

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2017MH500
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Name of Service:	Little Leaps
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Address of Service:	Ashbourne Community Centre, Dublin Road, Ashbourne, Co. Meath
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Name of Registered Provider:	Grace Mulligan, Siobhan Merrigan
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Service type:	Part Time, Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	09/09/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	39	PM	27
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate 180-189 Lakeshore Drive Airside Business Park Swords, Co Dublin
Inspection undertaken by:	M. McDonnell
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

Little Leaps is a community based creche operating from a community centre based in a residential area of Co. Meath. The service is registered to provide sessional and part-time time care to children aged 2-6 years old. The service is in a two-storey building. Room 1 is located on the ground floor is used to provide a sessional session from 9.00am to 12.00pm and 12.30 to 3.30pm. Room 2 is located on the first floor and is used to provide a sessional service and part time service from 9.00am to 1.00pm. The service provides Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). There is also a kitchen on the first floor and there are sanitary facilities located on both floors. There is an outdoor area to the side of the premises. The registered providers also operate a registered school age service in the community centre.

Staffing

The registered providers work in a supernumerary capacity within the service. The registered providers employ 10 staff members. This includes a deputy person in charge, five staff who work directly with the pre-school children, three staff who work with the school age children and a contractor.

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 inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under Regulation 9 Management & Recruitment, Regulation 11 Staffing Levels, Regulation 19 Health, Welfare & Development of Child, Regulation 23 Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of Child, Regulation 25 First Aid, Regulation 26 Fire safety measures, Regulation 28 Insurance and Regulation 27 Supervision. 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 providers, deputy 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.

(7) A registered provider shall ensure that all employees, unpaid workers and contractors are appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training, including in relation to the following:

- (a) the policies, procedures and statements of the service specified in Schedule 5;
- (b) Part VIIA (inserted by section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (No. 40 of 2013)) of the Act, and
- (c) these Regulations.

Compliance Information

(1) (a) The registered providers were the designated persons in charge of the service, and there was a named person to deputise in their absence.

(b) Following discussion with the person in charge, and review of the staff roster it was confirmed that when the preschool service was in operation the designated person in charge or the named person in charge were on the premises.

(c) On discussion with staff members and the registered providers, there was a clear management structure in place and staff were familiar with it.

(2) On the day of inspection, the recruitment files of the registered providers and 10 staff members were reviewed.

(a)(b) There registered providers had a written reference available for themselves and twenty written and validated references were available for the 10 staff members.

(c) A Garda vetting disclosure was available for all staff members and the registered providers. However, the service did not demonstrate compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years following a review of staff members employment in the service. This is detailed in Regulation 23.

(d) International police vetting was not required following a review of documentation available.

(4) The registered providers, deputy person in charge, and five staff members who work directly with the pre-school children in the service held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 - 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification.

(7) A review of the staff files demonstrated that staff members were provided with training to support them in the care of the children. Staff members spoke of the schedule of supervision that was in place which also supported them to actively support the children and included support from the staff member trained in Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC). This was also reflected in supervision records available in staff files.

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) On the day of inspection there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) On the inspector's unannounced arrival, the adult child ratio was observed to be correct and remained so throughout the inspection. The following adult-to-child ratios were observed:

- In Room 1 for the morning session there were 3 staff members, and 20 children aged between 3 years 2 months old to 4 years 8 months old. In the afternoon session there were 2 staff members, and 16 children aged between 3 years 2 months old to 4 years 9 months old.
- In Room 2 for the morning session there were 2 staff members, and 19 children aged between 3 years 1 month old to 4 years 9 months old.
- In the part time session, there were 2 staff members and 8 children aged between 3 years and 4 months old to 4 years and 7 months old.

The registered providers and the deputy person in charge were available to provide cover for breaks and support with care for the children.

(8) (a) Following discussions with staff members and the registered providers the inspector could confirm that two staff members were always on the premises when the children were attendance 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

(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

Basic Needs

The children's drinking water was accessible to the children within their rooms. Children brought in their lunches from home and staff sat and chatted with the children whilst they ate. The children were encouraged to participate in the daily routines, which children being given clear roles and responsibilities daily, which included giving out lunches and water. Children were observed to use the toilet independently with staff remaining close by for support if required.

Supporting relationships around children

The staff members were observed to interact kindly with the children within their care. The staff members informed the inspector that there were children who were new to the creche and some who required individual support. Staff members spoken with were aware of the needs and strategies required to support children in their care. The staff members discussed the settling in plan for the children and the daily communication with parents. The children were observed to be settled in the service. Children were observed to have choices within their play routine. For example, whilst some children played with cars and garages, houses and dolls other children played dress up or coloured pictures. Staff interacted with children to support their play, for example a child asked a staff member to read a book, and another child was encouraged to stay and listen when they showed interest in the story telling.

Physical and material environment

Appropriate relaxation areas were available in the rooms, with cosy areas available in both rooms. Activities and equipment were available on open shelving at a low level for children to access independently which included a range of books, tabletop activities, construction toys. Sensory items such as water and sand trays were available in the rooms with appropriate toys for children to play with. The home corners in each of the care rooms, were equipped with a range of materials which included food, cutlery and dining items. Some of these items were real life items such as kettles and food containers. There were also babies, buggies and clothes available.

The service had an outdoor play area. The inspector observed the children enjoying the outdoor play area in the service. The area had a soft safety surface. There was a wooden and climbing structure with a slide and a wooden kitchen with pots and utensils. Large toys and ride on toys were also provided. There was access to sensory materials in each of the outdoor area and seating.

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 service had a manned reception entrance to the service. This prevented any unauthorised access to the service and exit from the service by children.
- Blind cords were secured and were not accessible to children.
- Cleaning agents and medications were stored out of the reach of children.
- The staircase leading to Room 2 was adequately lit and in good condition.
- The outdoor area was secured by fencing which was observed to be maintained.
- Children were observed to wash their hands prior to their lunch.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. The service did not demonstrate compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. Following a review of staff members employment in the service two staff members required updated vetting disclosures.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. The service submitted updated disclosures. As a preventive action the registered providers stated that they have updated the Recruitment Policy, noting that renewal of vetting disclosures will be sought 3 months in advance of expiry. A Tracking document, which notes expiration dates of all Staff Garda Vetting, was created and will be monitored and displayed in the office in order to ensure all staff members have updated vetting disclosures.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

Updated Disclosure

A copy of the amended recruitment policy

Summary Comment

The actions and evidence submitted by the registered providers, in their corrective and preventive action plan, have addressed the non-compliance as identified on 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 registered provider ensured that a person trained in a First Aid Responder (FAR) course was available to the children attending the service. There were three staff members who had FAR training certificates.
- (2) The first aid equipment available in the service provided adequate resources in the event of a first aid emergency.

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 of the previous fire drill on 20 June 2025 was available for review. The service had maintained a record of monthly fire drills.
- (b) The registered provider had evidence of the annual maintenance of the fire alarm system on 2 September 2025 and the fire extinguishers on 20 May 2025.
- (4) The procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were displayed in the rooms.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

A registered provider shall ensure that pre-school children attending the service are supervised at all times.

Compliance Information

The inspector observed staff supervising children primarily by sight throughout the period of inspection. The layout of the rooms supported staff in being able to maintain sight of the children. This was evidenced as staff were able to support children sharing and engaging with different toys, whilst they completed activities with other children.

Children on the ground floor had to access sanitary facilities outside of the room. Staff accompanied children who needed to use the sanitary facilities. In Room 2 the sanitary facilities were available beside the room, and the children stored their coats outside of the room. When children went to the toilet or to their bags staff were aware and accompanied the children.

In the outdoor area there was a large climbing frame, trikes, scooters and toys for the children to play with. Staff members were aware of children's play and appropriately supervised the use of the different equipment that was available.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider provided evidence that the service was adequately insured. The policy showed that the service was insured from 28 March 2025 to 27 March 2026.