

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2016GY004
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Name of Service:	Happy Feet Pre-School & Afterschool Care
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Address of Service:	Community Building, Meadow Brook Court, Loughrea, Co. Galway
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Name of Registered Provider:	Mary Dunne Blake
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Service type:	Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	21/10/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	17	PM	9
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Quality and Regulation Directorate, Clinical & Administration Building, Block A - (1st Floor- Green Corridor), Merlin Park Hospital, Galway.
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	Not applicable
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Description of service

Happy Feet Pre-school and Afterschool Care is a private early years care and education facility that provides part-time, sessional and school age care services. It is opened Monday to Friday, from 09:00 to 14:00 for 50 weeks of the year and the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) service operates within these hours from 09:00 to 12 noon, 38 weeks of the year. The school age service is available in the afternoon from 13:00 to 18:00.

The community building is located on a residential estate in the urban town of Loughrea in east county Galway. It consists of 2 indoor care rooms, children and adult sanitary facilities and a kitchen on the premises. The outdoor play area is located at the rear of the premises.

Staffing

There were 10 persons on the premises including 1 adult employed under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), 2 school age care staff, 1 adult on a community work placement, a student on work experience and the registered provider. In addition, 1 adult employed in school age care was unavailable on the day.

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 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, 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.*

(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 was the person in charge and there was a named person available to deputise as required.
- (b) The staff roster indicated that either the person in charge and or the named person were available while the pre-school children were on the premises.
- (2) The recruitment files of all 11 persons were reviewed:
- (a) Fourteen of the 22 validated references were from previous employers.
- (b) The remaining 8 validated references were from a source other than a previous employer.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for all 10 persons for whom they were required demonstrating compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew garda vetting every 3 years. One student on work placement did not require garda vetting.
- (d) Overseas police vetting was available for 1 adult for whom it was required who had lived outside of Ireland for more than 6 consecutive months as an adult.
- (4) Staff files viewed on the day indicated that 4 of the 6 adults working directly with the early years children had obtained a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or above on the National Qualification Framework. In addition 1 adult had a Letter of Eligibility to practice from the Department of Children, Disability and Equality.

Non-Compliance Information

4. There was no major award in childcare on file for 1 adult working directly with the children, potentially compromising the quality of the education and care provided.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The following statements were received from the registered provider;

4. The staff member has enrolled on a childcare course and is currently working in school age care. In future the registered provider will ensure that new employees have the required qualifications or letter of qualification recognition before commencing employment in the service.

Supporting documentation submitted

The following documentation was received in the office of the inspectorate;

4. A copy of the staff roster from the week of 7 November which documented that the adult with no childcare qualification was working in school age care. In addition, a receipt was received confirming enrolment and full payment for the adult on a childcare course at level 6. The statement from the registered provider has been accepted.

Summary Comment

The actions taken and evidence submitted by the registered provider have addressed the non-compliance identified on inspection under Regulation 9 (4)

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 during the part-time hours of the service.

(2) The adult/child ratios were met. There were 6 adults observed working directly with 17 children along with 1 student on work experience when the inspector arrived at the service at 09:15. In addition, an adult rostered on work placement arrived at 11:00. In the afternoon there were 3 adults working directly with 9 early years children until 14:00 along with the student on work experience and the adult on work placement.

(8)

(a) The staff roster indicated that there were 2 adults on the premises while the early years children were in the service.

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

Basic needs:

- The service promoted healthy eating; food and snacks were provided at regular intervals during the part-time service. Children eating snacks in the covered outdoor area at 10:30, which had been prepared by the parents/guardians and the service, were observed to have access to yogurts, cheese, brown bread bite sized pieces of fruit, hula hoops and toast.
- Nine children availing of the part-time hours were observed at 12:30 enjoying hot sausages, pasta, noodles, rice, chicken, wraps and filled sandwiches. Staff were available to assist with the opening of packaging and additional food was available to the children, if required.
- Children's water bottles were visible in both the indoor care rooms and in the outdoor play area from a mobile trolley.
- Each child had a plate to place their food on and the adults sat with the children during the eating of food.
- The inspector observed that children were afforded ample time to finish snack without being rushed.
- Developmentally appropriate cutlery was observed in use and positioned within easy access of the children.
- Cosy rest areas, consisting of soft furnishings including child sized sofas, were available in each care room.
- Nappy changing was carried out as and when required and older children were observed being accompanied to the sanitary area by the adults in the area.
- Appropriate clothing was observed on all the children playing in the outdoor play area; the weather on the day was wet and the children were observed with waterproof clothes and wellingtons on.

Supporting children's relationships:

- A key person approach was in place in the service with named staff members assigned the responsibility for maintaining relationships with a designated group of children and their parents/guardians.

- Children’s scrapbooks were labelled with each child’s name, which had been put together by the keyperson and were available to view. The adults stated that they document each child’s individual interests and emergent curriculum throughout their time in the service.
- Adults in the care rooms who were supervising children playing in both the indoor and outdoor areas, were observed to work well as a team. They were heard, on several occasions, discussing children’s individual needs and ensuring the children’s needs were met.
- Various forms of communicating with parents/guardians was stated as being in use. Examples included a group messaging application and at drop off and collection as observed on the day.
- The adults in the service stated that meetings were held with the registered provider every 4-6 weeks with topics for discussion including the children, planning of curriculum activities, children’s progress and personal development.
- Interactions between the adults and children were heard to be warm, sensitive and responsive. Examples included a staff member heard getting down to a child’s level and listening to what was making the child upset at snack time. The staff member ensured that the child’s request for crackers and butter was attended to. In addition, staff were heard communicating with children in the outdoor area by providing positive reinforcement and praising children in their efforts. An example was an adult heard encouraging and praising a child attempting to kick a ball.

Physical and material environment:

- The 2 indoor care rooms appeared clean and well organised.
- Clearly defined areas were visible which provided play opportunities for enhancing the learning needs of the children across all developmental areas.
- Toys and play equipment were easily accessible from shelving with storage boxes and trays stored within reach of the children.
- Tables and chairs were positioned to facilitate group and solitary activities with a wide variety of resources stationed nearby.
- Displays including children’s artwork and photographs linked to curriculum themes were visually appealing and included pictures of a donkey and goat brought into the service.
- The fully enclosed outdoor play areas provided alternative changes of environment for all of the children who were observed playing in the various areas throughout the day. A range of developmentally appropriate equipment was observed in use by the children on the day of inspection. Opportunities were

provided for challenge and safe risk with swings, slides and a hexagonal climbing frame. Balance bikes, trikes and scooters provided opportunities to practice gross motor skills of pedalling, coordination, balancing and core strength. In addition, imaginary play opportunities were available from the 2 mud kitchens in which children were observed in open ended play with natural materials making potions and pushing wheel barrows carrying leaves. A covered wooden shelter was available ensuring the children could play outdoors in all weathers, mobile trolleys were available for storing wellies and waterproofs and tables and chairs were available for sitting.

Programme of activities:

- Detailed long, medium and short-term plans, which included the children's individual emergent interests of topics including dinosaurs, were furnished to the inspector. Weekly and monthly activities which could be seen in action on the day of inspection and were evidenced with the artwork, books and materials available in the care rooms.
- All children's language development was heard to be supported through one to one, group discussions and songs which were observed during inspection. The adults were heard using strategies to extend individual children's thinking and learning throughout the day and were observed in social conversation providing feedback, asking open questions and explaining. Examples included adults discussing witches and trolls in the outdoor play area while the children were using pipettes to make potions by mixing coloured water while another group of children were using paints to make spooky ghosts.
- Children were facilitated to make their own choice in selecting play equipment and activities they wished to engage with. Turn taking and sharing was promoted and was evidenced by children in the outdoor play area working collaboratively together.

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:

- All internal and external doors were secured preventing unauthorised adults from entering the premises and children leaving the service unsupervised.
- Window handles were placed out of reach of the children preventing children from exiting or falling.
- Heavy storage equipment was anchored preventing tipping or falling.
- All flexes and cables were stored out of reach of the children in the service.
- Cleaning agents were stored on high shelving, in the indoor and outdoor areas, which were inaccessible by the children.
- The outdoor play areas at the rear of the premises were secured with a concrete wall, wooden and metal fencing. Two gates were in operation in the outdoor play area and were secured with sliding bolts.

Infection Control:

- Sinks in use by the adults and children were fitted with thermostatically controlled hot water, measured at 34.6°C, dispensing soap and pedal operated bins for the disposal of waste.
- Staff assisted children with handwashing and were heard singing the handwashing song encouraging the children with the steps involved in hygienic handwashing.
- Staff were observed wearing disposable aprons and gloves, sanitising the mat after each use and disposing of the nappies in a pedal operated, lined, sealed and lidded nappy changing bin.
- Windows were open in the care rooms and in the sanitary area, providing a flow of fresh air.
- Cleaning and disinfection checklists were available and were noted to be completed and up to date.
- Staff in the service were noted to have followed their infection control policy in relation to an outbreak of hand, foot and mouth and impetigo. A notification, which was furnished to the inspector, was sent on a media application to all parents/guardians and any child or adult with symptoms was asked not to attend until no longer infectious as per service policy. The policy included the applicable exclusion periods.

Administration of Medication:

- Temperature reducing medication, stored in its original container, was stored on a shelf which was inaccessible to the children. The year of expiry was noted as 2027.

Safe Sleep:

- No children were observed sleeping on the day of inspection.
- Two stackable beds with individual bed linen were available in the event that a child required a rest or to sleep.

Fire Safety:

- The fire assembly point was visible on the back wall of the rear outdoor play area providing a designated safe place in the event of an emergency.
- Fire extinguishers were secured on the walls of the service with brackets.
- Fire exit doors were fitted with thumb twist cylinders aiding the quick evacuation of the adults and children in the event of an emergency.

Outing:

- The registered provider stated children are taken on local outings for which insurance was available.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

1. Perishable food provided by the parents/guardians was not observed to be stored in the fridge. The inspector observed the children and staff taking perishable food from the children's bags at snack time, posing a risk from the food spoiling.
2. Nappy changing was observed to be carried out on a mat placed on the floor of the nappy changing area, posing a risk of cross infection. In conversation, the staff member stated that this practice was an everyday occurrence in the service with the 5 children for whom nappy changing was required.
3. The inspector observed that adult handwashing was not carried out after nappy changing as required, posing a risk of cross infection.
4. The pedal on the bin in use in the Pre-school room was broken, posing a potential risk of cross infection from the number of adults and children placing their hands on the lid.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

The following statements were received from the registered provider;

Infection Control:

1. All perishable food is now placed in a zip lock bag, labelled and placed in a basket in the fridge. Staff check each child's bag in the morning and remove perishable food and place it in the fridge.
2. Temporary steps have been put in place to facilitate staff changing children on the changing table. Once the

permanent steps are in place the temporary ones will be removed.

3. Staff have been reminded of the nappy changing procedure and the need to wash their hands after each nappy change.
4. The broken pedal bin in the Pre-school room has been replaced with a new bin. Staff have been asked to check the bins daily and report any issues to management.

Supporting documentation submitted

The following photographs, copies of documentation and statements were received in the office of the inspectorate:

1. A photograph of a basket in the fridge with perishable food stored in zip lock bags.
2. A photograph of the temporary steps in place in the changing area to reach the changing table.
3. The statement from the registered provider has been accepted.
4. A photograph of the new pedal operated bin in the Pre-school care room. The statement from the registered provider has been accepted.

Summary Comment

The actions taken and evidence submitted by the registered provider has adequately 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) Documentary evidence in the form of the staff roster and First Aid Responder certificates (FAR) were available which indicated that 5 staff members were trained as First Aid Responders (FAR); 4 of whom were available while the pre-school children were on the premises.
- (2)
 - (a) The well stocked first aid boxes were stored within easy reach of the adults in both care rooms.
 - (b) The first aid boxes were available at all times while the early years children were present in the service.

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.
- (2) The record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection by-
- (c) an authorised person.
- (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)
- (b) Written records were available of the servicing of the firefighting equipment and the smoke alarms. The recorded dates were noted as October 2025 and August 2025, respectively.
- (2)
- (c) The records referred to in paragraph (1) (b) were available on the premises for review by the inspector.
- (4) The fire procedure notices were visible on the walls of the service ensuring that the adults were aware of the steps to be followed in the event of an emergency to ensure the safety of the children and adults on the premises.

Non-Compliance Information

- (1)
- (a) Contrary to the service's fire safety policy fire drills were not being carried out on a monthly basis as required. Documentary evidence indicated that the last fire drill had been carried out on 17/01/2025, posing a risk that the children and adults may be unaware of the procedures and routes used in the event of an emergency.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The following statement was received from the registered provider;

- (1) (a) A recent fire drill was carried out on 22 October 2025. A staff member has been designated to record fire drills to ensure compliance in the future. Management will ensure that fire drills are carried out monthly as required.

Supporting documentation submitted

- (1) (a) A copy of a fire drill dated 22 October, with the required information, was received in the office of

inspectorate.

Summary Comment

The actions taken and evidence submitted by the registered provider have addressed the non-compliance identified under Regulation 26 (1) (a).

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service was insured. Written records were furnished to the inspector which included the following details:

- The name, address and contact details of the insurance company
- The name and address of the service
- The number of children for whom the service is insured: 26 Pre-school and 27 School Age Care
- The type of service: Part-time and Afterschool Care
- Expiry date: 27 March 2026.