

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

USLA Identifier:	TU2020CN002
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Name of Service:	Circle of Friends Childcare Limited
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Address of Service:	Killeshandra Community Hall, Railway Road, Killeshandra, Co. Cavan
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Eircode:	H12 RY23
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Name of Registered Provider:	Nicola O Reilly, Eanna O Reilly
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	13/01/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	49	PM	26
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Hampton Court, Cootehill Road, Drumalee, Co Cavan. H12 YY84
Inspection undertaken by:	S. Mc Kenna
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

Circle of Friend's is a private operated childcare service established in 2020. The service provides full day care to children aged 1 to 6 years, operating from 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday within the community hall in the village of Killeshandra Co Cavan. The service participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme (ECCE). The service has sole use of the ground floor where the Wobbler and Toddler care rooms are located. The kitchen is on the first floor, and the two preschool rooms and office are located on the 2nd floor. There are three outdoor play areas available. Car parking is available outside the building.

Staffing

The service employs 19 staff. Fourteen staff are employed to care for preschool children to include the registered provider, and two staff employed through the Access and Inclusion (AIM) Programme. Four staff are employed to care for school aged children and one staff is employed as a cook.

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. The 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 and Regulation and 26: Fire Safety Measures. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within 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*

(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 who is the registered provider, and a named person in charge to deputise in their absence.

(b) Following discussion with the registered provider it was confirmed that the designated person in charge or the named person in charge were on the premises while the preschool service is in operation.

(2) The staff files for 19 adults were reviewed.

(a) A total of 28 validated references from past employers were available on file.

(b) A total of 10 validated references from reputable sources were available on file.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all 19 adults. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years for all 19 employed staff.

(d) A review of the employment history for the 19 adults, demonstrated that 2 adults had lived outside the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months. The required police vetting for the 2 adults was available on file.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that the 14 adults employed to work with children, held an appropriate childcare qualification at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications, or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent. A qualification for 5 adults was not required.

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) The adult to child ratios were correct in the service when the inspector arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection. The following adult to child ratios were observed upon the inspectors arrival.
- Two adults cared for 9 children aged 1 year to 1 year 11 months in the Wobbler Room.
- Two adults cared for 8 children aged 1 year 10 months to 2 years 8 months in the Toddler Room.
- Two adults cared for 17 children aged 2 years 11 months to 4 years in the Preschool 1 Room.
- Three adults cared for 15 children aged 3 years 5 months to 5 years in the Preschool 2 Room.
- The registered provider arrived at the service after the inspector's arrival and remained on site for the remainder of the inspection. The registered provider was available to assist in care rooms if required throughout the day.
- (8) A review of the staff roster demonstrated that the registered provider ensured that 2 adults were present while the service was in operation.

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

(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

The following examples demonstrated how the children's learning, development and well-being was facilitated in the service:

Basic Needs

Healthy eating was promoted within the service. Morning snack items and babies bottles were taken in from home, with the remainder of the meals and snacks cooked on site by the service's cook. The menu on the day of inspection included cereal choices for breakfast, children's own snack for morning time, fish fingers with pasta and vegetables for dinner, and an afternoon snack of sandwiches yogurt and apple. Appropriate plates, bowls and cutlery was used and was suitable for the children's age stage and development. Younger babies were encouraged to self-feed with staff providing support during the meal time if needed. Meal times were observed to be relaxed and at the children's pace. The children's drinking cups were set out and available to them throughout their day. The younger babies were given bottles and feeding times were in line with their individual routines.

The older children were observed to use the toilets located off each care room independently, with staff close by for support if needed. Nappy changing was carried out at allocated times, and more often if children's needs required. Adults were observed to use this opportunity for one-to-one conversations and singing with the younger children.

Bibs were provided to younger children at meal times, and their faces were cleaned following these times. Aprons were provided and used for messy play activities.

The sleep needs of the younger babies/wobblers were met through opportunities for sleep at a time in line with their own routine in the Baby/Wobbler room. The Toddler room children who required a sleep availed of a sleep after dinner time. Rest areas were provided in the preschool rooms to include mat areas with soft seating, where children could take time out to rest and relax during their day.

Younger babies were observed to crawl, lay and roll on soft floor areas in the Baby/Wobbler room. Opportunities for free-flowing movement was available in all the care rooms through the layout of the designated play areas. The children in both preschool rooms availed of physical play in the large indoor hall on the day of inspection.

Supporting Relationships

The staff were observed to promote positive behaviour, with words of encouragement such as “well done” and “good girl” when positive behaviour and interactions was observed. Any disagreements that occurred between children, staff were observed to get down to child level and discuss the disagreement using age-appropriate language and worked together to come to a positive solution.

The staff were observed to demonstrate positive regard for children and their families, through respecting parental wishes, and the children’s individual preferences regarding food and routines. Staff were observed to treat each child with respect, addressing each child by name. Many discussions were observed between the staff and the children about activities in their home life, which demonstrated strong bonds between the staff and children that they care for.

The staff were observed to use a positive and cheerful tone while communicating with the children. The atmosphere in all the care rooms on the day of inspection was fun and welcoming. The staff were observed to encourage children to take part in play and activities, while also respecting their wishes if they preferred another activity or just some time out to relax.

The transitions within the care rooms were observed to be smooth and calm, with little to no disruptions observed. Younger babies were settling into the service, with some of them experiencing their first full day attendance. The staff informed the inspector of how this transition occurs, and that children are given adequate time to settle in. Ongoing communication with parents is through in-person at arrival and collection times, phone calls, children’s notebooks and by email, social media platforms, a messaging service and monthly newsletters. The younger children’s routines and how they got on that day are documented in individual notebooks which are sent home daily.

The staff and management were observed to work well together. Regular support meetings take place. There was minimal staff change over observed, which provides the children with a sense of familiarity throughout the consistency of carers.

Physical And Material Environment

The indoor environments were bright and welcoming. The rooms were laid out to suit the care needs of the children in attendance. In the younger rooms there was space for the babies to take part in floor play, roll and crawl with pull-up toys available to encourage children to stand and in turn support them to begin to walk.

The tables, chairs and highchairs provided were suitable for the children’s needs. Adult sized chairs were provided for the comfort of adults while engaging with the children such as during feeding younger babies and while sitting with the older children to support them during meal times and activities.

The Preschool rooms were laid out with similar interest areas to include a rest area with books, a well-resourced home corner with dress up clothing and role play resources. Table top and connecting toys, jigsaws and building blocks were provided on low level shelves accessible to the children. A creative area, small world toys and tool benches was also provided. The children in Preschool 1 were observed to enjoy an activity about weather and a colouring activity afterwards. Preschool 2 room was celebrating a child’s birthday where they enjoyed a cake to mark this special occasion. A story about dancing and ballerinas was observed, with engagement and discussion among the staff and children observed during the story time.

The Toddler room had areas to include a soft cosy area with books, a home corner area, a trainset, push- along trucks, dolls and equipment, blocks and jigsaws. The toddler children were observed to take part in a creative activity of painting and sticking to create a “dancing on the ice” creative art piece.

The Baby/Wobbler room had a play kitchen with materials, a wall mounted pull up mirror, a soft area with books, sensory boards attached to the wall, musical toys, sensory and fidget toys and an exploration tray with animals and cotton wool for sensory play. The Babies/Wobbler took part in sensory floor play with cotton wool and animals. The adults used many opportunities to engage in songs and rhyme with the children during floor play times.

Many art work pieces were on display throughout the care rooms, which included recently themed activities such as winter, snow and winter clothing creative work. The daily helpers in the Preschool rooms, birthday charts and family walls were also on display.

The service had three outdoor areas with ground surfaces of artificial grass. The Preschool rooms had two adjoining areas with a slide, benches, water wall, trucks, climbing structures and a storage area with additional materials available. The third area is used by the Baby/Wobbler and Toddler rooms and is a covered area to allow for play in inclement weather. Equipment available included a slide, ride on and push along trucks, a climbing frame, balance beam and table and chairs.

Programme of Activities

A key worker system was in place, allowing opportunity for close relationships to be formed between the children, families and the staff. Creative folders were maintained for each child, with curriculum observations sent home at least monthly.

The curriculum was on display in each care room, to include records of the children emerging interests which is then incorporated into the curriculum planning in the relevant care room.

The daily routine and activities are planned while also allowing for flexibility in routine. Children were observed to engage in play and activities of their choosing throughout their day and it was observed in practise that they could opt out of activities if they wished.

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 registered provider ensured the following measures were put in place to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of children in attendance:

- The main entrance door upon the inspectors arrival was secured, which prevented unauthorised access to the building. A buzzer system was in place which alerts the staff of a person's presence at the entrance. The service maintained a visitors log, and the inspector was requested to sign in upon arrival.
- The outdoor play areas were secured with high level metal fencing, with lockable handles on the gates. Keys were accessible to staff only.
- The children were observed to be adequately supervised by the staff during the inspection.
- The equipment and materials available for the children's play were observed to be maintained in good repair.
- Daily room risk assessments were completed by staff and kept up to date.
- The kitchen was located away from the care rooms and remained inaccessible to the preschool children.
- The floor coverings in the care rooms and on the stairways was observed in a good state of repair. Handrails on the stairs were provided, which were suitable for the use of both adults and children.
- Cleaning agents remained out of the reach of children and were stored on high level shelving within the care rooms and sanitary areas.
- Fire exits were observed to remain clear throughout the inspection.

Infection Control:

The inspector observed the following infection control measures in practice within the service:

- Warm running water, hand soap, paper towels and pedal operated bins were available in each sanitary area. Aprons and gloves were provided for use during nappy changing procedures, with daily records maintained.
- Younger children had soothers which were stored in individual boxes within the care rooms. Staff outlined the relevant cleaning and sterilising procedure for the cleaning of the soothers. A box for mouthed toys was available in the younger care rooms.
- The tables in the care rooms were observed to be cleaned after messy activities and before and after meal times.
- The sanitary areas were ventilated through means of mechanical ventilation.
- The children’s snacks and bottles taken in from home were observed to be stored in the fridge in each care room until snack and bottle-feeding times.
- Cleaning schedules were in place and completed up to date. The service was maintained in a clean and hygienic manner throughout.

Administration of Medication:

- The staff outlined the procedures of administering medicine plus the storage of emergency temperature controlling medication if required. No child in attendance required medication to be administered on the day of inspection.

Safe Sleep:

- Suitable and adequate sleep facilities were provided for children aged 2 years and under. Five cots were provided in the sleep room, which were fitted with waterproof safety mattresses. One foldable cot was available for extra use in the care room if required. In addition to this a floor bed was also available if needed.
- Sleep checks were carried out every 10 minutes, recording sleeping children’s position, breathing pattern, skin colour, room temperature and staff signatures.
- Individually stored bed linen was provided for each child in attendance that required a sleep. The bed linen is laundered in the service at least once a week or more often if required.
- Stackable beds were provided for children aged 2 years and over, which were set up at sleep time within the Toddler Room following dinner time.

Non-Compliance Information

Safe Sleep:

1. The children’s comforters were observed to remain with the sleeping children in the cot room. This is not in line with the services safe sleep policy which states “comforters will be removed”, and not in line with the recommended safe sleep guidance. This poses a risk to children.

2. Two children in the Toddler Room were observed to be given their bottles to drink while lying on stackable beds at sleep time. This is not in line with the recommended safe sleep guidelines. This poses a risk to children.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Safe Sleep:

1. The staff now take each child's comforters of them and put them into their box or bag as soon as the child falls asleep. This has been discussed with all staff at a staff meeting and was implemented the day after inspection for the safety of all the children in our care.
2. Toddlers who have a bottle of milk before sleep time now either sit in the cosy corner or sit upright on the toddler bed until the bottle is gone and then staff put the bottle into the child's bag, and then the child is allowed to lie down for their sleep. This has been discussed with all staff at a staff meeting, and the staff working in these rooms are now aware and put this action in place the day after inspection, for the safety of all the children in our care.

Supporting documentation submitted

Safe Sleep:

A copy of staff meeting agenda and manager notes.

Summary Comment

The registered providers' response had adequately addressed the non-compliances under Regulation 23. This will be reviewed at the next inspection,

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 fire drills that take place was available. The most recently recorded fire drill was 12th.
December 2024.

(b) The annual maintenance certificate for the fire extinguishers and the smoke alarms was dated November
2024.

4) The fire evacuation procedures were displayed throughout the service, which contained details in relation to
the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire.