

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2021CW001
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Name of Service:	Hills of Tullow Playschool
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Address of Service:	Station Road, Tullowphelim, Tullow Hill, Tullow, Co. Carlow
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Eircode:	R93 RD82
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Name of Registered Provider:	Deirdre Hickey
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	28/02/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	8	PM	N/A
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla Child & Family Agency, Athy Road, Carlow.
Inspection undertaken by:	N.Thornton
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

Hills of Tullow is an early childhood care and education (ECCE) service which operates from a designated preschool classroom located in the Tullow Tennis Club, in Tullow, north county Carlow. The service operates from 09:30 to 12:30 hours, providing an ECCE curriculum to children aged three to six years of age. The service is operated single handedly by the registered provider.

Staffing

The registered provider holds a Level 8 degree in Early Childhood Care and Education and operates the service single-handedly. There is a named second person familiar with the operation of the service who lives within proximity, within ten minutes drive, to the service. The named second person is available to assist the registered provider, in the event of an emergency.

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.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under the following regulations.

- 10- Policies, procedures etc. of a pre-school service,
- 11(1), (3), (8)(c)-Staffing levels,
- 15- Record of a preschool child,
- 19(1)(a)(b)- Health, welfare, and development of child.

As a result, the scope of the inspection included the classroom and outdoor play area.

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 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 registered provider is the designated person in charge in the service and operates the service single handedly. There is a named second person familiar with the operation of the service who lives within proximity and can help the registered provider, when required. The maintenance staff of the tennis club were also onsite and available to assist if required.

(b) The registered provider was always onsite.

(2)(a)(b) There were two references from previous employers on file for the registered provider and two validated references, from previous employers for the named emergency contact.

(c) Garda Vetting disclosure certificates were available on file for the registered provider and for the second named emergency contact. A Garda Vetting Certificate was also available on file for each of the three maintenance personnel that worked in the tennis club, and who were available to assist if required.

(d) Not applicable as the registered provider and second named person had not lived outside of Ireland for a period of longer than six months.

(4) The registered provider held a Level 8 qualification in early childhood care and education.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 10 - Policies, procedures etc. of pre-school service

A registered provider of a pre-school service shall ensure that the written policies, procedures and statements specified in Schedule 5 are in place for the service.

Compliance Information

On review of documentation, the service's policies, procedures and statements, it was observed that the registered provider ensured, that all documents required for compliance with regulation 10 were on file and appropriate in contents for the service.

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.

(3) Subject to paragraph (5), a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 2 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) therefore at that reference number is satisfied.

(8) Without prejudice to paragraphs (2) to (7)-

(c) a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that, where the person in charge operates the service single-handedly, a second person familiar with the operation of the service and in a position to provide assistance to the person in charge in operating the service is, at all times, within close distance of the service and available to attend the service to assist the person in charge in the event of an emergency.

Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider was always present with the eight preschool children in attendance at the service.

(3) The adult to child ratio was maintained at one adult to eight children for the session.

(8)(c) The registered provider assured the inspector and provided details of the second person familiar with the operation of the service, who lived in proximity and was able to help the registered provider in the event of an emergency.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child

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

- (a) the name and date of birth of the child;*
- (b) the date on which the child first attended the service;*
- (c) the date on which the child ceased to attend the service;*
- (d) the name and address of a parent or guardian of the child and a telephone number where that parent or guardian or a relative or friend of the child can be contacted during the hours of operation of the service;*
- (e) authorisation for the collection of the child;*
- (f) details of any illness, disability, allergy or special need of the child, together with all the information relevant to the provision of special care or attention;*
- (g) the name and telephone number of the child's registered medical practitioner;*
- (h) record of immunisations, if any, received by the child;*
- (i) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.*

Compliance Information

(1)(a) to (i) On review of the 11 preschool records available for the 11 children registered to attend the service, the inspector was assured that all particulars (a) to (i) were recorded in detail by the registered provider.

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

(1)(a)(b) The inspector observed that the classroom was naturally lit and ventilated from the large windows and open door at the back of the classroom, which led directly onto the outdoor space, provided by a closed off section of a tennis court at the back of the building.

The classroom was planned by the registered provider to provide inviting and stimulating areas of interest as well as to facilitate sensory experiences such as art and crafts, a sand table resourced with small world construction toys and a playdough table.

Areas of interest included a kitchen area with open ended materials that the children would be familiar with in their own homes such as pottery mugs, a working clock, baking trays, pans, a chopping board, weighing scales and utensils. Dolls, a doll house and home play equipment, a construction bench with a case of construction tools, a playdough table with utensils and shape cutters, a crawling tunnel and drawing and art easel. A rest/ reading area was provided on a soft blue vinyl covered mat, supplemented with various shaped soft cushions and adjacent to a low-level book shelf, for the children to have ease of access to the books provided.

The back door led to the outdoor play area which had ride on scooters, a tractor and a wheelbarrow and shovels, all parked up ready for children to choose from.

When the children arrived at the service, parents and guardians came into the classroom, with the registered provider assuring the children that the inspector was visiting and introducing the inspector by name, to the children and parents. The children confidently and familiarly hung up their coats and placed their lunches in the refrigerator provided. One child kindly offered to share their coat hook with the inspector while informing the inspector that one friend would not be in, as that friend had hurt their ankle. The children's coat hooks were all visually labelled with a photograph of each individual child, which supported the child's identity and belonging in the service.

A visual outline of the children’s daily schedule at the service demonstrated the plan for the session and included free play/ child led activities, going for a walk through the nature track that had been created on waste grassland behind the tennis club, snack time, story, and song time.

As children moved towards activities of choice indoors or went to the outdoor play area to use the ride on toys, the registered provider had a clear overview of both areas due to the large floor to ceiling window panel.

Children engaged in activities such as playdough, playing imaginatively in the kitchen area, painting at the art easel, playing with manipulative and connective materials, jigsaws and peg boards. As the children played together, moving freely between indoors and outdoors, activities and friends of their choosing, they chatted freely about what they enjoyed to play or eat, discussed plans for playing later in the session and remembered two of their friends who were away from the service for an extended period , it was decided that they would work on cards for both friends at some stage during the session.

As the session progressed the inspector observed that the children were the managers of the various interest areas within the classroom. Each child had a managerial role, keeping an eye and order on their assigned area. For example, there was a quiet corner manager, a water tray manager, an office and shop manager, a dolls manager, and construction manager. Again, the children’s independence and autonomy were demonstrated at snack time when the children each had jobs to do such as laying the table, wiping the table, placing the individual placemats glasses and plates.

Prior to snack time taking pace, when the children had decided they had enough time playing freely, indoors and on the tennis court, the registered provider took them for a walk through the nature walk, which they rambled through trying the various natural rope swings which had been created. The registered provider assured the inspector that she carried out a daily risk assessment of both the outdoor tennis court and of the nature walkway in line with the service’s outings policy. Records of these assessments were maintained daily.

Children’s toileting needs were supported, a spacious toilet unit, designated for the use of the children was available across the corridor outside the classroom door. The registered provider had clear visibility of the children as they went in and out of the toilet. Children were observed to wash their hands post toileting, after outdoor play and messy play and all the children went and washed their hands after their nature walk, supported by the registered provider demonstrating that she also needed to wash her hands.

At 11:20, snack time involved the registered provider and children sitting together and chatting. All the children were observed to have bought healthy food options such as sandwiches, crackers, cheeses, yogurts, and fruit from home. The children stored their water bottles on a shelf on the door of the fridge, which they accessed whenever they wanted, placing them on the table during snack time.

The children and registered provider were observed to have warm, close respectful relationships. Children respected decisions reached around choice of book to read at reading time, taking a democratic vote and understanding that the majority vote on a particular book would be the deciding factor on what the story of the day would be. Children demonstrated a sense of pride in their responsibilities in the service and leadership roles were demonstrated such as organising everyone to make a card for their missing friends which the registered provider would post for them.

At collection time, authorised persons collecting the children were encouraged to come into the classroom as children finished their work so parents/grandparents/ guardians could see what activities they were participating in or the art that they had created.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 25 - First aid

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a person trained in first aid for children is, at all times, immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that a suitably equipped first aid box for children-

(a) is safely stored in an easily accessible and conspicuous position on the premises, and

(b) is available to the children attending the pre-school service at all times.

Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider held current first aid responder (FAR) training which was due to expire 22 July 2025. The registered provider was always on the premises while the preschool children were present.

(2)(a)(b) There was a first aid box present in the service which was observed to be appropriately stocked and which was clearly visible in a shelf in the classroom. The first aid box was always available for the children 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 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) The registered provider maintained a record of the fire drills that were carried out in the service. The last fire drill was recorded as having taken place on the 23 February 2024. Records maintained demonstrated that monthly fire drills were carried out during the ECCE school year.
- (b) A record was maintained of when the firefighting equipment and fire alarm in the building were last serviced. The last maintenance service was recorded as having taken place in September 2024.
- (4) A notice of procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed on the notice board in the hall outside the classroom. A fire assembly point was clearly signposted in the outdoor area.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

An insurance certificate was displayed on a notice board in the hall outside of the classroom, which provided details that insurance for a sessional ECCE service for up to 11 preschool children had been obtained by the registered provider. The expiry date on the insurance certificate was 27 March 2024.