

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2019MH002		
Name of Service:	Cookies Early Learning Centre Ltd		
Address of Service:	Unit 8/9, Ivy Hall, Dunshaughlin, Co. Meath		
Eircode:	A85 TR04		
Name of Registered Provider:	Megan Cooke		
Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional		
Date of Inspection:	29/09/2025		
No of pre-school children:	AM	33	PM 11
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, 181-189 Lakeshore Drive, Airside Business Park, Swords, Co. Dublin K67 Y5C6.		
Inspection undertaken by:	AM Coyle		
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.		

Description of service

Cookies Early Learning Centre Ltd is a privately-owned childcare service located in Dunshaughlin, Co Meath accommodating pre-school children aged 2-6 years on a sessional, part-time and full day care basis. The service is registered to cater for a maximum of 48 preschool children from 7.30am to 6.30pm each weekday, with eligible preschool children facilitated to participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme from 9.30am to 12.30pm for 38 weeks each year. There are 2 care rooms in the service namely the Bluebell room, and the Sunflower room. Two outdoor play areas are available in the service; one located to the front and the second outdoor area to the side of the service. There is a registered school-age service in operation on the premises.

Staffing

The registered provider employs a service manager to oversee the operational management of the service, supporting a staff team of 10 staff members, 8 of whom work directly with the pre-school children, 2 staff members work with the school aged children only. A student on work experience placement was present in the service on the day of inspection. The registered provider was not present in the service on the day of inspection and does not work directly with the children attending the service.

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. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 19, 23, 25 and 26; These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report. However, on inspection additional non-compliance which posed a risk were identified under Regulation 8 and 29.

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

Part II - Registration and Register

Regulation 8 - Notification of change in circumstances

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a temporary pre-school service shall, subject to paragraph (3), notify the Agency in writing of any proposed change in the details in relation to the pre-school service contained in the register pursuant to section 58C(2) of the Act or Regulation 7(2) at least 60 days before it is proposed that the change would take effect.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider failed to notify the Early Years Inspectorate of a change in circumstances in relation to the following as per the schedule 4 Form for Notification of Change in Circumstances:

The person in charge was at variance with the information listed on the national register.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

(1) A letter was sent to the CIC team and another team who contacted the registered provider and the situation explained as occurring due to exceptional circumstances. The person in charge had been changed on the HIVE and for the purposes of Pobal and Core Funding, but registered provider forgot to send in the CIC.

Preventive Action

(1) Registered provider will be more vigilant going forward that if there are ever any changes in any centre that she ensures to execute a procedural compliance check across all paperwork for all sectors of the business and all the regulatory bodies that they are governed by. A meeting was held with all their branch managers to discuss their findings and new methods of practice in this regard.

Supporting documentation submitted

Communication has been shared by email.

Summary Comment

The service has engaged with the Early Years Inspectorate and the noncompliance identified under regulation 8 - Notification of change in circumstances has been addressed. The regulatory requirement has been met.

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

(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 required.

(b) The service manager was the designated person in charge when the inspector arrived unannounced on the day of inspection and remained present on the premises for the duration of the inspection.

The files for 11 staff members and the student who was present on work experience placement were reviewed.

(2)(a) Twenty validated written references were available from a previous employer.

One written reference was available from a previous employer.

(b) Three validated written references were available from a source other than a previous employer.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for 11 staff members and the student on work experience placement. The Garda vetting records reviewed demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) International police vetting was available for 3 staff members who had resided outside of the Irish jurisdiction for more than 6 consecutive months as adults.

(4) The service manager and 8 core staff members who worked directly with the preschool children in the service held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 - 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a) A written reference that was on file for one staff member had not been validated with the person who provided the reference.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

(2) (a) The reference has now been validated and is on the staff member's file.

Preventive Action

(2) (a) Their checklists when hiring new staff have been updated to ensure that all compliant related documentation and cross checks are followed through in their entirety by all branch managers. They have also added a 'sign-off' sheet for both the branch manager to sign to confirm they have processed all checklist paperwork and an area for the senior management to sign to acknowledge testimony and/or their acknowledgement of same.

Supporting documentation submitted

Documented evidence was provided.

Summary Comment

The evidence submitted by the registered provider in relation to regulation 9 – Management and recruitment has been reviewed and accepted.

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 staff members working directly with the children attending the service.

(2) The adult to child ratios were correct in the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced to the service and remained so throughout the inspection.

The following adult to child ratios were observed during the inspection:

- In the Bluebells room, there were 14 children aged 2-year 9 month to 4 year 7 months being cared for by 4 staff members.
- In the Sunflowers room there were 19 children aged 3 years 9 months to 4 years 5 months being cared for by 3 staff members.

(8)(a) The registered provider ensured that 2 adults were present on the premises at all times, as evidenced in staff rosters and staff attendance records maintained 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

(1)(a) The following observations are examples of how each child's learning, development and well-being was facilitated within the daily life of the service.

Basic needs:

- In both care rooms in the service the atmosphere was warm and child centred. The staff members spoke positively and kindly to and about the children during the inspection and were observed initiating conversations and listening carefully to the children's stories and questions and responding to the children in an interested and engaged manner.
- There was a healthy eating policy in place in the service and healthy meals and snacks were provided for the children at regular intervals throughout the day. The children attending the service on a full day care basis can have breakfast if required. The children bring their own morning snack with them from home. At 1.00pm the children attending on a full day care basis had baked beans and hash browns to eat with chicken fajitas served for dinner at 3.00pm and an evening snack is served from 4:30 pm. The children's water bottles were accessible during the day, and these were placed beside the children on their tables when eating. Mealtimes were observed to be a pleasant unhurried experience with children given plenty of time to enjoy their meals. Staff members chatted to the children about their activities over the weekend and upcoming events.
- The personal care needs of the children were attended to promptly by the staff members, children were facilitated to use the bathroom as needed with support and supervision provided as required with children gently reminded to wash their hands afterwards. Aprons were available for messy play activities and children were supported in putting their coats on independently before they went outside.
- Comfortable rest areas alongside library resources were available in both the Bluebells room and the Sunflower room to facilitate the children to take a break from activities as they chose throughout the session.
- The children from both care rooms enjoyed time in the outdoor play area on the day of inspection.

- The staff members supported the children’s development of social skills by guiding them in times of minor conflict to listen to each other and to think of solutions together. Appropriate language and tone of voice was used by the adults during these interactions.

Supporting relationships around children:

- The children appeared to feel safe and comfortable in the service and with their peers. The staff members demonstrated skilful interaction strategies to support the children’s play, learning and development, as evidenced in occasions when the adults acted as a play partners with the children and supported the children’s participation in their chosen activities. The staff members were heard chatting to the children about their parents, siblings, pets and extended families, this practice nurtures links between the service and home.
- Familiar routines were established in both care rooms, and children’s transitions were supported in the service as evidenced by the staff members signposting which activities were coming next, including indoor and outdoor play, snack and mealtimes.
- Parents were warmly welcomed into the service, additionally monthly newsletters are sent to parents to keep them informed of the activities in the service. Partnership with parents was valued in the service the parents of the children attending the Bluebell room were invited into the care room on the day following the inspection to familiarise them with their children’s environment and care routines.

Physical and material environment:

- In both care rooms the play materials and equipment were positioned at an accessible level on open shelving which nurtured independence, facilitated choice, encouraged curiosity, child-led play and free movement.
- Both care rooms were spacious and enabled the children to move around the rooms freely. The rooms were laid out with areas of interest including home areas with a range of accessorial equipment including tableware and cooking utensils. Dress up resources, dolls, buggies and cradles to enable the children to extend their real and imaginary play were provided along with construction areas, a wide range of tabletop play resources and arts and crafts materials which supported all areas of development.
- In both care rooms there were a broad range of books available to support the children’s language development and the children were observed to choose the books they wanted to have read to them.

- The children’s artwork was displayed in the care rooms which supports children in feeling valued and appreciated.
- Two outdoor areas were available for the children to use, the area to the front of the service was predominantly surfaced with artificial grass. A well-resourced mud kitchen with a range of supporting play equipment was available to support the children’s imaginary play experiences, play equipment with climbing steps, a crawl through tunnel and a slide supported the children’s gross motor play, construction blocks, a water table was provided to support sensory play experiences in addition to ride on and push along toys. The outdoor area to the side of the service was surfaced with a combination of paving stones and grass, a large climbing frame and slide was available along with a stationary wooden car, a mud kitchen and a music wall for the children to enjoy.

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 premises and outdoor play area were appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the service.
- The water temperature in the sanitary accommodation in the service did not exceed the recommended maximum water temperature of 43°C. This reduced the risk of scalding for the children in attendance.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely out of the reach of children.

Infection Control:

- There was warm water, liquid soap and paper hand towels provided for hand hygiene at the wash hand basins in the sanitary accommodation of the service. The children were encouraged to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet, and after outdoor and messy play, with assistance provided when necessary.
- Children’s lunches which contained perishable food items including meat and dairy products, provided by parents for the morning snack, were refrigerated on arrival to the service. This reduced the risk of bacteria multiplying to levels which could result in food contamination.

- Documented up to date cleaning records were maintained on the premises. The premises and the play equipment and materials were in a clean and hygienic condition.

Administration of Medication:

- No children attending the service required a medical care plan. No medication was observed being administered on the day.

Fire Safety:

- Emergency exits in the service were clear and unobstructed.

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) A person who held in-date First Aid Response (FAR) training was at all times immediately available to the children attending the service.

(2)(a)(b) The first aid boxes available in the service were suitably equipped and stored in conspicuous locations on the premises and these were available for the children in attendance, in the event of an 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 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) Records were available in the service to demonstrate that regular fire drills take place. The most recent fire drill was recorded to have been carried out 11/09/25.

(b) There was a record available that detailed the number, type and maintenance of firefighting equipment and smoke alarms on the premises. The firefighting equipment was serviced on the 04/07/25 and the smoke alarm system was last serviced on 04/07/25.

(4) Notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were on display in the care rooms and corridors of the service.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

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

- (b) safe and secure,*
- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and*

Compliance Information

(b)The building was observed to be safe and secure. Access to the building was via an intercom system at a secure door on the ground floor. This reduced the risk of an unauthorised adult entering the premises or a child leaving the premises unsupervised.

Non-Compliance Information

- (d) The service was not maintained in a proper state of repair as demonstrated by the following:
- The walls of the sanitary area directly located off the Blubell room had been repaired leaving multiple small areas of rough plaster, these areas were unable to be cleaned effectively.
 - The artificial grass in the outdoor play area to the front of the service was frayed and worn at two of the joining's resulting in a potential trip hazard.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

- (d)
- The walls have been sanded and repaired in the bathroom. They have also been fitted with new tiles and wallpaper.
 - A whole new astro turf surface has been fitted to the area in question which has been recommended for schools and creches.

Preventive Action

(d) Registered provider has discussed with all their branch managers, as part of their daily indoor and outdoor assessments to include the investigation of all surfaces, walls and in general all structural fittings, and to report anything they may deem to be worthy of further investigation by senior management and/or specific trade professionals.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographs of repairs to the walls of the sanitary accommodation and new surface in the outdoor area.

Summary Comment

The evidence submitted by the registered provider in relation to regulation 29 - Premises has been reviewed and accepted. The non-compliance has been adequately addressed.