

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2018GY507
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Name of Service:	Happy Feet Creche
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Address of Service:	Unit 6, Creggan, Barna, Co. Galway
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Eircode:	H91 EW28
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Name of Registered Provider:	Aoife O'Brien
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Service type:	Full Day, Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	23/03/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	38	PM	26
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	TUSLA - Child and Family Agency, Early Years Inspectorate, Quality Assurance Directorate, Clinical & Administration Building, Block A - (1st Floor- Green Corridor), Merlin Park, Galway.
Inspection undertaken by:	F Nic Dhonnacha
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 private childcare facility provides a full day care, sessional and part-time service. The preschool is based in a commercial and residential estate in the village of Barna on the outskirts of Galway city. The service operates from 07.30 to 18.00, from Monday to Friday. An Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) pre-school care programme and sessional care programme between 09.00 and 12.00 is also offered. The service also caters for school age children with a breakfast club and afterschool programme. There were four playrooms in the service. All rooms were in operation on the day of inspection- the Big Room which accommodates children from age 3 to 5 years up until 12.00. The school age children were accommodated in this room in the afternoon. The Toddler room caters for children aged 1-2 years. The Preschool playroom caters for children aged 2-3 years, while the Blue room caters for children aged 3-5 years. Additionally, there is a designated sleep room with six cots and stackable beds, a kitchen, staff room, office, storage room, sluice room and both adult and children's sanitary areas. There was a secure outdoor play area to the back and side of the premises. A child centred play-based pre-school curriculum focusing on emerging interests is provided.

Staffing

There were 17 adults in total working in the service. The registered provider is the designated person in charge and is onsite daily. There is an assistant manager who was the deputy person in charge and 10 adults who work directly with the preschool children. Additionally, there is a cook preparing, cooking, serving and storing the service meals and snacks daily, an auxiliary staff member and two adults who work directly with the school age children afterschool programme. An outside contractor provides an exercise programme of activities to the children once a week.

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:

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- 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.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under Regulation 15 Record of a Preschool Child and Regulation 16 Record in Relation to Pre-School Service.

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, deputy person in charge, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

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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) There was a designated person in charge and there was a named person available to deputise in the service.
- (b) The registered provider and deputy person in charge were on the premises when the early years inspector arrived and remained on site for the duration of the inspection. Documentary evidence indicated that either the designated person in charge or deputy were available on the premises when the pre-school children were present.
- (c) There was a clear management structure in the service that identified the lines of authority and accountability in the service. The specific roles and responsibilities of each employee and unpaid worker were documented.

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- (2) The recruitment files for 17 adults (16 staff and 1 contractor) were reviewed on the day of inspection. It was acknowledged that the registered provider had an additional complete file for the contractor who attends the service on a regular basis providing sports and exercise sessions for the children.
- (a) Thirty-two written validated references on file, in respect of the 16 staff and 1 contractor were from a past employer.
- (b) Two written validated references on file, in respect of the 16 staff and 1 contractor were from a source other than a past employer.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for 17 adults. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew garda vetting every three years.
- (d) Six staff, who had lived outside the jurisdiction, for longer than 6 consecutive months, while over the age of 18 years, had the required police vetting. Where applicable, these vetting's were translated by a reputable source.
- (4) Twelve staff working directly with the children had evidence of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 5 to Level 9, in Early Childhood Care and Education.

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) At all times during the period of the inspection, the registered provider ensured that an adequate number of staff were working directly with the children.
- (2) The person in charge ensured that the minimum ratio of adults to children specified was maintained.

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On the morning of the inspection, there were 38 children present.

- 9 children were aged between 1 and 2 years
- 5 children were aged between 2 and 3 years
- 24 children were aged between 3 and 5 years

There were six staff directly caring for these children.

Additionally, the registered provider acted as childcare relief and assisted with the administration parts of the inspection.

There was a staff member designated to kitchen duties- preparing and serving the service meals.

In addition, there was a contractor in the service providing an exercise programme of activities to the older children in the service.

On the afternoon of the inspection, there were 26 children present.

- 7 children were aged between 1 and 2 years,
- 5 children were aged between 2 and 3 years.
- 14 children were aged between 3 and 5 years.

There were five staff directly caring for these children. Additionally, the registered provider acted as childcare relief and assisted with the administration parts of the inspection.

In the afternoon there were 17 school aged children being cared for by 2 designated staff.

- (8)(a) The registered provider ensured that there were two staff on the premises while the pre-school was operating.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a pre-school service in a drop-in centre or a temporary pre-school service shall ensure that a record in writing is kept in respect of each pre-school child attending the service containing the following particulars:

- (a) the name and date of birth of the child;*
- (b) the date on which the child first attended the service;*
- (c) the date on which the child ceased to attend the service;*
- (d) the name and address of a parent or guardian of the child and a telephone number where that parent or guardian or a relative or friend of the child can be contacted during the hours of operation of the service;*
- (e) authorisation for the collection of the child;*

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(f) details of any illness, disability, allergy or special need of the child, together with all the information relevant to the provision of special care or attention;

(g) the name and telephone number of the child's registered medical practitioner;

(h) record of immunisations, if any, received by the child;

(i) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (1) is retained for a period of 2 years from the date on which the child to whom it relates ceases to attend the service.

(5) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (2) is retained for a period of 2 years from the date on which the child attends the service.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(g)(h) &(i)

- A sample of 10 children's records were reviewed by the early years inspector. The entries reviewed were factual, consistent and accurate. The 10 random children's records contained the following:
- The name and date of birth of the child.
- The date on which the child first attended the service.
- The date on which the child stopped attending the service (where relevant).
- The name and address of the child's parent or guardian and a telephone number where that parent or guardian (or a relative or friend of the parent or child) can be contacted during the hours of operation.
- Written authorisation/permissions for collecting the child.
- Details are recorded of any illness, allergy or additional need(s) the child had, together with all the information relevant to the provision of specific care or attention.
- The name and telephone number of the child's registered medical practitioner.
- A record of any immunisations the child has had.
- Written parental or guardian consent was included to allow the child to have appropriate medical treatment if there was an emergency.

(4)&(5) The person in charge advised and documentary evidence from file review indicated, that the pre-school had a system to allow all relevant children's records were kept for 2 years from the date a child stopped attending the service.

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Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of the following information in relation to the service:

- (a) the name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee, unpaid worker and contractor;*
- (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;*
- (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;*
- (j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent;*
- (k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.*

Compliance Information

- (1)(a) The name, position and qualification and experience of each employee and unpaid worker and contractor was available on file on the day of inspection.
- (h) Details of the children's attendance was accurately recorded.
- (i) A staff roster was available on request.
- (j) Documentation was available on the electronic application to demonstrate that signed parental consent was required prior to administering medication to a child, should it be required and that administration of medication should be witnessed.
- (k) Details of accidents and incidents were recorded on the electronic application and there was evidence available that parents were informed following an accident or incident involving their child.

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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(1)(a)

- The staff encouraged and supported the children to be as independent as possible.
- The children were given sufficient time to eat in an unhurried manner. The staff complied with the service's healthy eating policy.
- The tables and chairs were suitable for the children's ages and stages of development.
- The children had unrestricted access to the toilet and did not have to wait to use the toilet. The staff used the correct language surrounding toileting. Ten children who wore nappies were changed in a sensitive and timely manner and on a regular basis.
- Children had plenty of opportunities to move themselves, to practice and improve their emerging skills, such as co-ordination and balance. Play activities and experiences were developmentally appropriate and suitably challenging. The children could move about freely and explore their environment. The children were observed at free play, making puzzles, mix and match, stacking and building. The children played at pretend kitchen/house, drawing and artwork. The children talked about the theme of the week, which was the Easter. The staff acknowledged a child's achievements and the children were observed having fun. The staff advised the children play in the outdoor area on a daily basis except during bad weather.

Supporting Relationships.

- The staff supported children in forming and sustaining positive relationships by -
 - having a key person system for each child.
 - showing respect for each unique child and developing their trust.
 - listening to the voice of the child as they communicate their needs, thoughts and experiences both verbally and non-verbally, by reading children's cues, gestures and body language.
 - using soft tones, the child's individual name, getting down to their level and making eye contact.
 - providing opportunities for individual and small group activities and play, leading to increased social awareness, co-operation, collaboration, teamwork and a sense of belonging.

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- providing opportunities for children to learn from each other and with each other, to work together, join in and contribute to projects and tasks.
- working with parents and guardians by sharing knowledge and observations of the child's interests, strengths, developmental and care needs, approaches to learning, changes in their life and any other concerns.
- On speaking with the staff, the inspector was informed that they provided parents with daily information on their child's experiences in the pre-school including the child's likes, interests and preferences and play activities engaged in. This information was provided through the electronic childcare application, at collection times and by phone calls and by email if necessary.
- The staff created individual learning journals/profile scrapbooks for each child, showing the themes, experiences and activities engaged in along with photographs.
- The staff were observed helping children to find solutions, supporting them and talking to the children in a variety of ways- discussing, questioning, modelling and commentating, extending a child's activities and initiating games and activities. The staff provided significant opportunities for the child to decide their play activities and experiences. The inspectors noted the staff acknowledged a child's achievements 'that is great' 'well done' and used questions such as 'what should we do next?', 'is there any other way to do this?', to allow children to critically think and explore.
- On the day of the inspection the staff showed kindness. They were thoughtful, supportive and reassuring whilst caring for the children. They cared for children by being supportive while the children engaged in free play, role play and creative play. A climate was fostered where the children knew their boundaries.
- Older children could identify, name and explore their feelings both positive and negative.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that each pre-school child attending the service is checked in and out of the service by an employee or an unpaid worker.

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) no person other than-

(i) pre-school child attending the service,

(ii) a person dropping or collecting such a child,

(iii) an employee, or

(iv) an unpaid worker, can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee, and

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(b) a daily record in writing is kept of the entry on the premises of any such person.

Compliance Information

- (1) An electronic childcare application detailed the children's arrival and departure to and from the service daily.
- (3)(a) The registered provider ensured that no person other than the persons outlined in (i) to (iv) entered the service without prior approval. All visitors recorded had written approval by the person in charge.
- (b) A written record was available recording all visitors at the entrance to the service.

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 service provided evidence that two people trained in first aid for children were available to the children attending the pre-school service. Additionally, six staff had current training in paediatric first aid for children.
- (2)(a) There was a first aid box available with a supply of first aid items in a designated press area in the front office. The first aid items were safely stored, easily accessible, in a conspicuous position and in date.
- (b) The service demonstrated that the first aid box was fully equipped and available to the children attending the pre-school service.

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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.*
- (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 written record was available of the monthly fire drills completed in the service. The last recorded fire drill was dated 4/03/2026.
- (b) Records were available in relation to the number, type and maintenance of fire-fighting equipment with the annual service dated 10/10/2025.
- The smoke and fire detection alarm system for the premises had the last annual service dated 10/10/2025.
- (4) Notices were displayed within the service of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire in the premises.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service's insurance specifying the address of the service, catering for full day care service, with an expiry date of 27/03/2026, was available. The insurance covered -

- public liability,
- personal accident,
- against fire and theft,
- buildings,
- outings undertaken as part of the service provision.