

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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| TUSLA Identifier: | TU2025CC006 |
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| Name of Service: | Zenith Childcare Midleton |
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| Address of Service: | Tir Chluain, Midleton, Co Cork |
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| Eircode: | P25 KP66 |
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| Name of Registered Provider: | Charlene Roche |
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| Service type: | Full-Day, Part Time, Sessional |
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| Date of Inspection: | 04/11/2025 |
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| No of pre-school children: | AM | 22 | PM | 19 |
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| Address of the Early Years Inspectorate: | Early Years Inspectorate, Administration Building, St Mary's Health Campus, Gurrabraher, Cork T23 X440 |
| Inspection undertaken by: | D Prendergast & B Fraher |
| Title: | Early Years Inspectors |

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).

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| Conditions if applicable | N/A |
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Description of service

Zenith Childcare Midleton was recently registered to provide full day care to children aged 0 to 6 years, with options of sessional and part time care also available. Children can avail of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme from 9.00am to 12.00pm, each Monday to Friday, over 38 weeks of the year. Daily opening hours are from 7.30am to 6.00pm, over a 50-week annual period. The registered provider is a multiple service provider. Located in a residential area of Midleton in Co Cork, the service consists of a purpose built, two storey premises, with seven care rooms. Five of these rooms were in operation at the time of inspection. Children's sanitary facilities are available adjoining the care rooms. The service also includes a designated sleep room, along with a sensory room, an office, a kitchen, a staff room and staff toilet facilities. The children have access to two interconnecting outdoor play areas.

Staffing

At present, there are 16 adults in employment at the childcare facility, of whom 15 are involved in the day-to-day care of the children, or are available to cover in the care rooms. This includes the person in charge, the deputy and the area manager. Each of these adults has achieved a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education. The registered provider does not work directly with the 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 announced 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.

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 registered provider, area manager, person in charge, deputy, 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) There was a designated person in charge assigned to the service, along with a named person who could deputise, as required.
- (b) A person in charge was available at the premises throughout the inspection. Review of the staff roster indicated that the person in charge or the deputy was consistently present, while the service was in operation.
- (c) On inspection, there was clear evidence of the management structure in place and the specific roles of each staff member.
- (2) Recruitment records in respect of the 16 adults attached to the service were assessed and the following information was obtained:
- (a) Of the 32 required written and validated references, there were 24 on file from past employers.
- (b) Eight written and validated references were from sources other than previous employers.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all 16 staff. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
- (d) The required police vetting was available for 11 adults, who had lived in other jurisdictions for 6 consecutive months or longer, while over the age of 18 years.
- (4) All 15 adults who worked directly with the early years children held a relevant qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education, as listed on the National Framework of 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) During the period of inspection, it was noted that a sufficient number of adults were working with the children who attended the service.

(2) The required adult to child ratios were adhered to.

- On the morning of the inspection, there were 22 children present across the 5 care rooms, with an age range of 1 to 3 years. There were 9 adults working directly with these children.
- In the afternoon, 8 adults were involved in the direct care of 19 children, who were aged 1 to 3 years. The person in charge, deputy and the area manager were also available to provide cover, if needed.

(8)

(a) The service was operated with at least two adults present at all times. This was observed in practice and demonstrated through review of the staff roster.

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)

Basic needs:

- Meal and snack breaks were appropriately timed, to ensure that children ate at regular intervals throughout the day. A mid-morning snack was observed shortly before 10.00am in the Wobbler 3 room, followed by lunch at 11.45am. The person in charge advised the inspectors that breakfast was typically facilitated between 7.30am and 9.00am and that afternoon and evening snacks were respectively accommodated from 2.30pm and 4.30pm.
- A calm and pleasant atmosphere was evident at mealtimes. Staff members sat with and chatted to the children and offered appropriate assistance. Bibs were provided for the younger children, along with suitable cutlery and crockery. The children appeared to thoroughly enjoy the hot lunch meal and were afforded plenty of time to eat and drink.
- Drinking water was available to the children throughout the day, should they become thirsty at any stage; children were observed to retrieve their reusable water bottles or sippy cups from low-level trolleys in the care rooms. In the younger care rooms, this practice was supported by the adults, who assisted the children to identify their own water bottles.
- The children's personal hygiene needs were frequently attended to; staff members were observed to help children to clean their noses and to clean their faces and hands, when they had finished eating.
- During discussion, staff advised that nappy changing was undertaken at regular intervals and as needed. Toilet trained children were supported to access the sanitary facilities in an independent manner.
- Both scheduled and needs led sleep were observed to be accommodated. For example, in the Wobbler 3 and Toddler 1 rooms, designated rest periods were facilitated after then children had eaten their lunch meal. A staff member also advised that the children in Wobbler 1 generally availed of a routine sleep time at midday. However, a child who was noted to display signs of tiredness before the scheduled rest period, was taken into the sleep room by a staff member.

- Adult sized chairs were in use in the younger care rooms, which supported staff to soothe and comfort the children.
- Within each care room, a cosy area was incorporated for any child that required quiet time, or space to relax.
- The layouts of the care rooms facilitated the children to freely explore their environments and to engage with materials.

Supporting relationships:

- The adults demonstrated warmth and positive regard for the children in their care. For example, playful interactions were observed as the children and adults explored with play dough and participated in free play activities.
- Care routines were sensitively managed by staff members, who chatted warmly to children during nappy changing procedures and helped to create calm environments in preparation for rest periods.
- Upset children were promptly comforted and reassured by the adults, as needed.
- The service had introduced the use of a digital application, which allowed parents to instantly access information about their children's activities of daily living. The registered provider advised that other methods of communicating with parents included email, phone calls and informal conversation at arrival and collection times. Printed copies of the emails sent to parents were maintained on file.
- A management meeting and individual room meetings had taken place since the service began operating and corresponding minutes were presented for review. The facilitation of such meetings ensured that staff members were informed of relevant plans and any changes to practice. They also provided staff with opportunities to share feedback and to discuss any issues arising.

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

- The person in charge advised the inspectors that information in relation to the service’s healthy eating policy had been emailed to the children’s parents.
- The majority of the meals and snacks offered were supplied by the service and a corresponding menu was available. Parents or caregivers of the children who attended the ECCE sessional service provided snacks for the mid-morning break.
- At the time of inspection, the mid-morning snack offered by the service consisted of a selection of chopped fruit, with yogurt. Beef bolognaise, or beef meatballs, with rice and vegetables was served for lunch. Water or milk was available as a drink at mealtimes.
- The children’s dietary requirements and food allergies were communicated to staff, in order to ensure that these needs were appropriately managed. In each care room and in the kitchen, the names, photographs and relevant information of the children who had specific food related requirements, were displayed.
- The inspectors were informed that additional snacks could be provided for any child who expressed hunger outside of the routine mealtimes.

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:

- There was a keypad/buzzer entry system in place at the childcare facility. Exit through the same door was via a door release button, positioned at adult height. These safety mechanisms reduced the risk of unauthorised persons gaining access and the risk of a child exiting unsupervised.
- The perimeters of the outdoor play areas were secured by a combination of walls and gates.
- Cupboards located at child level were fitted with childproof locks.
- There were no cables accessible to the children.
- Appropriate tension devices were in use to secure blind cords.
- Cleaning agents were stored at a height that was inaccessible by children.
- Visibility strips were fitted to glass panel doors at child level.
- Firefighting equipment was safely wall mounted.

Infection control:

- Wash hand basins were supplied with warm running water, liquid soap and paper towel dispensers. Foot pedal operated bins were in place for the hygienic disposal of paper towels and nappies.
- Handwashing was observed after a messy play activity, before eating and after using the sanitary facilities.
- The following practices were observed during nappy changing procedures and reduced the risk of cross infection:
 - single use aprons and gloves were worn by the adults and were removed and disposed of immediately after the nappy change
 - the changing mats were sanitised
 - the adults and the children washed their hands, once each nappy change was complete.
- Labelling of the children's toiletries was ensured within the nappy changing areas.
- The care rooms and sanitary facilities presented in a clean and hygiene manner. Cleaning, such as sanitising tables and sweeping floors, was observed during the inspection and cleaning records were also displayed in the care rooms.

Administration of medication:

- The temperature reducing medication that was held at the service was stored well out of the children's reach and was in-date.

Safe sleep:

- While occupied by a sleeping child aged over 12 months, the air temperature of the sleep room fell within the required range of 18°C to 22°C. A temperature reading of 21.5°C was recorded. The Wobbler 3 room, which was used to facilitate a scheduled rest period in the afternoon, had a recorded air temperature of 22°C.
- The physical checks of sleeping children that were carried out by staff members, had been recorded on a digital application and were available for review. These included monitoring of each child's breathing, colour and position. During discussion, a staff member confirmed that these checks were conducted at regular 10-minute intervals.

Fire safety:

- Fire exits were found to be free from obstruction and fire exit signs were clearly illuminated.

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.

Compliance Information

(1) Evidence was available to demonstrate that six of the adults held current First Aid Responder (FAR) certification and that at least one of these adults was rostered to work at the service during the hours of operation.