

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2024MH002		
Name of Service:	Cookies Early Learning Centre		
Address of Service:	60 Castletown Manor, Athboy, Co. Meath		
Eircode:	C15 CC1F		
Name of Registered Provider:	Megan Cooke-Smith		
Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional		
Date of Inspection:	11/03/2025		
No of pre-school children:	AM	12	PM 7
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla Early Years Inspectorate, Meath Child & Parent Support Hub, Commons Road, Navan, Co. Meath.		
Inspection undertaken by:	D. Murray		
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.

Description of service

Cookies Early Learning Centre which is part of a chain is located in a residential area of Athboy town. The service provides full day care, sessional and part-time care to children from 2 to 6 years and participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE). Hours of operation are from 07:30am to 6pm. A school aged service is also provided. The service is situated in a converted residential home consisting of 3 care rooms, sanitary facilities, staff room, office and a kitchen.

The rooms in the service were as follows:

Seomra Solas na Gréine provided care for children from 2 to 2 years 8 months attending the service on a full day care /part-time basis.

Seomra Réaltá Lámhach catered for children from 2 years 6 months to 5 years attending the service on a full day care /sessional basis.

Seomra Tuar Ceatha was not in operation on the day of inspection.

An outdoor space is located to the rear of the premises.

Staffing

The registered provider employs a manager and 7 childcare staff. A student is also completing an Early Childhood Care and Education course and is doing placement in the service. Present on the day of inspection were the manager and 5 childcare staff.

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 announced and focused on the area of governance/ health, welfare and development of child and safety.

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 manager, 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
- (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) The service had a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise as required.

(b) A designated person in charge was on the premises when the inspectors arrived unannounced to carry out the inspection.

(c) A clear management structure that identified specific roles of each employee was displayed outside each care room.

(2) (a)&(b) Eight staff files along with 1 student file were reviewed.

Eighteen validated written references were available either from a past employer or from a reputable source.

(c) Garda vetting disclosure was available for the 9 adults. 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 for 2 adults who had resided outside the jurisdiction for a period of more than 6 consecutive months as an adult.

(4) Eight childcare staff members had a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 and above on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(d) Police vetting was not available for 1 adult who had resided outside the jurisdiction for a period of more than 6 consecutive months as an adult. It is acknowledged that the adult had made reasonable attempts to obtain police vetting with no success.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(2)(d) The adult has provided documentation stating that she cannot access police vetting from the country she resided in.

The registered provider will ensure that all staff members and students have police vetting were necessary before commencing employment.

Supporting documentation submitted

Documentation stating that police vetting cannot be sought.

Summary Comment

Although it is acknowledged that all reasonable attempts were made to obtain police vetting the non-compliance remains outstanding.

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) On the day of the inspection the manager and 5 childcare staff were working directly with the 12 children attending the service.

(2) The correct adult/child ratio was maintained throughout the inspection.

The rooms were as follows:

Seomra Solas na Gréine 3 staff provided care for 4 children ranging in age from 2 to 2 years 8 months; 3 children attending the full day care service and 1 child attending the part-time service.

Seomra Réaltá Lámhach 2 staff providing care for 8 children ranging in age from 2 years 6 months to 5 years; 4 children attending the full day care service and 4 children attending the sessional service.

Seomra Tuar Ceatha was not in operation on the day of inspection.

(8) (a) According to the staff roster 2 adults were present 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, and

Compliance Information

(1)(a) The following observations were made on how each child's learning, development and well-being was facilitated within the daily life in the service:

Basic needs:

- Children individual needs were met with additional care, attention and supervision given as required. Children were settled to sleep downstairs in the Seomra Solas na Gréine room at the designated sleep time after morning snack at 12noon. The older children in the Seomra Réaltá Lámhach room were encouraged to become independent and self-caring, suitable to their age and stage of development which included using the toilet, hand washing, caring for their belongings and tidying away after activities and play.
- All children attending the service brought their own healthy lunch from home. The service provided the remainder of the meals to the children attending the part-time /full day care service. Morning snack was service at 12md which consisted of pancakes and a selection of fruit. The main hot meal was served at 2:45pm which consisted of beef fajitas with cucumber, cheese, lettuce, tomatoes and rice. A light snack of carrot sticks, sliced peppers and crackers was served at 5pm for the children staying until 6pm.
- The themed areas of interest in the care rooms were well developed with supporting equipment. Equipment and materials facilitated all types of play and learning which incorporated natural/sensorial materials, art and crafts and a range of suitable toys. Children were observed being allowed to self-direct their own play. The children were afforded the opportunity to choose activities and to follow through on their choices and change activities if they so wish. The theme of the week was "ST Patricks Day" which was incorporated into the child led curriculum. Children's artwork was displayed to reflect this theme.
- The service embraced outdoor play and learning with all children availing of outdoor play on the day of the inspection. The outdoor space had areas of interest which supported children's play and curiosity with adequate space for children to play alone and in small and large groups. Children were observed enjoying imaginative, energetic and messy outdoor play with both their peers and staff members.

Supporting relationships around children:

- The service showed a positive regard towards the families of the children and family links were nurtured in the service with family photographs displayed on “The Family Wall” in the care rooms which gave a sense of identity and belonging. A monthly newsletter was sent home to update parents on the curriculum and activities taking place in the service.
- The staff members in both care rooms were observed encouraging and collaborating with children in their play activities. They used welcoming facial expressions and gentle vocal tones when engaging with the children and showed a keen interest in what each child was doing. The children sought out staff members for praise ,encouragement and reassurance. The staff encouraged the children to engage positively with each other by adopting simple social rules such as turn taking, sharing in play activities and resolving minor disputes. The children appeared comfortable, happy and relaxed in their environment.

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:

On the day of inspection both the indoor and outdoor environment appeared safe. Risk assessments were conducted on a daily basis. The manager and staff members had a clear understanding of their role and range of responsibilities to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the children. A Childs Safeguarding Statement was available and displayed in the reception area.