

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CW027
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Name of Service:	Little Owls Childminding Service
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Address of Service:	Mc View, Tullow Hill, Tullow, Carlow, Co. Carlow
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Eircode:	R93 X938
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Name of Registered Provider:	Margaret Mc Hutcheon
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Service type:	Childminder
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Date of Inspection:	29/02/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	4	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

Little Owls Childminding service is a registered childminder service providing two sessional early childhood care and education (ECCE) sessions for children aged two to six years. The service operates from a designated classroom in the childminder's house and has three designated outdoor play areas for the preschool children, including an outdoor classroom. The sessions provided by the childminder are from 09:00 to 12:00 hours and from 12:00 to 15:00 hours, Monday to Friday according to the ECCE school year scheme.

Staffing

The registered childminder is a single-handed sessional operator and has a named second person familiar with the operation of the service who lives in the house who can help the childminder, when required. There is also a qualified named person who lives within proximity to the service, who is familiar with the service and can assist the registered provider in case of emergency if required. Currently this named person is employed in the service under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM).

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.

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

- 10- Policies, procedures etc. of a pre-school service,
- 11(1), (8)(b)(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 indoors classroom and outdoor classroom.

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 childminder, 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 childminder 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 in the house and can help the childminder, when required. Currently a second qualified staff member is employed in the service under AIM.
- (b) The registered childminder was always onsite.
- (2)(a) There were two references from previous employers on file for the childminder and for the second staff member employed under AIM. One reference from a past employer was available for the named second person, available to assist the childminder in the event of an emergency.

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- (b) A second reference from a reputable source was available for the named emergency contact.
- (c) Garda Vetting disclosure certificates were available on file for the childminder, for the staff member employed under AIM and for the second named emergency contact.
- (d) Not applicable as none of the afore mentioned persons had lived outside of Ireland for a period of longer than six months.
- (4) The childminder and staff member employed in the service, who as part of their roles worked directly with the children attending the service, held qualification at Level 6 on the national Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) framework.

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 the service's policies, procedures, and statements, it was observed that the childminder ensured that all documents required for compliance with regulation 10, as a registered childminder were on file and appropriate in content.

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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.

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

(b) a childminder shall ensure that a second person familiar with the operation of the service and in a position to provide assistance to the childminder in operating the service is, at all times, within close distance of the service and available to attend the service to assist the childminder in the event of an emergency, and

Compliance Information

(1) There were four children aged four to five years of age directly cared for by two qualified staff members.

(8)(b) At times when the staff member employed under AIM, was not in the service, the childminder demonstrated to the inspector that a second person familiar with the service, who lived in the childminder's house, was available to assist the registered provider in the event of an emergency.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 12 - Childminders

(1) A childminder shall ensure that-

(a) there are no more than 5 pre-school children in his or her care at any given time, including his or her own pre-school children,

(b) subject to paragraph (2), there are no more than 2 children under the age of 15 months in his or her care at any given time, including his or her own pre-school children, and

(c) there is a working telephone on the premises.

Compliance Information

(1)(a) The registered childminder and staff member were caring for four children aged between four to five years.

(b) There was no child under the age of fifteen months in the childminder's care.

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(c) There was a working telephone on the premises.

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 a sample of five of the ten children's preschool records available, the inspector was assured that all particulars (a) to (i) were recorded in detail by the childminder.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 19 - Health, welfare and development of child

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(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)

Physical Environment.

Internal Classroom.

The children's physical environment was comprised of a designated classroom which was naturally lit by a large gothic style window. The room had a primary colour jigsaw patterned vinyl floor covering with the walls painted in muted colours displaying the children's art creations, family wall and "People in the Community" project, providing the children with familiarity and a sense of individual identity and belonging. Interest areas that the staff had created included an art and handwriting skills area, a wooden kitchen area and play shop stall, both of which were resourced with wooden play kitchen equipment, and for the shop stall, a variety of play fruit and fast-food toys. Low-level shelves were visual labelled indicating their contents, which included connective and manipulative bricks, wooden building blocks, dinosaurs, dolls, sensory skills boards for learning to fasten and tie, jigsaws, puppets, and dress up play materials including doctors' equipment and firefighter equipment.

A soft rest area, comprised of two child sized vinyl couches, had been created next to a shelf of age appropriate books in the wide hallway that was outside the classroom but which the staff had clear oversight of, if a child wished to take a moment to rest and relax.

Outdoor area.

Just outside the entrance door to the service, the childminder had built an outdoor classroom, which was sheltered by two walls, and had a covered roof. A child sized table and seating had been created so that children could sit and do their tabletop activities outside throughout the year. Areas of interest had also been created in an adjacent outdoor space where the children had access to an outdoor kitchen, building blocks and physical games, which included balance beams. A third area provided a play system which incorporated a slide, climbing frame and crawling tunnel and a child sized picnic bench integrated into it, where children could sit and chat.

The children had a nature table which they adapted seasonally, and which parents could examine as they came to collect or drop the children off. An aviary was also present to the side of the outdoor play area, where the children

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could often see owls in their enclosure and white doves coming and going from the dovecote. The children were able to identify the owls and name them.

The childminder's husband, the second named person in the service, had built a raised wooden tower in the front garden which the children and staff could walk to through a wildflower garden and climb up the wooden ladder into. The children explained that this was often an adventure to go to the tower and spend time in it as a group listening to each other's stories.

Basic Needs of Children.

Children were confident and familiar with their surroundings in the service. The staff present were responsive to children's questions and requests and were often observed to reassure the children if they showed self-doubt.

Children had their water bottles stored on a shelf where they could access them for a drink at any time. The children used the toilet facilities independently and were responded to promptly by staff if support was required.

Handwashing was carried out after toileting, outdoor play and prior to snack time.

Children brought their snacks from home which they sat at the classroom table and had together with the staff also having a snack. The children's snack contents included all healthy options in line with the service's healthy eating policy, which had been communicated to parents/ guardians at registration.

Extent to which the programme of activities and its implementation support children's development.

The children played freely, pulling out the shop stall and creating meals from the play food items available.

Evidence of the children's displayed work included Chinese dragons and lanterns that they had made to celebrate the Chinese New Year, which the staff had also documented in each of the children's learning journals.

The children were confident and proud in telling the inspector about their work and why they had decided to do that piece of work.

The children enthusiastically showed the inspector the hair salon that they had created in the wide hallway that ran from the classroom to the children's bathroom. The children demonstrated how a hair wash basin had been created from a box, plastic washing basin, and shower head. Children showed the inspector around the hair salon, indicating where their reception desk was and how they used the phone and appointment book to book in hair appointments. Children confidently suggested to the inspector that a new "bright copper red, number 31" colour from the hair colour chart might be a nice change. Catting and partaking in the conversation around hairdressers and going to the hairdresser extended children's vocabulary and provided opportunities for each one of them to role play.

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Supporting Relationships around children.

On observation of the children during the session's activities, children demonstrated a warmth and connectedness to the staff, were reassured that they would have opportunities to try activities that they wanted to during the session, opportunities to tell their story or voice their opinion. Children proudly showed the inspector their individual family photos on the family wall and a "People in the Community" project which was on display demonstrated how the staff connected the children to the local community with visits to the fire station and photos of the churches, doctor's and public health nurse office, the local supermarkets, and park.

The knowledge that the staff members demonstrated regarding each child, their likes and dislikes, abilities, and achievements since attending the service demonstrated the staff's enthusiasm to support the children in their learning and development. The staff worked in partnership with parents providing information in a sensitive and responsive manner to support children in their early years education.

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 childminder held current first aid responder (FAR) training which was due to expire 22 July 2025. The childminder was always on the premises while the preschool children were present. It is acknowledged that the staff member employed in the service under AIM held a certificate in basic paediatric first aid training.

(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 on a shelf in the classroom. The first aid box was always available for the children attending the service.

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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 provided by the registered childminder detailing that insurance for a sessional child-minding service was provided for up to a maximum number of five preschool children at any one time. The expiry date on the insurance certificate was 05 August 2024.