

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2019TY003
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Name of Service:	Muddy Puddles Country Childcare
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Address of Service:	Fantane, Borrisoleigh, Co Tipperary
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Eircode:	E41 C579
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Name of Registered Provider:	Trevor Groome
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	02/04/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	30	PM	29
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	North Tipperary Civic Offices, Limerick Road, Nenagh, Co Tipperary, E45A099
Inspection undertaken by:	L McGeeney and A McNamara
Title:	Early Years Inspectors

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).

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Description of service

This full day care service was established in 2019 in the old schoolhouse in Fantane near Borrisoleigh in North Tipperary to provide care and education to children aged between 0 and 6 years old. A registered school age care service is also provided. The service operates Monday – Friday, 7am – 5.45pm, for 50 weeks of the year. This includes a daily three-hour session funded under the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme (ECCE) for eligible children, which operates 9am – 12pm for 38 weeks of the year.

The service is provided across a number of buildings on the former school campus which includes the original schoolhouse, which had three activity rooms, kitchenette, sanitary accommodation areas, office space and sleep room. Outbuildings on either side of the main schoolhouse have been developed to create a kitchen and a pre-school room with sanitary accommodation. A modular building at the back of the premises provides two activity rooms and sanitary accommodation and a second modular building is used as a lunchroom and space for school age children. There are large, enclosed outdoor play areas at the front and back of the premises.

Staffing

The registered provider and 14 staff work directly with the children in the service on a daily basis, including staff employed under the access and inclusion model (AIM). All staff hold recognised qualifications 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

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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.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9(1)(2)(4), 11(1)(2), 19(1)(a), 22, 23, 24(1)(3) and 26(1)(4).

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 inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, 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

(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 a named person who was able to deputise, as required.

(b) A person in charge was present on the day of inspection. A person in charge was present daily.

(2) Following a review of previous inspection information, information available on inspection and discussion with the registered provider it was determined that one new staff member who works directly with the children had been employed since the previous inspection. In addition, Garda vetting for four staff members whose disclosures were identified as due for renewal were requested for review, one of these staff members had left the service since the last inspection.

(a) Two written and validated references were available in relation to the new staff member working at the service.

(b) Where past employer references were not available, there were references from sources such as previous schools and colleges.

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(c) Garda vetting was available on file for everyone working in the service. Garda vetting had been renewed, in compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Police vetting documentation was available for one new staff member working in the service, who had lived outside of the state for a period of longer than six months.

(4) Certificates of qualifications for the staff working with pre-school children were available on file demonstrating that they held a qualification at level 5 and above on the National Framework of Qualifications.

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.

Compliance Information

(1) At the time of inspection, there was an adequate number of adults responsible for the direct care of the children.

(2) On the day of the inspection, the staff to child ratios were maintained as follows throughout the service:

- Puddles (babies): There were seven children being cared for by two staff.
- Don Ellas (wobbler): There were six children being cared for by two staff.
- Muddy's (toddler): There were four children being cared for by two staff.
- Preschool: There were 13 children being cared for by 2 staff

The registered provider was also available in the service but not included in the adult to child ratios.

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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

(1)(a) The following was observed on the day of inspection through direct observation, review of records and discussions with staff:

Basic needs:

The children brought their own drink bottles, which were stored in the rooms in an accessible area. The children had access to meals and snacks throughout the day. The children sat together to eat and were given as much time as they needed to eat. There were comfortable chairs for the staff to sit in while bottle feeding the babies. Fridges were available for the storage of perishable foods and drinks.

The children enjoyed freedom of movement both indoors and outdoors. Children could rest and relax in the cosy areas in each room or sleep in a cot or on a camp bed if they needed a sleep during the day.

Sanitary accommodation areas were located near or in each room to facilitate the children who were toilet trained to access the toilets and sinks independently and to support nappy changing as often as was required during the day.

Supporting relationships:

The children were cared for in small groups with favourable adult to child ratios. The staff supported the children to make choices and be involved in the plans for the day. The staff understood the needs, interests and abilities of each child in their care and supported them in their play, exploration and interactions with other children.

Parents were met at the entrance doors or gates at drop off and arrival times, when they could share with staff any relevant information about their child.

Siblings, cousins and children with close family or friendship ties, who were not in the same care room, were enabled to see each other, interact and play together at appropriate times during the day, such as during outdoor

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play time. There were lower numbers of children present on the day of inspection than was usual as it was the Easter holidays. Holiday periods provided the staff and children with the opportunity to change the normal routines and the chance for different rooms to come together for activities.

Physical and material environment:

The children had access to their designated care rooms which were well resourced and laid out. Additional toys and materials were stored outside the rooms and brought in when needed such as seasonal and rotated toys.

Each room was furnished with age-appropriate tables and chairs for the children and additional seating for the staff. There were highchairs for the babies to use during mealtimes and low chairs with splayed legs which provided stability for toddlers. Many of the tables were height adjustable so they could be made lower or higher according to the needs of the children using them.

There were several outdoor play spaces available to the children at the front, back and sides of the large site. On the day of inspection the children from the pre-school room and Don Ellas played in the covered space between their room. The children from Muddy's room played in the enclosed area designed for the younger children, between the kitchen and ball court. The babies had access to the play area directly outside Puddles room.

The children's art work, birthday charts and family photos were displayed on the walls in each room.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 22 – Food and drink

A registered provider shall ensure that adequate and suitable, nutritious and varied food and drink is available for each pre-school child attending the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

The service had a healthy eating policy and a rolling two-week menu plan. The service supplied a hot midday meal each day in line with the menu plan. Parents supplied children's snacks and lunch. Foods eaten on the day of inspection included: sandwiches, dry cereal, crackers, ham, grapes, strawberries, cucumbers, custard, rice cakes, pancakes, brown bread, mandarins and fromage frais. Children were encouraged to be independent, such as opening their lunch boxes and peeling fruit. Staff assisted children as required and spoon-fed younger children. Infant formula was brought in made up in bottles in line with national guidance.

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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 was kept secured. There were locked gates at the sides and the front door was secured. Parents or those seeking admission could ring one of the bells at the door or at the gates to alert staff of their presence. Hot water throughout the service was heated by electric water heaters that were thermostatically controlled not to exceed 43°C.

Infection control:

The service had an infection prevention and control policy. There was a cleaning policy and procedure for the service and sign off sheets were completed by staff when tasks were completed. There was a cleaning schedule for toys and all toys that were mouthed were washed after use.

Administration of medication:

The service had a policy on the administration of medication. Signed parental consent was sought prior to medication being given to a child while attending the service.

Safe sleep:

The service had a safe sleep policy. Children were monitored while they slept and physical checks were carried out at 10-minute intervals and recorded.

Fire safety:

Fire exits were found to be unobstructed on the day of inspection.
There were fire evacuation procedures displayed in a prominent area within the service.
Firefighting equipment was present in the service.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection control:

1. The children in the pre-school room did not wash their hands before eating their lunch. Regular hand washing is required at appropriate times during the day such as before eating to reduce the risk of children or staff acquiring illnesses through cross contamination.

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2. Bins without lids and bins that were not 'hands free' or pedal operated were observed in the rooms throughout the service. Pedal-operated, lidded bins are required to be used in the service for the safe storage of rubbish or waste before it is removed from the rooms.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Infection control:

1. Regular hand washing now takes place throughout the day.
2. New pedal operated bins are now installed throughout the service.

Supporting documentation submitted

Infection control:

A photo of the new pedal bins was forwarded with the CAPA response.

Summary Comment

All evidence submitted meets the requirements Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016.

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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Compliance Information

- (1) Staff were responsible for recording the arrival and departure times of the children in the daily attendance registers designed for that purpose.
- (3)(a) Staff met visitors to the service at one of the entrances before allowing them admission to the service if appropriate.

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.
- (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) There was a record of fire drills that had taken place in the service. The last fire drill was recorded as having taken place on 27 February 2026 and staff advised that monthly fire drills were completed.
- (b) There was a record available demonstrating that the smoke alarm system was last serviced on the 9 January 2026 and the firefighting equipment was last serviced on the 14 October 2025.
- (4) There was a notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire displayed in a conspicuous position on the premises.