

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2020TY004
Name of Service:	Bright Sparks Preschool
Address of Service:	Castlequarter, Toomevara, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary
Eircode:	
Name of Registered Provider:	Therese Martin
Service type:	Full Day
Date of Inspection:	08/04/2024
No of pre-school children:	AM 30 PM 28
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Civic Offices, Limerick Road, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary
Inspection undertaken by:	L McGeeney
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 service was established in 2020 to provide care and education to children aged 2 – 6 years old. A registered school aged service is also provided. The service operates Monday – Friday, 8am – 6pm for 49 weeks of the year. This includes a three-hour session funded under the early childhood care and education scheme (ECCE) for eligible children, which operates Monday – Friday, 8.45am – 11.45am for 38 weeks of the year.

The service is operated from a converted parochial house in the village of Toomevara in north Tipperary. The service is across the road from the national school where its sister service, Bright Sparks Preschool, is located. The premises is a partial three-storey, detached, period building surrounded by extensive grounds. The facilities on the ground floor include two activity rooms and sanitary accommodation area. The kitchen is located on the lower ground floor. The office and a large activity room that can be divided into two spaces are located on the first floor, with a sanitary accommodation area off the staircase landing between the ground and first floor. The main outdoor play area is at the back of the premises.

The Orchard room/Cabin has been created in the outdoor area since the last inspection in 2021. This is a single storey, detached modular building which has been installed in the orchard at the side of the premises and developed as an outdoor learning environment for children attending the service.

Staffing

The registered provider is the service manager and works in the service on a daily basis. There are 14 staff employed in the service including the assistant manager, catering staff and 11 staff who work directly with the early years children. Three staff work in the service across the road in the morning and in this service in the afternoon. Two of the staff are employed under the access and inclusion model (AIM). All staff who work directly with the children hold recognised qualifications in early childhood care and education at levels 5, 6 or 8 on the national qualifications framework.

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/ premises and facilities. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9(2)(4), 11(1)(2)(4)(8), 20(1)(2), 21, 22, 24(1)(3), 25, 26(1)(4) and 28.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 9 Management and Recruitment.

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

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(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

The staff files of ten staff who had commenced working in the service since the last inspection on 18 March 2021 were reviewed as part of the inspection process. Staff records contained the required documentation and were well maintained.

2(a) Written, validated references from past employers were available in respect of each of the ten members of staff.

(b) Written, validated references from a source other than a past employer were available in respect of three members of staff.

(c) Garda vetting had been carried out in respect of each member of staff. Relevant documents were retained on file. The service had introduced re-vetting of staff on a three yearly basis in line with best practice.

(d) Police vetting had been carried out in respect of the member of staff who had lived outside the state. Relevant documents were retained on file.

(4) Staff who worked directly with the children held recognised qualifications in early childhood care and education at levels 5, 6 or 8 on the national qualifications framework.

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.

(4) Subject to paragraph (5), where a registered provider contemporaneously provides-

(a) a sessional pre-school service, and

(b) a full day care service or a part-time day care service, or both, the minimum ratio of adults to children applicable for the duration of the sessional pre-school service in respect of the children attending that service shall be the ratio specified in paragraph (3).

(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

11(1) There were 6 staff working directly with 30 children aged between 2 and 6 years old attending on a sessional, part time or full day care basis accommodated across 3 activity rooms on the morning of the inspection. There were 2 staff and 7 children aged 2 – 4 years old in Caterpillars room; 2 staff and 8 children aged 4 – 6 years old in Busy Bees room and 15 children aged 3 – 5 years old in Butterflies room. In the afternoon, 15 children and 2 staff came from across the road to complete their part-time or full day care hours in the service. In the afternoon, there were 28 children and 8 staff working directly with the children.

The service manager was present in the service throughout the day and was available to provide relief in the rooms for staff breaks. There was also a member of staff responsible for preparing, cooking and serving food present in the service during the inspection but not included in the adult to child ratios.

(2) and (4) The adult to child ratios were maintained at greater than the minimum requirements in each room throughout the day.

(8)(a) There were at least 2 staff present in the service while it was in operation.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 20 – Facilities for rest and play

(1) Subject to this regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) having regard to the number of pre-school children attending the service, their respective ages and the amount of time they spend on the premises, there are adequate and suitable facilities for each child to play indoors and, where required by these Regulations, outdoors, during the day, and

(b) there are adequate and suitable facilities for a pre-school child to rest during the day, and in the case of an overnight pre-school service, during the day and the night.

(2) A registered provider-

(a) of a full day care service, a part-time day care service, a sessional preschool service or a childminding service that is registered for the first time on or after 30 June 2016, shall ensure that a suitable, safe and secure outdoor space to which the preschool children attending the service have access on a daily basis is provided on the premises.

Compliance Information

(1)(a) The children had access to three bright, comfortable, well laid out and resourced indoor environments and daily access to play outdoors. There were two activity rooms on the ground floor of the premises and a newly installed wooden cabin in the orchard which provided a third activity room for the early years children.

(b) There were cosy spaces in each activity room where the children could rest and relax during the day. These spaces were furnished with child or standard sized sofas, cushions and blankets and children were observed making themselves comfortable in these spaces during the inspection. Bookshelves were positioned beside the cosy areas to provide the children with resources that suited the quiet space. There were camp beds available for the children who required a sleep during the day. These were laid out in part of Caterpillars room after dinner time each day, the window shutters were closed to dim the light and soft music or white noise was played to

create an environment that was conducive to restful sleep. Fairy lights were used to brighten the parts of the room used by children who didn't sleep during this time who could either remain in the room and engage in quiet activities such as playdough or move to another activity room or to outdoor play.

(2)(a) There were two outdoor play areas available to the children. The main area was at the back of the premises and directly accessible from Caterpillars room. This space was enclosed by fencing and gates and had a combination of ground surfaces including soft fall material under climbing equipment, tarmacadam and concrete paths. Part of the space had been covered with a corrugated plastic roof to provide sheltered play space in all weathers. The second area had recently been developed in the orchard at the side of the premises. This space was fenced to incorporate the new wooden cabin, a sanitary accommodation area, a stone storage building that was under development as a sheltered outdoor play space and many mature trees. There were strings of outdoor electric lighting along the fence and battery-operated fairy lights wound around some of the trees to light the space when needed and allow outdoor play at all times of the year. There was a wooden shelter between some of the trees as well as an area that was covered with a corrugated plastic roof to provide sheltered outdoor play spaces that could be used in all weathers. The ground surface had been covered with a black barrier over which was laid bark mulch in one part and gravel in another part.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 21 – Equipment and materials

A registered provider shall ensure that there is adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment and materials available on the premises of the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

The service was well equipped with a range of good quality toys, furniture and materials suitable to the age and stage of development of the children using them. Caterpillars room was used by children aged 2 – 3 years old. In this room there were low level tables and chairs for dining and tabletop activities as well as an activity tray table with raised sides for special interest resources such as sand play. Stackable beds were stored in a storage room off this room and taken out when needed as well as routinely each afternoon. The sides of low-level shelving units had been covered with felt fabric to create backgrounds to scenes the children created using felt shapes or pictures with hoop and loop backing which stuck to the fabric. Interest areas in the room included the art area,

small world areas, home corner, dress up area, family photo area and cosy area with library. There were materials for indoor physical activity such as the horse shaped hopper and scooters.

Busy Bees room was set up for use by children aged 4 – 6 years old. The tables and chairs were set up in the middle of the room for dining and tabletop activities and were easy to move if the central space was needed for other activities such as circle time. The room was well laid out with plenty of space available to move in and between each interest area. Low level storage units were used effectively as room dividers. There were notice boards on the walls to display the children’s artwork and their birthdays. A wooden tree silhouette was fixed to one wall and used to display family photos.

The new cabin was used by the children in Butterflies room, who were aged between 3 and 5 years old. The furniture and equipment in this room were chosen especially to reflect the location and ethos of this indoor element to the predominantly outdoor learning environment and were either made of natural materials such as wood and wool or were neutral tones such as the cream coloured, vinyl covered sofa and grey throw rugs.

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 staff promoted healthy eating in the service. Staff said that they had made healthy eating a topic of discussion and focus with the children after Christmas when they had noticed that the number of sweet treats in the children’s lunch boxes had increased.

Children brought a packed lunch to eat in the morning at about 10.30am. Food eaten by the children on the morning of the inspection included: brown bread, cheese and cucumber slices, bread rolls with cheese, apple slices, bread sticks and soft cheese, fruit salad (grapes, blueberries and strawberries), fromage frais, wraps with ham and cheese, rice cakes and yoghurt drinks. Children brought a drink bottle filled with water or squash that they could access throughout the day when they wanted a drink. Bottles were refilled with water when empty. Children who attended on a part-time or full day care basis received a hot dinner at 12.30pm and brought a second snack to eat later in the day. The service had a three-week rolling menu which was varied and nutritious. On the day of inspection the dinner was pasta in a roast vegetable sauce served with carrots and garlic bread.

Staff were aware of any children in their room with special dietary requirements or food intolerances or allergies as were catering staff.

The service supplies a cake for each child for their birthday, so that each child gets the same cake.

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

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

Compliance Information

(1) The service used an electronic application for recording many of the processes that occurred in the service including arrival and departure times of the children. Staff in each room were responsible for recording the attendance of the children in their room using the application designed for this purpose.

(3)(a) Staff met any visitors to the service at the entrance door before allowing them access to the service.

(b) A paper record was maintained of any visitors to the service. This record was stored in the entrance lobby and filled in by any visitors 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) There were several staff present on the day of inspection who held current certification in first aid response (FAR).

(2)(a) There were suitably equipped first aid bags in each activity room held on a hook on a cupboard where it could be easily accessed when required. The first aid bag was taken outside when the children went to play outdoors. There was also a first aid box in a cupboard in each room.

(b) The first aid bags and boxes were available if required by a child attending the service.

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) There was a written record of the monthly fire drills that took place in the service, most recently in April 2024.

(b) There was a written record of the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms in the service. Firefighting equipment was serviced on an annual basis, most recently on 17 November 2023. The smoke alarm system was serviced on an annual basis, most recently on 25 August 2023.

(4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were displayed on the walls of the rooms throughout the service.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service had current insurance to cater for up to 55 children at any one time, valid until 27 March 2025.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

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

- (a) of sound and stable structure,*
- (b) safe and secure,*
- (c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated*
- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and*
- (e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.*

Compliance Information

A new wooden cabin had been installed on the site since the last inspection and was used as an indoor play space for the children using the orchard outdoor play environment.

(a) The cabin appeared to be of sound and stable structure. It was newly constructed and installed by the manufacturers.

(b) The cabin was safe and secure. There were two doors in the building: a main entrance exit door at the front and double doors in the side wall. Both sets of doors were kept secured and had glass panels in the centre which

enabled staff to see who was seeking entrance before opening the door to them. Access to the cabin was through a gate between the car park at the front of the main premises and the orchard area.

(c) The cabin had openable windows and doors for ventilation. The room was heated by two wall mounted electric radiators and lit by electric, sealed unit lights on the ceiling. The room was warm and cosy on the day of inspection which was wet and cold.

(d) The cabin was clean and well maintained. It was a new building and therefore in good repair at the time of the inspection. The registered provider said that they had sealed the outside of the building with the recommended treatment which then guaranteed the soundness of the structure for ten years.

(e) A new sanitary accommodation area and utility room had been created in a stone outbuilding that was on the site. The new sanitary accommodation area was beside the cabin and directly accessible from the orchard outdoor area. This area had one toilet and one wash hand basin with cold and hot running water, thermostatically controlled not to exceed 43°C. The addition of this toilet and wash hand basin increased the sanitary provision in the service to seven toilets and seven wash hand basins as well as nappy changing facilities.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 30 - Minimum space requirements

(1) Subject to paragraphs (2) to (6), a registered provider shall ensure that adequate clear floor space is available in the premises for the work, play and movement of children attending the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

The new cabin was measured as part of the inspection process. The stone storage building that was being developed as a sheltered outdoor play space was also measured. Staff were asked for their ideas on how this space could be developed and their mood boards were displayed in the entrance lobby of the main building where parents and children could view them.

(1) The internal dimensions of the cabin were 7.7m x 4.72m = 36.34m².

The internal dimensions of the ground floor of the stone storage building totalled 33.86m².