

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier: TU2025DL003

Name of Service: Wonderyears Cottages

Address of Service: Rossbracken, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal

Eircode: F92 TX99

Name of Registered Provider: Marcella McNamee

Service type: Full Day, Part Time, Sessional

Date of Inspection: 27/01/2026

No of pre-school children:	AM	35	PM	NA
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate: Early Years Inspectorate,
TUSLA Child & Family Agency,
Markievicz House,
Barrack St,
Sligo,
F91 XC84

Inspection undertaken by: K Folan

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

Wonderyears Cottages is a privately owned early years' service located outside Letterkenny in Co. Donegal. The service is registered to provide full day, part time and sessional care to children aged 1 to 6 years of age. The service is open from 06:00 to 17:30 Monday to Friday. The premises consists of three cottages, Dancing Dandelions, Bluebell Cottage and Primrose Cottage, which has two care room. Each cottage is equipped with sanitary accommodation. Bluebell Cottage and Dancing Dandelions each contain a separate sleep room. Each cottage has its own outdoor play area as well as access to a shared playground and forest walk. The area is surrounded by secure fencing and a secure keypad access gate. The service is based on a site shared with two early years services operated by the same company.

Staffing

The registered provider does not work in the service on a daily basis. There are 19 adults employed to work in the service, including a designated person in charge, a deputy person in charge and 7 adults to work directly with the children. Ten adults are available to provide relief cover in the event of staff absences. On the day of the inspection a student on work placement was present.

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. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9,11 and 19. 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.

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*
- (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

(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)

The registered provider ensured that:

- (a) There was a designated person in charge and a named adult to deputise in their absence.
- (b) The designated person in charge was available on the premises throughout the period of inspection.
- (c) There was a clear management structure in place.

(2) On the day of the inspection 9 of the 20 adults employed in the service were present. One student on work placement was also present.

21 staff files were reviewed, and the following information was available:

- (a) Thirty-three written and validated references from previous employers for nineteen of the adults.
- (b) Nine written validated reference from reputable sources for seven of the adults.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all adults. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(4)

Twenty one of the adult files reviewed, evidenced they held a major award at level 5 or above in early childhood care and education on the national qualification framework, or qualifications deemed by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) to meet the regulatory requirement.

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.

(4) Subject to paragraph (5), where a registered provider contemporaneously provides-

(a) a sessional pre-school service, and

(b) a full day care service or a part-time day care service, or both, the minimum ratio of adults to children applicable for the duration of the sessional pre-school service in respect of the children attending that service shall be the ratio specified in paragraph (3).

Compliance Information

(1)

On the day of inspection, there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the preschool children attending the service.

(4)(a)(b)

On the morning of the inspection the following adult to child ratios were observed:

- Bluebell Cottage: Three adults cared for 10 children aged between 1 to 2 years of age.
- Primrose Cottage 1: One adult cared for 10 children aged between 4 to 5 years of age.
- Primrose Cottage 2: One adult cared for 9 children aged between 3 to 4 years of age.
- Dancing Dandelions: Two adults cared for 6 children aged between 1 to 2 years of age.

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

(1) A registered provider shall, in providing a pre-school service, ensure that-

(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)

Basic Need

- The service has a healthy eating policy in place. All meals and snacks for the children are provided by the service. Breakfast is served in the morning; a hot meal is served at midday. On the day of the inspection the hot meal was chilli con carne with rice. A hot alternative was available for children who refused the main meal. Afternoon tea is served at 3:00p.m. and consisted of fruit, crackers, and hummus. Children in the sessional rooms brought food from home and this was stored safely in a temperature monitored refrigerator.
- Drinking water was available to the children in all rooms throughout the day.
- Children in Bluebell cottage and Dancing Dandelions had a scheduled sleep during the day.
- Nappy changes took place at scheduled times and more frequently when required.
- All children in the service had access to the outdoor environment on the day of the inspection.
- Suitable warm, waterproof clothing and footwear was available for the children to play outdoors.

Supporting relationships

- A key worker system was in place in the service with named staff assigned the responsibility for creating close relationships with children as evidenced through documentation.
- The inspector observed the staff speaking kindly to the children throughout the morning, offering help to the children who required support to complete a task.

- Communication with parents is facilitated at drop off and pick up times which is used to exchange information with parents in relation to the child’s day and development.
- The staff members were observed to work well as a team, frequently collaborating with each other in relation to activities and children’s needs for example, getting ready for outdoor time and sleep times.
- The children appeared happy in the service, each child had choice over their preferred activity.
- The staff promoted a calm atmosphere by using soft tones with the children, speaking at the child’s level and notifying the children of upcoming transitions such as tidy up time, outdoor time and home time.
- Photographs of the children and their families were displayed on the walls to promote a sense of belonging among the children.
- Positive message posters were displayed on the walls, with messages such as “Be Kind” “Take Turns” “Kind hands” to encourage positive relationships and interactions among the children.

Physical and Material environment

- The care rooms were warm, bright and spacious. Each room was neatly organised with areas of interest for children.
- Each room contained a home corner with a wooden kitchen and utensils and real vegetables for imaginary play.
- Open ended items such as magnet tiles, plastic bricks and loose parts were stored on low level shelves accessible to children.
- Puzzles and jigsaws were available for fine motor development.
- A rest area was available in each room containing a sofa, soft matting and cushions. This area was positioned beside a “library” area containing age-appropriate books and magazine for the children.
- Posters to encourage language development were displayed on the walls in each care room such as shapes, the alphabet, colours and seasons.
- Baskets containing items to develop the senses such as sensory bottles, musical instruments and colourful material were available in each room.
- Primrose 1 and 2 shared an outdoor space enclosed with fencing. This space contained a covered sand area, low balance beams for gross motor development, a natural grass area with trees and a wooden play

train for imaginative play. On the day of the inspection a large puddle provided the children with opportunities for jumping, playing and sweeping the water with brushes.

- The Dancing Dandelions room had an outdoor area directly off the playroom which was enclosed with fencing. The outdoor area had a partially covered area to provide shelter or shade for the children. A mud kitchen, a ramp bridge, balance boards and picnic benches were available to the children.
- Bluebell cottage outdoor area had a selection of ride on toys and scooters, a large tunnel embedded in the grass, chalkboards and climbing apparatus to support gross motor development.