

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015WW214
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Name of Service:	Head Start Pre-school & Montessori
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Address of Service:	Methodist Hall, Ferrybank, Arklow, Co. Wicklow
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Eircode:	Y14 VK65
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Name of Registered Provider:	Gillian Dempsey
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	19/03/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	22	PM	No.
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Loughlinstown Health centre, Loughlinstown Drive, Loughlinstown, Co. Dublin.
Inspection undertaken by:	Mona Condon
Title:	Early Years Inspector

Authority to Inspect	
The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate carries out inspections of Early Years Services under Section 58(J) of the Child Care Act 1991 (as inserted by Section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013).	
Conditions if applicable	Not applicable.

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Description of service

This service operates from a church hall which has been adapted for use as a pre-school and is located in Arklow town in County Wicklow. There were 22 pre-school children and two adults present on the day of inspection. The service is registered to operate from Monday to Friday between 09.30 and 13.00 for 38 weeks of the year and provides care and education to a maximum of 22 children aged between two to six years of age. The service has one indoor care room, a sanitary area, a separate office and a kitchen. A large outdoor area is available to the children at the rear of the premises.

Staffing

There are three staff employed in the service. This includes the registered provider.

Methodology

Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate is the independent statutory regulator of early years services in Ireland. The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 define the duty of a registered provider to ensure the safety and well-being of children and to comply with these regulations. This Act also gives Tusla the authority to assess compliance with the regulations. The purpose of regulation in relation to early years services is to ensure that the care, safety, and well-being of children attending such services is upheld. Inspections of early years services are planned based on the following:

- Previous inspection history
- Any information received in relation to the service

The findings on inspection are based on:

- Information obtained through examination of documentation
- Direct observation
- Discussion with relevant staff

This inspection was unannounced and focused on the area of governance, health, welfare and development of child and safety. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

Inspection findings are documented in the inspection report which is first issued in draft format to the service with an opportunity to respond to any findings. Where statutory requirements are identified as not being met, the

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registered provider must demonstrate how they have rectified the non-compliance and will prevent any non-compliance from re occurring. The Corrective Action and Preventive Action plan (CAPA) will be used to inform decisions about compliance with regulatory requirements. Where the registered provider fails to meet the statutory requirements an escalation process may be commenced.

The inspectorate reserves the right to edit responses received for reasons including clarity, completeness and compliance with administrative and legal processes.

The contents of the report are compiled by the inspectorate body.

Acknowledgments

The inspector wishes to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, staff member and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that each employee, unpaid worker and contractor is suitable and competent taking into consideration the nature of the needs of children, including by-

- (a) consideration of references from the person's past employers, if any, and in particular the most recent employer, if any,*
- (b) consideration of references from reputable sources in the case of a person who has no past employers,*
- (c) consideration of the vetting disclosure received from the National Vetting Bureau of the Garda Síochána in accordance with the Act of 2012 in respect of the person, and*
- (d) ensuring, insofar as is practicable, that where a person has lived in a state other than the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months, he or she provides police vetting from the police authorities in that state.*

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that, without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (2) and subject to paragraphs (5) and (6), each employee working directly with children attending the service holds at least a major award in Early childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

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Compliance Information

One new adult was employed since the last inspection. The files for the three adults employed were reviewed.

(a)(b) There were two written and validated references available for three adults.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for three adults. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Not applicable as there was no evidence that an adult had lived outside the jurisdiction for more than six consecutive months as an adult.

(4)

Three adults had at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework, or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 11 - Staffing levels

(1) Subject to this Regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that there is at all times an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.

(3) Subject to paragraph (5), a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 2 of Schedule 6 opposite a particular reference number specified in column (1) of that Part in respect of the age range of the children specified in column (2) therefore at that reference number is satisfied.

Compliance Information

(1) There were two adults present working directly with twenty-two pre-school children throughout the period of the inspection. The registered provider was present at all times.

(3) The adult/child ratios were maintained throughout the morning.

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Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 19 - Health, welfare and development of child

(1) A registered provider shall, in providing a pre-school service, ensure that-

(a) each child's learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the pre-school service through the provision of the appropriate activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child, and

(1) A registered provider shall, in providing a pre-school service, ensure that-

(b) appropriate and suitable care practices are in place in the pre-school service, having regard to the number of children attending the service and the nature of their needs.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

Basic Needs of Infants and Children

- Healthy nutritious lunch and snacks in line with the healthy eating policy of the service were enjoyed by the children on the day of inspection. The two adults sat with children during snack time and provided assistance the children as required. Drinking water was provided with the snack and freely available throughout the morning.
- Children used the toilet independently and assistance was given if required.
- In the outdoor area suitable age-appropriate toys and equipment was available.

Supporting Relationships around Children

- There was evidence that the service worked in partnership with parents. The staff reported that they communicate information to parents daily at drop off and collection times.
- Staff demonstrated warmth and affection in their interactions with the children. They addressed them by name, used gentle tones and interacted with them in a positive manner.

Physical and Material Environment

- The play resources available to the children were accessible, organised and stored on low level shelving which allowed the children to select and replace items and materials of interest.
- There was an adequate amount of age-appropriate furniture and equipment available in the rooms. Equipment included Montessori equipment, construction, home corner, toy animals, puzzles and a library.
- There was evidence of the children's artwork on display in the rooms.

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- A secure outdoor area was located at the rear of the premises. Play equipment available include play kitchen, slides, water play and sand play.
- An ambient temperature of 18.5°C – 22°C was maintained in the care room.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 23 - Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child

A registered provider shall ensure that all reasonable measures are taken to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of a pre-school child attending the service and that the environment of the service is safe.

Compliance Information

General Safety:

- The external doors were appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the pre-school.
- The designated emergency exit doors were clear and unobstructed.
- Documentary evidence was available that fire drills were being carried out on a monthly basis as per best practice guidelines.
- The cleaning agents were stored on high shelving and were inaccessible to the pre-school children. The tables were cleaned before and after snack time.
- A comprehensive care plan was available for one child who had a specific medical condition.

Infection Control:

- Children were encouraged to wash their hands regularly including before lunch and after using the toilet. Effective hand hygiene practices were observed and in accordance with the services infection control policies and procedures. Pedal operated bins were available in the sanitary areas and in the care room.
- The premises play equipment and materials were in a clean and hygienic condition.
- The tables were cleaned before and after snack time.

Administration of Medication:

- Medication was not given at the time of the inspection. Written parental consent was available should medication be required to be administered to a child. Medication was stored safely. Staff were aware of the procedure to be undertaken should medication be required.

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Part VI - Safety

Regulation 25 - First aid

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a person trained in first aid for children is, at all times, immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that a suitably equipped first aid box for children-

(a) is safely stored in an easily accessible and conspicuous position on the premises, and

(b) is available to the children attending the pre-school service at all times.

Compliance Information

(1) Two staff members who were trained in first aid response (FAR) were available to the children on the day of inspection.

(2)

(a) The first aid box for children was safely stored in an accessible position.

(b) At all times the first aid box was available to the children attending the pre-school.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 26 - Fire safety measures

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of-

(a) any fire drill that takes place in the premises, and

(b) the number, type and maintenance record of fire fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises.

(4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire shall be displayed in a conspicuous position in the premises.

Compliance Information

(1)

(a) A record in writing was kept of all fire drills that took place on the premises. The last fire drill was recorded on 26 January 2026.

(b) Records were available detailing the number, type, and maintenance of fire- fighting equipment. and smoke alarms dated August 2025 and December 2025 respectively.

(4) Notices were displayed detailing the procedures to be followed in the event of fire.