

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2016CC027				
Name of Service:	Curious Minds				
Address of Service:	Dromagh, Mallow, Co. Cork				
Eircode:	P51 A037				
Name of Registered Provider:	Marie Sheehy				
Service type:	Full Day, Sessional				
Date of Inspection:	29/10/2024				
No of pre-school children:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>AM</td> <td>4</td> <td>PM</td> <td>3</td> </tr> </table>	AM	4	PM	3
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	13 Market Square, Mallow, Cork. P51 DD5Y.				
Inspection undertaken by:	E. Friel				
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	N/A
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Description of service

Curious Minds is a privately owned early years care and education service which has been in operation since 2016. It offers a range of services including full-day care, part-time and sessional services to children aged from 2 to 6 years of age, facilitating the Early Years Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme from 9:30 to 12:30. The service is registered to operate from 07:30 until 18:30, 49 weeks of the year, and a school age service is available in the morning from 07:30 until 09:10 and in the afternoon from 14:00 to 18:30.

Curious Minds is situated on the grounds of Dromagh National School on the main Mallow to Killarney Road. It operates from a prefabricated building which consists of 1 large care room off which child sanitary facilities and a kitchen area are located. A dedicated outdoor play area is available at the rear of the service, and the children have use of the school grounds.

Staffing

There are four staff employed to work directly with the children in the service. The registered provider is not service based.

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/ safety/ premises and facilities. 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 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 manager, deputy, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that-

- (a) the service has a designated person in charge and a named person who is able to deputise as required,*
- (b) at all times during the period when the pre-school service is being carried on, the designated person in charge or the named person referred to in subparagraph (a) is on the premises, and*
- (c) there is a clear management structure in the service that identifies the lines of authority and accountability in the service and the specific roles and responsibilities of each employee and unpaid worker.*

(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.

Compliance Information

- (1)
- (a) The registered provider ensured that there was a designated person in charge and named persons available to deputise.
 - (b) The staff roster evidenced that both the designated person in charge and one of the named persons are available, on the premises, while the early years children are present.
 - (c) Staff were aware of their roles and responsibilities in the service and a management structure was available on the notice board inside the main entrance door.
- (2) Recruitment files of the five adults, including the registered provider, were reviewed;
- (a) (b) There were seven validated references from past employers and three validated references from sources other than past employers.
 - (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all five adults, demonstrating compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
 - (d) No international police vetting was required as none of the adults had lived outside of the State for a period of six consecutive months or more as adults.
- (4) Qualification certificates on file, for the four adults working directly with the children, indicated that each had obtained a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education, at level 5 or above, the National Framework of Qualifications. The registered provider does not require a child care qualification.

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.

(2) Subject to paragraphs (4) and (5), a registered provider of a full day care service or a part-time day care service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 1 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) thereof at that reference number is satisfied.

(8) Without prejudice to paragraphs (2) to (7)-

(a) a registered provider of a pre-school service other than a child-minding service or a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that there are at least 2 adults on the premises at all times.

Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider ensured that there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children on the day of inspection.

(2) The adult/child ratio was met. There were four children in attendance with three adults in the morning and three children in attendance with two adults in the afternoon.

(8) (a) The inspector reviewed the roster from the past week and present week's roster which evidenced that there were two adults on the premises at all times.

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.

Compliance Information

BASIC NEEDS:

- The children were observed eating healthy and nutritious food throughout the day which had been prepared by the parents/guardians. Morning snack served at 10:30 was noted to consist of bite sized pieces of fruit, yogurt and sandwiches. From 12:40 staff started to reheat a variety of food for the children's lunches including pasta, rice, bacon, sausages and carrots. Afternoon snack was available from 15:00 and consisted of fruit and sandwiches.
- The inspector observed that a variety of food, appropriate for snacks and hot lunches, was available in the service should a child be hungry, or they did not like the food in their lunch box.
- Cutlery and crockery, appropriate to the age and stage of the children in the service, was observed in use and available on the table while food was being served.
- Individually labelled water bottles were available from a shelf nearby, throughout the day.
- Children were observed accessing the toilet area independently, staff were nearby to remind the children to dry their hands.
- A rest/quiet area was available where the children could sit away from noisy activities. It was furnished with a stackable bed, in use as a sofa, with cushions and blankets. Two bean bags were positioned opposite the library in the area which contained a variety of age and stage appropriate books.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIPS:

- Staff were observed sitting at tables engaged in social conversation with the children at mealtimes and during tabletop activities. The atmosphere was noted to be happy and relaxed.
- Children who were visibly upset were comforted and cuddled by staff. This was observed in the outdoor area when a child fell over, and the staff member immediately went over to assist the child.
- Children's efforts were supported; the inspector observed staff praising a child for trying vegetables.

- Self-help skills were encouraged, and children were observed putting on their jackets for outdoor play, placing their belongings back into their individual bags and putting on their shoes when exiting the tents in the home corner. Adults were nearby to assist, if required.
- Communication with parents was observed to be mainly through a software application on a tablet available in the care room. This enabled the staff to capture, store and communicate information to the parents in real times such as their child's eating, toileting and daily activities. Staff were also observed speaking to parents at drop off and collection.
- Staff meetings were stated as happening daily on an informal basis. The inspector was furnished with a communication book the staff use to leave messages for each other, ensuring that tasks are carried out as some staff work at the beginning and others the end of the week. Minutes of the last meeting with management on 17 September 2024 were furnished to the inspector and included topics such as planning, form signing, fire safety and uniforms.

PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT:

- The care room was laid out in clearly defined areas; a home corner, farmhouse/farm machinery, a selection of play figures, animals and dinosaurs were available to facilitate imaginary play. Sensory materials such as sand, playdough, and arts and crafts were available providing opportunities for the children to engage in open ended discovery. Resources which supported fine motor skills including pegs, pencils and threading were also available.
- Equipment, resources and toys were stored in baskets on shelves which were within easy reach of the offering choice and promoting independence.
- Tables and chairs, which were age and stage appropriate, were positioned to facilitate both group and solitary activities.
- The walls were decorated with seasonal artwork carried out by the children which included ghosts and bats made from paper plates and photographs of the children and their families. Information posters with days of the weeks and months of the year were visible and alphabet letters and numbers 1-10 were painted onto the walls.
- Children observed playing in the outdoors had the option of two outdoor play areas; one with a grass area and the other with tarmac. Both areas were equipped with developmentally appropriate play equipment. New outdoor equipment had been purchased since the last inspection. Examples included a nest swing and a climbing unit with a slide which provided opportunities for the children to practice their gross motor skills of swinging, sliding and climbing.

PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES:

- Scrapbooks were available which documented the children’s activities, needs and interests. Staff stated these are shared with parents and they were linked to Aistear the curriculum framework and included themes such as Chinese new year, Valentines day, St. Patricks day and professional jobs.
- Children’s language development was supported through group discussions and storytelling which were observed during the inspection. Staff were heard reading a rhyming book about a police car that saved the day, and the children could be heard reciting Halloween songs including Five little pumpkins.
- Children were facilitated to make their own choice in selecting play equipment and activities they wanted to engage with activities observed including painting and playdough.

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 main entrance door was secured on arrival and was answered by a staff member, ensuring no unauthorised adult could gain entry.
- Thirteen window openings in the service were inaccessible to the children as they were placed at adult height.
- Blind cords were securely anchored with hooks which were placed out of reach of the children.
- A hand rail was available to assist all children to move safely between the care room and the outdoor areas.
- All flexes and chords were secured out of reach of the children.
- Cleaning materials and agents were locked away in a cupboard, out of reach of the children.
- The fridge and cupboards all had child safety straps, all of which were in operation.
- The outdoor areas were secured with high metal fencing, gates with sliding bolts, and a graduated high concrete wall. These safety measures ensured that children could not leave the outdoor areas unsupervised.

Infection Control:

- Children's coats and bags were placed on individual hooks, away from the floor area. Each child's name and photograph identified where each child could hang their personal belongings.
- Wash hand basins in use in the service were supplied with thermostatically controlled hot water, 26.2°C, dispensing soap, and hand dryers. Pedal operated bins were available for the disposal of paper waste.
- Hygienic handwashing was observed regularly, particularly before and after food, after toileting and coming in from outdoor play.
- Perishable food was observed to be stored in the fridge, preventing the food from spoiling.
- Staff were observed sanitising the tables before and after food and sweeping the floor ensuring the area was kept safe and hygienic.
- Single use gloves and aprons were available for use in the nappy changing area, if required. A pedal operated, lined and sealed bin was also available for the hygienic disposal of nappies. No children required nappy changing on the day of inspection.

Administration of Medication:

- Temperature reducing medications were available in the service, if required. These were stored in their original containers and were stored in a locked cupboard, inaccessible by the children.

Safe Sleep:

- No children were observed sleeping/resting on the day of inspection. The inspector observed that there were three stackable beds and two sleep mats, with individual bed linen, available should they be required.

Fire Safety:

- A Fire assembly sign was visible on the fence in the tarmac playground of the school.
- All fire doors had thumb twist cylinders and were unobstructed ensuring the safe evacuation of children and staff in the event of an emergency.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

- (1) A sharp screw was observed protruding from a broken hinge which was hanging off of a large plastic toy box at the entrance to the service. This presented a general safety risk as the screw was easily accessible by the children. It was acknowledged that when informed about the screw the manager removed it immediately.

- (2) The inspector observed a number of items in the care room which were causing potential tripping hazards. Examples included; boxes of excess toys and equipment left on the floor and new equipment and a Hoover left in a corner at the main entrance area where children had access to them.
- (3) The pockets of adult coats, hanging on two doors, were accessible to the children posing a safety risk to the children should they gain access to unsafe items.
- (4) A large doll's house, made of light wood and above the children's height, was not anchored to prevent it from falling or tipping over. When informed the manager had it removed.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

The following statements were received from the registered provider;

General Safety:

- (1) When informed, during the inspection, the manager removed the screw from the box. A new toy box is now in place.
- (2) The room was cleared of all items liable to cause a tripping hazard. Staff will ensure that the floor areas are kept free of any potential hazards on a daily basis.
- (3) A secure area has been allocated to ensure staff belongings are not accessible by the children.
- (4) The doll's house was removed on the day of inspection. All heavy equipment and furniture, that may fall or tip over, will be fully anchored in the future.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

- (1) The statement form the registered provider has been accepted.
- (2) A photograph of the cleared floor areas free of tripping hazards. The statement from the registered provider has been accepted.
- (3) A photograph of the secure area in which the staff coats are now stored.
- (4) The statement from the registered provider has been accepted.

Summary Comment

The actions taken by the registered provider have addressed the non-compliances identified under Regulation 23.

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) Certificates were available to evidence that the five adults had First Aid Responder (FAR) training completed.

The staff roster evidenced that at least two adults with FAR training are available while the early years children are on the premises.

(2) (a) (b) The suitably equipped first aid box, which was easily accessible by the adults from a secure cupboard under the sink, was available at all times.

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 firefighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises.

(2) The record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection by-

(c) an authorised person.

Compliance Information

(1)

(a) Written records of the fire drills that took place in the service were furnished to the inspector. The last date recorded was noted as 30 September 2024 with previous monthly drills recorded as 2 September and 12 August 2024.

(b) Written records were available of the servicing of the firefighting equipment and the smoke alarms. The firefighting certificate was dated 11 November 2023, and the smoke alarm certificate was dated 29 July

2024.

(2)

(c) The records referred to in paragraph (1) were available on the premises for review.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

A registered provider shall ensure that the pre-school service is adequately insured.

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured the service was insured. Written records of insurance documents were furnished to the inspector which included the following details;

- The contact details of the insurance company
- The name and address of the service
- The number of children for whom the service is insured: 22
- The type of service: Full Day Care

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-

- (c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated*
- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required.*

Compliance Information

(c) The temperature of the care room was recorded at 22°C within the recommended limits of 18-22°C and the heat was provided by heaters on the walls of the service. Windows were open in the service providing natural ventilation and lighting was obtained from both natural and artificial sources.

Non-Compliance Information

- (d) The care room was not well maintained and was in a poor state of repair. The inspector observed the following:
- (1) Exposed splintered wood, located on the bottom part of a door frame in the care room, was accessible to the children. In conversation, staff furnished evidence that this had been reported to the school on 12 August 2024 and 17 October 2024.

- (2) The walls in the care room were in a poor state of repair. The inspector observed large areas where layers of sticky tape and adhesive putty, which had been removed several times over the years, were visible on the walls. In discussion, a staff member stated that the room had not been painted for a number of years.
- (3) A handle on a cistern in the children's sanitary area was hanging out of place making it difficult to flush effectively.
- (4) There were two accessible pipes extending from the back of the service in the dedicated outdoor play area. In discussion, the manager stated that old play equipment, which had concealed the pipes, had recently been removed and the pipes were exposed.
- (5) There were two brown water stains visible on the ceiling in the care room. Staff stated that these stains had previously been painted however, they were still visible.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The following statements were received from the registered provider;

- (d)
- (1) (2) and (5) Communication from the board of management to the manager, after a meeting held in early December 2024, indicated that over the Christmas holiday period the non-compliances would be addressed.
- (3) The cistern handle has been replaced.
- (4) The two pipes are now concealed behind the new outdoor toy box.

Supporting documentation submitted

- (d)
- (1), (2) and (5) The statement from the registered provider has been accepted.
- (3) A photograph of the new cistern handle in place was received in the office of the inspectorate.
- (4) A photograph of the new outdoor toy box concealing the two pipes which extend from the back of the service was received in the office of the inspectorate.

Summary Comment

The actions taken by the registered provider have addressed the non-compliances identified under Regulation 29 (d) (1-5).