

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2016DS008
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Name of Service:	Happy Feet Early Learning Centre
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Address of Service:	Rathcoole Boys Football Club, Frank Cox Park, Rathcoole,
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Eircode:	D24 YR91
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Name of Registered Provider:	Kelly O'Hickey
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Service type:	Full Day, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	23/04/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	19	PM	20
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Floor 7 Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, St. John's Road West, Kilmainham, Dublin 8
Inspection undertaken by:	H Sutherland and S Quigley
Title:	Early Years Inspectors

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

Happy Feet Early Learning Centre is one of three early years services operated by the registered provider. The service comprises of three care rooms; one situated within a building used by Rathcoole Football Club and two located in adjacent prefabricated buildings. In addition, a fully enclosed outdoor area is located to the rear of the premises. On the day of inspection, the two prefabricated buildings were in operation. The service caters for children aged 3 to 6 years offering both full day and sessional care. Opening hours are 7:30 am to 5:30 pm for full day care and from 9:15am to 12:15 pm for sessional care.

Staffing

The registered provider currently employs nine staff to work in the service including the centre manager and was not present on the day of the inspection. The area manager arrived shortly after the inspectors arrived and remained on the premises for the duration of the inspection. Five staff were working directly with the children on the day of the inspection.

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.

This inspection focused on an examination of compliance under the following regulations:

9(1)(a),(b),(c) (2) (a)-(d) and (4) Management and Recruitment

11(1),(2), Staffing Levels

19(1)(a) Health, welfare and development of child

23 Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child

25 First Aid

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 inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the area manager, the person in charge, 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 service had a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise as needed.
 - (b) The person in charge was on the premises for the duration of the inspection.
 - (c) There was clear management structure and staff were aware of their own roles and responsibilities and the roles and responsibilities of their colleagues.
- (2) The files of eleven adults employed to work in the service were reviewed and met compliance as follows.
- (a) Nineteen written and verified references were available from past employers.
 - (b) Three written and verified references were available from a source other than a past employer.
 - (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for eight staff members. However, the service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring

services to renew Garda vetting every three years. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.

(4) Documentation was available to show that ten adults held at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. One adult did not require a qualification as they do not work directly with the children.

Non-Compliance Information

2(d) Police vetting was not available in relation to one staff member who previously lived outside of the State for a period of more than 6 months as an adult.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

2(d) Police vetting was obtained for the staff member. The registered provider will ensure that police vetting is obtained for all new employees that have lived outside the State for a period of more than six months as an adult.

Supporting documentation submitted

Police vetting record submitted.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under Regulation 9 (2)(d) has been adequately addressed.

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.

Compliance Information

- (1) On the day of inspection there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children.
There were five adults working directly with the twenty children in attendance.
- (2) The minimum adult to child ratio was maintained at all times throughout the inspection.

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

Compliance Information

1(a)

Children's needs were met consistently in a warm caring responsive manner, as a result children were observed to be content in their environment. Staff advised that the service provides breakfast and hot meals, and lunch was provided by the parents. Inspectors observed that lunch time was organised in a social unhurried manner and children's food consisted of a well-balanced selection of food in line with the services healthy eating policy. Children's water bottles were stored on a low-level shelf and were observed to be easily accessible when required. The children were encouraged to use the toilet independently with support provided when required. Children were observed to be dressed appropriately for the weather, with coats worn during outdoor play to ensure their comfort.

Staff were observed to actively involve children in decision making by encouraging them to share their ideas, offering choices and incorporating their suggestions in the daily routine supporting their development of confidence and sense of responsibility. Play was observed to be child led with staff responding sensitively to children's interests and choices. Staff actively extended children's learning through open ended questions, introducing new vocabulary and provision of additional materials. Children were observed playing in small groups engaging in positive interactions and sharing resources. A few children chose to play independently opting out of group activities. They appeared to be content focusing on their chosen play, demonstrating confidence and an awareness of their personal preferences within the play environment. Staff discussed how children use a sand timer to support turn taking. This was observed during outdoor play when one child who was waiting patiently to use the swing signalled to the children on the swing that their time was nearly up. This interaction displayed an understanding of cooperation and an effective use of a visual aid to manage turn taking in a positive manner. Staff described how engagement with families and parents was facilitated through informal conversations at drop off and collection, through a digital platform and group messaging.

The care rooms offered a variety of interest areas designed to stimulate children’s learning and development. For example, the construction area allowed space for teamwork and problem solving. Children were observed working together to build a tower experiencing cause and effect. The home corner provided opportunity for children to engage in role play. Small world materials such as animals, cars and dolls encouraged imaginative play supporting children to create a fantasy world in a familiar environment. A tuff tray was available filled with sensory materials allowing children to explore a variety of different textures and develop language along with sensory exploration. The development of children’s fine motor skills and concentration and focus were supported with materials such as peg boards, small bricks, threading and jigsaws. Child size furniture was in place allowing children to access and engage with materials comfortably and independently. A well-resourced outdoor area with items such as swings, a sand box, mud kitchen, a planting area and a climbing wall encouraged risk taking, curiosity, gross motor skills, balance and coordination.

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:

- External doors were appropriately secured to prevent unauthorised entry and the children from exiting the service unsupervised.
- Window blinds were secured to the wall and made safe.
- Toys and play equipment were in good condition and observed to be age appropriate for the children using them.
- Cleaning agents and temperature reducing medication was stored safely and inaccessible to children.
- The staff were observed to carry out a risk assessment prior to taking the children outside. Staff confirmed that this was a daily practice and provided documentation to show where they record risks identified.

Infection Control:

- Staff demonstrated awareness of the recommended exclusion periods for common childhood illnesses.
- Pedal operated bins were in use throughout the service for example in the care room, bathrooms and outdoor area.

- Liquid soap, warm running water and single use paper towels were available and accessible to children.
- Effective hand washing was observed to control the spread of infection. For example, children were observed to wash their hands after using the toilet, following outdoor play and before lunch.

Administration of Medication:

- Staff demonstrated knowledge of the procedure to safely administer medication to a child and documentation was available for use on an electronic device should it be required in line with the services administration of medication policy.

Fire Safety:

- Emergency exits were observed to be unobstructed throughout the inspection.
- The inspectors found through review of documentation and discussion with staff that fire drills are carried out monthly with the most recent fire drill taking place on the 31st May 2025.
- Fire evacuation procedures were displayed in prominent positions throughout the service.

Outing:

- Staff discussed the procedure followed by the service when taking children on outings. Risk assessments and outings forms were observed to be in use in line with the services outings policy.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

- Garda vetting was available for 3 staff members. However, these were not dated within the previous three years in adherence with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

Garda vetting has been obtained for three staff members. The registered provider has a system in place and will check at least once per month to ensure that no Garda vetting expires for any employee.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

Garda vetting records submitted.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under Regulation 23 has been adequately addressed.

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

- (2) (a) A suitably equipped first aid box was available and stored safely in an easily accessible and conspicuous position in the service.
- (b) The first aid box was observed to be available to the children attending the service.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) There was no adult with in date First Aid Responder (FAR) training available to the children on the day of inspection. This was non-compliant on the last inspection 09 February 2023. The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider did not prevent the re-occurrence of the non-compliance.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The registered provider has secured First Aid Responder refresher training for three staff members and will ensure certification is maintained on an ongoing basis, with a minimum of three staff members certified at all times to ensure a First Aid Responder trained staff member is always on site.

Supporting documentation submitted

Receipt submitted.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report Pre School

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under Regulation 25 has been adequately addressed.