

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2023LH001
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Name of Service:	Footprints Preschool
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Address of Service:	Saint Oliver Plunkett National School, Sandy Lane , Blackrock, Co. Louth
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Eircode:	A91 AK57
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Name of Registered Provider:	Sinead Auld
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	29/01/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	17	PM	No.
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate Child Wellbeing Centre Castleblayney Co. Monaghan
Inspection undertaken by:	M.Flood
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

Footprints Preschool is one of 2 privately owned services by the registered provider. This service has been registered since 29th August 2023 and it provides sessional care and education to pre-school children aged 3 - 6 years.

This service operates from a purposively developed classroom within St. Olivers National School Blackrock Co. Louth. The premises consists of a playroom with adjoining sanitary facilities on the corridor and an outdoor play area located on the grounds of the school. There is onsite parking for drop off and collection.

Staffing

Three childcare staff are employed to work directly with the preschool children. The registered provider provides relief cover as required in the service.

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

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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 would like to acknowledge the cooperation of the person in charge, 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
- (c) there is a clear management structure in the service that identifies the lines of authority and accountability in the service and the specific roles and responsibilities of each employee and unpaid worker.

(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) & (b) The service had a designated person in charge and a named deputy person to deputise as required. The person in charge and the deputy person was on the premises when the inspector arrived and were present throughout the inspection.

(c) When questioned staff were familiar with the management structure within the service and the roles and responsibilities of the various staff members.

(2) Four staff files including the registered provider and a recruitment file for the contracted music teacher were reviewed. The following vetting documents were available:

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(a) & (b) There were 2 written references available for the registered provider and 3 staff members with evidence of the required validations also available. One written and validated reference was also available for the contracted music teacher.

(c) A processed Garda Vetting disclosure was available for all 4 members of staff and the contracted music teacher. The registered provider adhered to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Following a review of the files presented for inspection, documentary evidence was available of international police vetting for 1 staff member and the contracted music teacher who had resided outside the Irish jurisdiction for greater than 6 months as an adult.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that the registered provider and 3 members of staff who work directly with the preschool children held at least the minimum required level 5 childcare qualification on the National Framework of Childcare Qualifications or a qualification deemed equivalent

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a&b) Documentary evidence was not available of a 2nd written and validated reference for the contracted music teacher who attends the service on a regular basis.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The registered provider stated that the contracted music teacher submitted an updated second written reference. Procedures have been reviewed to ensure that all required documentation for staff and contractors is maintained and readily available in advance of the school year and for inspection in the future.

Supporting documentation submitted

Reference submitted

Summary Comment

While the registered provider submitted evidence of a second reference, there was no evidence to demonstrate that the registered provider had validated the reference. This non-compliance remains outstanding.

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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.*

Compliance Information

- (1) On the day of inspection there was an adequate number of staff members working directly with the children attending the service.
- (3) The adult to child ratios were correct when the inspector arrived unannounced to the service and remained so throughout the inspection. There were 17 preschool children aged 3 to 4 years being cared for by 3 staff members.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

- (1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of the following information in relation to the service:*
- (a) the name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee, unpaid worker and contractor;*
 - (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;*
 - (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;*
 - (j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent;*

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Compliance Information

(1) The following records were available for inspection and reviewed:

- (a) Documentary evidence was available of curriculum 7itaes for all staff files reviewed. This included information of each staff members qualification and experience.
- (h) A written record was available of the arrival and departure times for the children attending the service on a daily basis.
- (i) Documentary evidence was available of a weekly staff roster which was reflective of the staff present in the service.
- (j) No medication was administered during the inspection. Parental consent was available for temperature reducing medication should it be required in an emergency. A medical care plan was also available and which staff were familiar with for a child who may require medication in the event of an emergency.

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 examples demonstrate how the registered provider ensured that children's learning, development, and well-being was facilitated in the service:

Basic Needs:

- The children's lunches were provided by the parents, and all perishables were appropriately stored in the refrigerator. The children were encouraged to be independent when getting their lunch boxes and opening them. Assistance was also provided if required. The drinks cups / bottles were accessible to the children at all times.
- The staff sat with the children during snack time and engaged in social conversation also about their 'space theme'.

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- The children were encouraged to be independent with toileting. Discreet supervision was provided by the staff when the children were observed to access the toilet on the corridor. Gentle handwashing reminders were also given to the children after toileting.
- The children were reported to have a change of environment to the outdoor area early in the morning. Although not accessed on the day of the inspection the activities hall is also used on a rotational basis.
- 'Quiet time' was observed in the care room where the children were seated at their tables with the staff, the lights were dimmed and the children waved stars to the soft "starlight" song playing. The sensory room is also reported to be used by the children and staff on a regular basis if they require a change of environment or to rest and take a break.

Supporting relationship around children

- A key worker system was in place in the service with staff members allocated a group of children. The key person took the lead in supporting that group's transitions, recording their daily activities, maintaining relationships with their families, and documenting their learning and development.
- Individual plans for children who required additional supports in the service were available and were implemented. The staff when questioned were familiar with supportive strategies and these were observed during the inspection.
- Communication between the parents and staff was informal at drop off and pick-up and through the use of phone calls and a small messaging service. For example, a sample of the message sent to parents was reviewed and this included photographs of activities and themes such as 'penguins', their homes and freezing water activities.
- The staff members in the service were observed to interact with the children in a warm and supportive manner. The children were observed to seek out the staff for assistance. Soft tones, positive and respectful language were observed in interactions between the children and staff member for example, *".....you are just so kind for trying to help....i think you need to go on the kindness board.."*.

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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

It was observed that the registered provider has taken the following measures to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the pre-school children attending the service including:

Infection Control:

- All perishable items provided by the parents for snack time were stored appropriately in the fridge.
- Pedal operated waste bins were observed in use and were appropriately maintained on the day of the inspection.

General Safety:

- The external doors of the school were appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the Early Years' service.
- The outdoor play area was gated and secured with fencing to prevent a child gaining unsupervised access to a roadway or other source of danger. The staff confirmed to the inspector that a risk assessment is carried out prior to the children accessing the outdoor area.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely out of the reach of children on high shelving and in locked cupboards

Administration of Medication:

- No medication was administered during the inspection. A step-by-step plan together with documented consent was available for a child who may require medication in the event of an emergency.

Fire Safety:

- Documentary evidence was available of monthly fire drills haven taken place in accordance with best practice guidelines.

Outing:

- No outing was observed during the inspection, however the person in charge was familiar with the procedures to be carried out prior to and during an outing taking place and in accordance with the services outings policy. For example: the requirement to have a checklist, first aid kit and emergency medication for a child were available in the 'fox bag' in the classroom and this is brought on all outings.

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Non-Compliance Information

The registered provider did not ensure that all reasonable measures were taken to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of a preschool child in relation to the following:

Infection Control:

The following infection control risks were observed:

1. Ineffective hand washing was observed. There was no running hot water available in the sanitary area or care room during the inspection. The staff when questioned stated that this is an on-going issue since prior to Christmas. While documentary evidence of a risk assessment was available it did not detail the absence of hot water in the service.
2. The paper 'blue roll' used for hand drying was observed stored on the floor of the sanitary area. This is a cross-contamination risk. It is acknowledged that photographic evidence was submitted following the inspection of a wall mounted paper towel dispenser.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

A plumber was engaged to rectify the issue with the hot water system. The plumber has provided a confirmation letter stating that the hot water issue has been resolved and that the water system has been tested. The system has also been added to the annual service list for ongoing maintenance. The plumber has included the pre-school on his annual service list for ongoing maintenance.

Regarding the blue roll, it is now policy to ensure the wall mounted paper towel dispenser is full daily.

Supporting documentation submitted

Confirmation letter from school principal that hot water was restored.
Photographic evidence that the paper towels are dispensed appropriately.

Summary Comment

The registered provider has addressed the non-compliance found on inspection. This regulation will be reviewed at the next inspection.

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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 ensured that a person trained in first aid for children was at all times available to the children attending the service. Documentary evidence was available of an up to date First Aid Responder (FAR) qualification for one adult in the service.

(2)(a) and (b) The first aid box available in the service was stored in a conspicuous location and readily accessible in the event of an emergency