

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2023WH001
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Name of Service:	Juniper Tree Autism Services Ltd T/A Sundancers
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Address of Service:	Unit 7, Castlepollard S.C, Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath
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Eircode:	N91 RX24
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Name of Registered Provider:	Sarah Mulligan
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Service type:	Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	14/05/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	18	PM	11
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla, Child and Family Agency, SAP Office, St. Loman's Campus, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath.
Inspection undertaken by:	C. O' Connor Hughes
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 operates a part time service from 09:00 to 14:00 on a Monday to Friday basis. The sessional service operates from 09:00 to 12:00. There are no children currently attending the 12:30 to 15:30 sessional service. The age range of children attending the service is 2 to 6 years.

The Early Years Service is located in an adapted commercial unit at the Castlepollard Shopping Centre, Co. Westmeath. The service consists of a large pre-school room and kitchen/office. An outdoor play area is available adjacent to the pre-school service.

Staffing

Six staff members are employed in the service. The designated person in charge and two staff members were working directly with children on the 14 May 2025. The designated person in charge facilitated the inspection and attended the closing meeting. Two staff members provide relief cover when required. The registered provider does not work with children.

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.

Regulation 9- Management and recruitment - (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(c)(d) (3) (4)

Regulation 11 -Staffing levels - (1) (3) (8)(a)

Regulation 19- Health, welfare and development of child - (1)(a)

Regulation 22- Food and drink

Regulation 23- Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child

Regulation 24- Checking in and out and record of attendance (1)(3)(a)(b)

Regulation 25- First aid - (1) (2)(a)(b)

Regulation 26 -Fire safety measures - (1)(a)(b)(4)

Regulation 28 – Insurance

However, on inspection additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under;

Regulation 29 – Premises – (b)(c)(e)

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.

Additional Information

An Immediate Action Notice was issued under Regulation 23, in relation to the non compliance identified under Regulation 25, to the registered provider on the day of inspection. A response was received from the registered provider on the 15 May 2025 which mitigated the risk identified.

The corrective and preventive action response 1 received from the registered provider on the 6 June 2025 was not accepted.

The corrective and preventive action response 2 received from the registered provider on the 26 June 2025 was accepted with the exception of Regulation 9 (3).

The corrective and preventive action response in respect of Regulation 9 (3) received from the registered provider on the 15 July 2025 was accepted.

Acknowledgments

The inspector wishes to acknowledge the cooperation of the 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.

(3) The procedures specified in paragraph (2) shall be carried out prior to any person being appointed, assigned or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the pre-school service.

(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)

A person in charge was available in the service. A deputy person was available if required.

(b)

The designated person in charge facilitated the inspection.

All staff files were reviewed including the registered provider. The following was noted:

(2)(a)(b)

Eight written validated references were available from past employers or from a source other than a past employer in respect of four staff members. Two written references were available in respect of two staff members. Two written references were available in respect of the registered provider.

(c)

A Garda Vetting disclosure was available in respect of the six staff files reviewed. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d)

Police vetting was available in respect of three staff members who had lived outside the state for a period of longer than six consecutive months.

(4)

Staff members working directly with children attending the service and held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Levels 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a)(b)

Four references were not validated in respect of two staff members.

(3)

The registered provider was unable to demonstrate that they had completed all vetting procedures as stated in the above non compliance (9)(2)(a)(b) for two staff members prior to commencement of employment in the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(2)(a)(b)

Management to ensure no staff member commences employment until all references are validated either in writing or by phone.

References will be checked by telephone and/or in writing to validate and verify the candidate's identity and to check their employment history, qualifications, experience and suitability for the role.

Successful candidates will have their references checked before an offer of employment is made.

(3)

Vetting procedures were completed immediately and all staff files updated.

Recruitment procedures reviewed to ensure it included “no person to take up employment until all vetting is completed”.

Supporting documentation submitted

Two written validated references in respect of two staff members.

Recruitment policy.

Summary Comment

The non compliances have been addressed.

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)

The minimum ratio of adults to children was maintained during the inspection.

(2)

There were 18 children attending the service supervised directly by 3 adults in the morning session.

There were 11 children attending the service supervised directly by 3 adults in the afternoon session.

(8)(a)

Documentation reviewed indicated that two adults are on the premises at all times.

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

(1)(a)

Children enjoyed extended play time in the outdoor play area in the lovely weather supervised by staff. Suncream was applied to their skin and extra suncream available if required. Children enjoyed sensory sand and water play, physical play driving toy cars and playing in the playhouses.

Staff members held children in positive regard using their individual names, interacting and conversing with children at eye level. Staff were familiar with each child and their personality.

The service worked in partnership with parents in the following ways: A verbal handover is given on collection.

The designated person in charge stated a short messaging system (SMS) is used to send information and updates to parents. The child's learning journal depicting the child's developmental observations, play and work activities are shared with parents at the end of the pre-school term.

The indoor and outdoor environments provided a range of developmentally appropriate, creative and enriching experiences for all children. Age and stage appropriate toys and materials were accessible to children on low level shelving. Children were observed to alternate between the playroom and outdoor play area to avail of the areas of interest that included a home area, rest area, construction area and dress up. The playroom was large in nature and allowed for freedom of movement for all physical and active play activities. Children's artwork and family photographs were noted.

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

Parents provided healthy snacks and meals for the children attending on a sessional and a part time basis. Lunches consisted of sandwiches, yoghurts, vegetables and a selection of fruit with water to drink.

Water was available to children in their water bottles as required during the day.

A refrigerator was available for the storage of perishable foods. Records indicated that the fridge temperatures were maintained within the correct limits of less than 5 degree Celsius.

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 main entrance to the service was secure. The inspector signed the visitors book on arrival. The service met the necessary safety requirements in respect of the indoor environment, toys and equipment. Safety checklists for the indoor environment were available for review.

Infection Control:

Cleaning schedules were in place and maintained in the pre-school room and in the communal areas.

There was an adequate supply of paper hand towel and liquid soap in the sanitary accommodation. Warm water soap and hand towels were available at the wash hand basins. Hand washing for children was facilitated before snack and mealtimes.

Administration of Medication:

Temperature reducing medication was available if required by a child with a high temperature.

Fire Safety:

The fire exit routes in the premises were unobstructed.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

An immediate action notice was issued under Regulation 23, in relation to the non compliance identified under Regulation 25, to the registered provider on the day of the inspection.

A response was received from the registered provider which mitigated the risk.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

A FAR Course was immediately sourced for 1 staff member, starting on 16th May 2025 (two days after inspection) consisting of 3 Friday Sessions to end on 30th May 2025. A person trained in first aid for children was on site from 15th to 30th May inclusive.

Management to ensure all staff are trained in First Aid for Children.

Regular checks to be made to ensure all First Aid for Children certificates are up to date.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

Temporary first aid for children's certificates in respect of three staff members.

Summary Comment

The non-compliance has been addressed.

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.

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (3)(b) is retained for a period of one year from the date to which it relates.

Compliance Information

(1)

The records of arrival and departure reviewed verified that each child attending the service was checked in and out of the service by a staff member.

(3)(a)(b)

A visitor log for the service was available for review with the following details included.

- Date.
- Person's name.
- Contact number.
- Reason for entry.
- The name of person who approved access.
- The check in and out times.

(4)

A record in writing referred to in paragraph (3)(b) is retained for a period of one year by 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

(2)(b)

A first aid box was accessible to adults caring for children in the service.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)
There was no adult present on the day of the inspection who held a First Aid Responder training certificate. This posed a risk to the safety of children if first aid was required. An immediate action notice was issued to the registered provider under Regulation 23 Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child in relation to this non compliance.

(2)(a)
The first aid box was not equipped in line with TUSLA Quality Regulatory Framework document.

- There were no wound dressings available.
- The normal saline expired in April 2024.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(1)
A FAR Course was immediately sourced for 1 staff member, starting on 16th May 2025 (two days after inspection) consisting of 3 Friday Sessions to end on 30th May 2025. A person trained in first aid for children was on site from 15th to 30th May inclusive.

Management to ensure all staff are trained in First Aid for Children. Regular checks to be made to ensure all First Aid for Children Certificates are up to date.

(2)(a)
The first aid box was checked. 1 wound dressing was immediately replaced. The saline was also replaced. Management to be informed immediately if replacements are needed.

Supporting documentation submitted

Temporary first aid for children certificates.
Photograph of wound dressing and normal saline.

Summary Comment

The non-compliance has been addressed with the exception of the wound dressings. The evidence submitted does meet the Regulatory requirement as the following is required as per the Quality Regulation Framework document; 2 individually wrapped sterile wound dressings size medium size 10 cm x 8 cm, 6 individually wrapped sterile wound dressings size large 13 cm x 9cm and 3 individually wrapped sterile wound dressings size extra-large 28 cm x 17.5 cm. This will be assessed on the next TUSLA 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 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)

A written record for the completed monthly fire drills was available on the premises. The last fire drill was recorded as taking place on the 28 April 2025.

(b)

A record was available demonstrating the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms on the premises. The firefighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises were serviced on the 28 January 2025.

(4)

A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed in a conspicuous position in the service.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

There was evidence of current insurance cover for the number of children attending the service. The expiry date noted was 27 March 2026.

Additional Risk Identified

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

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

- (c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated*
- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and*
- (e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.*

Non-Compliance Information

- (c)
Room occupancy temperature of 18 to 22 degrees Celsius was not maintained in the playroom.
At 10:15 the temperature of the playroom was recorded at 24.7 degrees Celsius by the services' digital thermometer. It is acknowledged that the person in charge took a corrective action and turned the radiators off in the playroom.
At 12:00 the temperature of the playroom was recorded at 24.1 degrees Celsius by the services' digital thermometer.
- (d)
The outdoor play area was not maintained and repaired as required.
- There were gaps in the side gate where the bolts were placed and strained by use. The gate required replacement.
 - The wooden fence surrounding the outdoor play area required painting with a wood protector paint.
 - An exposed wooden post was noted in the fence which required to be rendered smooth and painted.
 - The two playhouses in the outdoor play area were worn due to exposure to the elements and required cleaning.
 - The mat on the left-hand side of the playroom was stained and required cleaning.
 - The couch in the playroom was ripped and required repair.
 - The toilet seat was missing from the toilet in the second cubicle in the sanitary accommodation.
- (e)
The mechanical ventilation was not working in both cubicles in the sanitary accommodation.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

- (c)
All radiators were turned off and all windows and doors opened.

Staff to ensure all radiators are turned off during hot weather and the room is well aired out before children arrive. A fan to be kept in storage for exceptional hot weather.

(d)

- A carpenter was employed to fix the gate and replace the bolts.
- Outside fence and inside walls and woodwork to be painted before 11th July 2025.
- Exposed post is now rendered smooth
- Playhouses removed & replacement bought.
- Mat washed - stain did not come out so mat removed.
- Couch in the playroom removed and new ordered.
- Toilet seat replaced.

(e)

The mechanical ventilation fans did work after inspection but do need to be changed. Electrician sourced to replace fans. The electrician will not be able to do this until the end of July.

Management to ensure the fans are cleaned regularly and annual check by an electrician.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence of the room temperature, invoice, receipts and quotation.

Summary Comment

The actions submitted are appropriate to address the non-compliances. The implementation of these actions will be reviewed on next inspection.