

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2023GY001
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Name of Service:	Sonas Early Learning Centre
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Address of Service:	Unit D, Fánán, Letteragh Road, Ragoon, Co. Galway.
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Eircode:	H91 N2XK
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Name of Registered Provider:	Theresa Murphy
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	13/05/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	55	PM	55
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla – Child and Family Agency, Early Years Inspectorate, Quality and Regulations Directorate, Clinical & Administration Building, Block A - (1st Floor- Green Corridor), Merlin Park, Co. Galway.
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Inspection undertaken by:	S. Meehan and E. Friel.
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Title:	Early Years Inspectors.
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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 purpose-built early years service is based in the Ragoon area on the westside of Galway city. The service operating hours are 8 am to 6 pm, from Monday to Friday. While the service is registered to accommodate children aged 0 - 6 years it is currently accommodating children from 1 - 6 years. The service caters for full day-care, part-time care, Early Childhood Care and Education scheme (ECCE) and sessional pre-school care, the latter two programmes from 9.30 am to 12.30 pm. This ground floor premises has a total of four playrooms, the Lamas room, Turtles room, Penguins room and the Koalas room. The service has a designated kitchen where food is prepared and cooked on site. To the rear and side of the premises children have access to three outdoor play areas.

Staffing

The service currently employs 13 adults, which includes the manager, an adult in the kitchen and the allocated area manager working in the service. The registered provider does not work in the service and is not detailed on the staff roster.

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.

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 area manager, 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 area manager was the person in charge; the manager or deputy manager were available to deputise in their absence.
- (b) The roster indicated that there was a designated person in charge during the inspection and a person in charge while the pre-school children were on the premises.
- (2) The recruitment records in relation to the 14 adults working in the service were reviewed which included the registered provider:
- (a) Fifteen of the required 28 validated references were from past employers.
- (b) The remaining 13 of 28 validated references were from sources other than a past employer.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all 14 adults. However, the service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.
- (d) International police vetting was available for six adults working in the service who had lived in another state for a period longer than six months.
- (4) There was evidence that 11 of 14 adults working directly with the children had attained major awards in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications, or qualifications deemed to be equivalent. In addition, one adult had a letter of eligibility to practice from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The remaining two adults did not require childcare 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.*
- (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) An adequate number of adults were working with the children on the day.
- (2) The registered provider ensured that the minimum ratio of adults to children was adhered to.
There were 13 adults working directly with 55 children in the morning and 13 adults working with 55 children in the afternoon.
- (8)(a) Documentary evidence on the roster indicated that at least two adults were on the premises when the pre-school was operating.

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.

Compliance Information

(19) (1)(a)

BASIC NEEDS:

- Healthy eating was promoted within the service and the food observed was healthy and nutritious. At 10 am, the snacks were provided by parents and consisted of a selection of sandwiches, wraps, cheese and various pieces of fruit including chopped grapes, strawberries, bananas and apples. The hot meal of the day was spicy chicken with rice and a vegan option was available.
- The children were afforded time to enjoy their snack in a relaxed and unhurried manner. Crockery and plates were given to children during snack times, laid out on low tables in the playroom.
- The children had access to a water station on a low-level table, which allowed them the opportunity to take a drink if thirsty in the playrooms and the outdoor play areas.
- Children were encouraged and supported to manage their own personal care appropriate to their own level of independence. This was observed at toileting, encouraging children to wash their hands and wipe their nose.
- Children who had their nappy changed were supported in a caring way by adults who interacted with the children and sang to them.
- The children had the opportunity to rest or relax with soft seating in the form of child size couches, in a designated rest and relaxation area in the playrooms. Sleep beds and sleep mats were available for children attending on a part time or full day care basis.
- The children played a good part of the day in the outdoor area in groups or independently. Children were also engaged in free play, tabletop activities, imaginary play in the household area, making playdough with the adults and in circle time.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)(a)

Basic Needs of Children:

Provisions for children's sleep requirements were not observed. At approximately 11:15 am, a child in the Penguin room was displaying signs of tiredness including crying, rubbing their eyes, closing their eyes and clinging to an adult in the outdoor play area. The child was not placed to sleep until approximately 12:10 pm despite the Early Years Inspector advising the adult that the child required sleep. Failure to facilitate children to sleep according to their needs may impact negatively on their emotional and cognitive development.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider responded to say:

Corrective and Preventive Action

Staff have undergone supervision meetings and have been addressed on such actions. A further training session was completed on the 06/06/2025 in which understanding basic needs and looking for non-verbal behavioural cues were discussed. Mentoring from management and eight weekly supervision reviews in line with the company policy will prevent the non-compliance from reoccurring in the future.

Supporting documentation submitted

A copy of the supervision policy.

Summary Comment

The inspectors have reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The no-compliance identified under Regulation 19 (1)(a) has been addressed.

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 entrance to the service was secured by a pin code and camera surveillance system.
- The designated outdoor area was secured with high concrete walls and two gates to protect the children in the service.
- All the highchairs were in good condition and were fitted with safety harnesses.
- Looped blind cords on the windows were secured and out of reach of the children.
- Children had sun screen applied by adults before going to play in the outdoor play area.
- The emergency fire doors were unobstructed.

Infection Control:

- The indoor and outdoor environments were maintained in a clean condition.
- The sanitary facilities were equipped with liquid soap, hand paper towels and lined, lidded pedal operated bins.
- The pre-school children washed their hands after activities, after using the toilet and before mealtime.

Administration of Medication:

- Individual temperature reducing medication, stored in original containers, was available on a high shelf in the office, inaccessible to the children.

Safe Sleep:

- Younger children were observed sleeping on demand throughout the day.
- After lunch children were observed sleeping in the playrooms on mats and sleep beds.
- There was a designated sleep room with four cots for sleep provision for children younger than two years of age.
- Children under two years of age were observed sleeping in their individual age-appropriate grow bag.
- Children over 15 months, of whom there were 6 in total, were observed sleeping on sleep beds. Each individual child had a sleep plan drawn up in conjunction with the parents.

- There was a safe sleep policy that detailed temperature, lighting, ventilation, space between cots and child safety requirements as per the 'safe sleep for under 2's best practice guidelines for childcare services policy'.
- Documented records were available of each child's sleep, recording the time an adult physically checks a child and the signature. Additionally, the records included a sleeping child's colour, position, breathing and the temperature of the sleep room with the opportunity to document any necessary remedial actions taken.
- The inspectors observed and documentary evidence indicated that the staff physically checked sleeping children every 10 minutes.
- A supply of dry, clean linen was available and stored in containers.
- Rest and quiet areas were provided in each of the playrooms to facilitate a child to rest or relax during the day.

Fire Safety:

- The service had documented evidence of monthly fire drills.
- The service had a designated fire point and all fire exits were clearly identifiable with signage.

Outing:

- The manager stated that the service did not carry out outings.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. Garda vetting was available for fourteen adults, however one of these vetting disclosure was not dated within the previous three years in adherence to with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting' posing a potential safety risk for children.

Infection Control:

2. An adult did not wash their hands prior to nappy changing which may pose as a risk of cross infection.
3. There was no thermostatically controlled hot water in the Koalas sanitary area or the adult sanitary area. The water was cold and read at a temperature of between 18.2°C and 18.3°C which may present as a risk of cross infection.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider stated in their response that:

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. The service will ensure in future that Garda vetting is renewed within the 3-year period as required.

Infection Control:

2. Staff have been retrained in nappy changing procedures and will be monitored by management.
3. The water temperature has now been adjusted by a competent person and will be monitored by the manager going forward.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

1. A copy of the Garda vetting disclosure was submitted for the adult to the Early Years Inspectorate.

Infection Control:

2. Documentation was submitted to evidence that six staff members attended training on nappy changing dated the 05 June 2025. In addition, the manager signs the nappy changing check.
3. A receipt from the competent person for a new water heater was received.

Summary Comment

The evidence submitted to the office of the Early Years Inspectorate has been reviewed by the Early Years Inspectors and has been deemed to have met the requirements of this Regulation for 23 (1-3).

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) Two adults working in the service had in date certification that they were trained in First Aid Responder (FAR) training. The staff roster indicated that an adult was available during operational hours.
- (2)(a) A suitably equipped first aid box was stored in the service. The adults working in the service were familiar with the location of the first aid box in the office
- (b) The first aid box was available for use by the adults in the event of an emergency.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service had evidence of in date insurance for 61 preschool children on a full day care basis and was valid until the 27 March 2025.