

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2017LK501
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Name of Service:	Little Explorers
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Address of Service:	SportsComplex, Portnard, Cappamore, Co. Limerick
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Eircode:	V94 H2N4
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Name of Registered Provider:	Claire McNamara
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	28/05/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	18	PM	No.
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla, Early Years Inspectorate, 2 ND Floor, Estuary House, Henry St. Limerick
Inspection undertaken by:	Ellen Browne
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 privately owned pre-school service initially opened in September 2017 in Scoil Caitriona, Cappamore, Co Limerick. In September 2022, the service relocated to a designated room located in the upstairs section of the Sports Complex in Portnard, Cappamore Co Limerick.

In this premises, the service provides sessional care for children aged 3 to 6 years from 09.00 to 12.00hrs for 38 weeks of the year. The children have access to an upstairs playroom, a large sports hall, sanitary facilities for the adults and children and a small enclosed outdoor area near to the main entrance. The service is registered to cater for 22 pre-school children.

A school aged service is also available

Staffing

There were three staff members working in the service on the day of the inspection. The registered provider works in another service. The staff members all hold an award in Early Childhood Care and Education.

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 and premises and facilities. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 10, 11, 19, 23, 25, 26, and 29. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations in this report.

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, 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.

(3) The procedures specified in paragraph (2) shall be carried out prior to any person being appointed, assigned or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the pre-school service.

(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 designated person in charge of operating the service was present on the day of the inspection. There was a named person available who was able to deputise if required.

(b) During the period of the inspection, the designated person in charge was present and the staff roster indicated that this person or their deputy was always available on the premises.

(c) There was a clear management structure that identified the lines of authority and accountability in the service and the specific roles and responsibilities of each member of the management team.

(2) The files of the four staff members were viewed on the day of inspection.

(a) Two written and validated references were on file for all staff members working in the service. References were mainly from past employers.

(b) Where two past employers were not available, references from other reputable sources were submitted where required.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures received from the National Vetting Bureau of Garda Síochána were available for the four staff members working at the service. Garda vetting for the staff was dated within the last three years as per the regulatory notice, EYI-RN12.3 renewal of garda vetting, published by the Inspectorate in September 2023 and effective from 1st of January 2024.

(d) Police vetting was on file for one person who had lived in another country for longer than six consecutive months.

(3) All of the above documentation was furnished to the registered provider prior to each new staff member taking up employment at the facility.

(4) All the staff members working directly with children held an appropriate qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education or an equivalent such qualification.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 10 - Policies, procedures etc. of pre-school service

A registered provider of a pre-school service shall ensure that the written policies, procedures and statements specified in Schedule 5 are in place for the service.

Compliance Information

The following policies were viewed and met the requirements of the regulation. These policies were available to the staff members working in the service and to all the parents/ guardians of the pre-school children attending the service.

Policy on accident and incidents

Policy on healthy eating

Policy on outdoor play

Non-Compliance Information

1.The above policies were viewed by the inspector, and it was noted that the policies were not signed off by the person approving the policies, and the last review date was September 2022. This was at variance with the policies for the service, which stated that all policies will be reviewed annually and signed off by management.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action: The registered provider has stated that:

The policies have been updated and signed off and reminders set to annually update the policies for the service in August.

Summary Comment

The regulatory requirements of Regulation 10 have been met. This will be reviewed at the next inspection.

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.

Compliance Information

(1) On the day of the inspection, there were 3 childcare staff working with 18 pre-school children present in the morning sessional service. During the period of inspection, the registered provider ensured that the minimum ratio of adults to children was maintained and that an adequate number of staff members were working directly with the children attending the pre-school 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:

A healthy eating policy was available in the service and parents were encouraged to provide healthy snacks and drinks for the children attending each day. The staff sat with the children at break time and actively encouraged mealtimes to be a social occasion. Children's drinks were stored out of their bags and were easily accessible to them throughout the morning.

As the bathroom facilities for the children were located downstairs near the main entrance to the premises, the children must be accompanied by a member of staff to use the bathroom facilities, toileting and hand washing throughout the morning.

Following outdoor play the children used the bathroom facilities and were observed washing their hands. The children were supervised and assisted by the staff members.

PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT:

The playroom contained a number of interest areas such as a home corner, play kitchen and dress up for imaginative play and a soft seated reading area for language development.

Open shelving containing small trays of car/trucks, animals, small timber blocks, jigsaws, and equipment to promote fine motor skills was also provided in the room. Low level tables and chairs were available for break time and for tabletop activities.

Non-Compliance Information

PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT:

1. The sensory materials such as the sand, paint, crayons and paper were not readily accessible, open and visible to the pre-school children in the playroom.

The small box of sand was located on a shelf inaccessible to the children, and the paints, crayons paper, brushes were stored in the same shelf behind closed doors. The staff members stated they made the decision as to when these play materials, such as the sand and water play, crayons, paints etc, were available to the children. When

materials are not visible and readily accessible, it does not allow the children to think for themselves and extend their own learning.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action: The registered provider has stated that:

Sensory materials will be out at all times throughout the morning. The sensory materials were packed away around 1020 for lunch.

Supporting documentation submitted

Pictures were submitted demonstrating how the playroom will be organized each day for children with the art board set up with paper and crayons, turf table and open shelves with sensory materials.

Summary Comment

The requirement for this regulation 19 have been met. This will be reviewed at the next inspection.

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) The three staff members present on the day of the inspection held a current certification in first aid responder (FAR) for children and were immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service.

(2)(a) First aid boxes were accessible and safely stored in the service.

(b)The first aid boxes were available if required by a child.

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-
- (a) a parent or guardian of a pre-school child attending or proposing to attend the pre-school service,
 - (b) an employee, and
 - (c) an authorised person.
- (3) A registered provider shall ensure that a record referred to in paragraph (2) is retained for a period of 5 years after its creation
- (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) The fire drills were practiced monthly, and the records were available. The last fire drill was the 19th of May 2025.
- (b)The firefighting equipment and smoke alarms were serviced on an annual basis, most recently on the 16th of January 2025, and a record was maintained of the number, type, and maintenance of the firefighting equipment/smoke alarms.
- (4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed in the service.

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.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. There was no working system in place at the main entrance to alert staff working in the service when parents, authorised persons or any other person arrived at the service. A notice was displayed which detailed a telephone number to call to gain entry, however when the inspector tried to gain entry this was not responded to. Staff in the service only became aware that the inspector was at the front door was when staff and children came downstairs to go outside. On discussion, it was noted that the number on the notice was for the registered provider who was not working in the service on the day and did not respond to calls made. No other means of contact were available. This posed potential risk to the safety of both staff and children in the event of an emergency.

Infection Control:

2. There was no thermostatically controlled hot water at the time of the inspection for effective handwashing in the children's bathroom facility. This increased the risk of cross infection. The pump that heats the water for the bathroom facility was off and was positioned under the basins accessible to the children.

Outing:

3. On the day of the inspection, the staff and children were observed using in the outdoor public playground, which the service uses on a regular basis when unoccupied by members of the public. The staff stated that routinely a risk assessment would be carried out when using this public outdoor playground and the service's own outdoor space; however, no written records were maintained and available at the time of inspection. This was at variance with the service's own outdoor play policy.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action: The registered provider has stated that:

1. A new bell has been installed. An additional number for the service is available to the parents however this will not be displayed due to safety reasons.
2. and 3. The water tank is being covered while the service is closed for the summer along with other maintenance jobs. Additional photos will be sent once the work is completed and staff are back in the office on August 27th.

Supporting documentation submitted:

Photographic evidence was submitted of the new doorbell installed. All other works will be completed when the service resumes on the 27th of August 2025.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

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

- (a) of sound and stable structure,*
- (c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated*
- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and*

Compliance Information

- (a) The premises appear to be a sound and stable structure.
- (c) There were windows installed in the playroom since the last inspection in June 2023, which ensured that there was a balance between artificial and natural lighting. The windows were opened to ventilate the playroom.

Non-Compliance Information

- (d)
 1. The main entrance area and doors were unclean and in a poor state of repair.
 2. The child size couch and the larger couch were worn in appearance and unclean.
 3. The walls of the playroom were unclean, stained and marked.
 4. The fridge was in a poor state of repair, it was old, worn and had signs of rust on the door.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action: The registered provider has stated that:

- (d)
 1. The main entrance area and doors have been painted for the time being and will be replaced soon.
 2. The child size couch has been replaced.
 3. The walls of the playroom have been cleaned and refreshed for September 2025.
 4. The fridge has been replaced.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence was submitted for the works completed to date including the painted doors, new fridge and playroom walls. Additional photographs will be submitted when the service resumes in August/September 2025.

Summary Comment

The regulatory requirements of Regulation 29 Premises have been met. This will be assessed at the next inspection.