

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DL067
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Name of Service:	Little Dreamers
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Address of Service:	Carnamuggagh Upper, Mountain Top, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal
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Eircode:	F92 KR44
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Name of Registered Provider:	Mary McColgan
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	12/08/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	32	PM	31
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Donegal Early Years Inspectorate, St. Conal's Campus, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. F95 XK94
Inspection undertaken by:	L Costello N Toner
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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Description of service

Little Dreamers is a privately owned and operated full day care service located on the outskirts of the large urban town of Letterkenny. The service is registered to operate from 7.45am to 6.00pm each weekday and provides full day, part time and sessional preschool care to children aged 0-6 years. The premises is in a quiet residential area and operates from a detached single-story building purposely adapted for the provision of an early years' service. There are three care rooms, a sleep room, kitchen, office and sanitary accommodation for both staff and children. There are two outdoor play areas one for the infant and toddler children and one for older children.

Staffing

There were 14 adults working in the service at the time of inspection which included the registered provider. There were 11 adults present on the day of inspection which included the registered provider, eight staff members working directly with the children and one staff member in the kitchen. There was also a school age staff present on the day of inspection.

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

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The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9(1)(2)(3)(4)(7), 10, 11(1)(2), 16(k), 19(1a)(1b), 23,25(1)(2),27 and 32.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulations 10 - Policies, procedures etc. of pre-school service and regulation 16 (k) – Records in relation to pre-school service.

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

This unannounced inspection was carried out in response to feedback received by the Early Years Inspectorate.

Acknowledgments

The inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, 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.*

(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.

(7) A registered provider shall ensure that all employees, unpaid workers and contractors are appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training, including in relation to the following:

- (a) the policies, procedures and statements of the service specified in Schedule 5;*

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Compliance Information

- (1)
- (a) There was a named person in charge and a person available to deputise as required.
- (b) A review of the staff roster indicated that either the person in charge or deputy person in charge were rostered to be on the premises during the hours of operation.
- (c) The person in charge confirmed that there was a clear line of authority within the service.
- (2) Following a review of previous inspection information, information available on the inspection and through discussion with the registered provider onsite, it was determined that two adults had been employed since the last inspection. The references on file for 12 staff were compliant upon the service's last inspection; therefore, they were not reviewed upon this inspection. Of the two new adults employed, the following was available on file;
- (2)(a)(b) Four written and validated references from past employers was on file for review.
- (2)(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) Two of the adults filles reviewed had attained major awards in Early childhood care and education at level 5 or above on the national framework of qualifications, or qualifications deemed by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) to meet the regulatory requirement.
- (7)(a)
- The person in charge demonstrated that they had taken all reasonable measures to ensure that all employees were appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information. Through a review of documentation, training records and observations of practices, the inspector was assured that all employees were provided with appropriate information and training on the policies and procedures in place in the service. Records of training indicated that staff members had received training in child safeguarding and the services policies and procedures. Records of regular team meetings demonstrated that the registered provider ensures staff members are updated regularly on changes within the service.

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Non-Compliance Information

(2) (d)

Evidence of International police vetting was not available for one adult who had resided outside the state for a period of more than six consecutive months and had direct access to children

(3) A review of documentation evidenced that the requirements of Regulation 9(2) had not been completed prior to staff members being appointed, assigned, or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the preschool service as outlined above under point 2 (d).

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

9 (2)(d) One adult requiring international police vetting now has it on file and translated. Moving forward the registered provider will ensure that adults will have international police vetting before they commence working in the service.

9 (3) The registered provider has reviewed their child safeguarding policy and added a risk assessment that all international police vetting must be in place before adults start working in the service. No adults will commence work until their international police vetting is on file.

Supporting documentation submitted

9 (2)(d) A copy of the international police vetting has been submitted to the inspectorate for one adult.

9 (3) A copy of an updated policy including the requirement for international police vetting for all relevant adults has been sent to the inspectorate.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider and supporting documentation submitted has adequately addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 9 (2)(d) and 9 (3).

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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

For the purpose of this inspection, a sample of the required written policies, procedures and statements that are specified and required under schedule 5 of these regulations were reviewed.

The following policies, procedures and statements were included as part of this inspection.

- (b) Complaints policy
- (c) Administration of medication policy
- (d) Infection control policy
- (r) Accidents and incidents policy

Documentation reviewed evidenced that the above policies were available and in operation in the service.

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.

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Compliance Information

(1)

The registered provider ensured that an adequate number of adults working directly with children attending the preschool service at all times during its operation. This was demonstrated by a review of attendance records.

(2)

The minimum ratio of adults to children ratio were provided on the day of the inspection in accordance with the required ratio considering the ages of the children and the length of time each child spent in the service as follows:

In the morning

- Baby & Toddler Room – Four adults cared for 15 children which were 10 months to 3 years of age.
- EECE 1 & 2 Room – Three adults cared for 17 children which were 3 to 5 years of age.

In the afternoon

- Baby & Toddler Room – Four adults cared for 15 children which were 10 months to 3 years of age.
- EECE 1 & 2 Room – Three adults cared for 16 children which were 3 to 5 years of age.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of the following information in relation to the service:

(k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.

(3) A record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection on the premises, and the documents and records referred to in paragraph (2)(a) shall be open to inspection whether on the premises or elsewhere, by an authorised person.

(4) A record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection on the premises by a parent or guardian of a child but only in respect of information concerning that child.

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Compliance Information

(1)

A random sample of 20 records of the children attending the service were reviewed. The required information included all details of accidents, injuries or incidents involving a pre-school children attending the service.

(3)

These records were made available to the authorised person on the day.

(4)

The registered provider demonstrated that these records were made available to the parent or guardian of the preschool child by evidence of signature.

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 Needs:

- Nappy changing for the younger children was completed as required and staff members were observed to use the opportunity as one-to-one positive engagement with the young child laughing and singing. The older children who were toileting independently were prompted to do so and supervised from a distance.
- The younger children's basic needs were responded to in a prompt manner, noses wiped as required. Hands and faces cleaned after mealtimes and clothes changed if they were soiled, ensuring dignity was promoted.
- Meals were served to the children in the rooms. Breakfast was served from 8am to 9:30am, followed by an early dinner at 11:30am of spaghetti bolognese which was prepared by the cook onsite. Children ate together in a relaxed, social atmosphere at child-sized tables, where staff provided positive interaction and encouraged independent feeding of the older children. Afternoon snacks were provided without rush, and drink bottles remained fully accessible on low shelves throughout the day.
- Children had opportunities to play both indoor and outdoor play throughout the day.

Supporting Relationships:

- Staff members were observed to be respectful, gentle, and kind in their interactions towards the children in their care. During mealtimes the staff members sat at the table and engaged in social conversation with children promoting a relaxed atmosphere.
- In the baby and toddler room, staff members were observed to be caring in their approach, holding and cuddling the children as required. Children appeared happy and content in the company of staff.
- Through discussion with staff members, they explained how they communicate with the children's families ensuring information is exchanged in a timely manner with the use of written records and a messaging application.
- Pictures of families displayed on the walls in all the care rooms ensured children's connection to home was maintained.
- Story time which was observed to be an interactive fun time for the children. In the ECCE room staff read the story of the three little pigs in an interactive way with the children who engaging well. Similarly in the Baby/wobbler room, stories were interactive with a variety of action songs which the children enjoyed.

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- Staff were observed to work well with the children throughout the day supporting choice and encouraging the children to share, take turns and be inclusive.
- Staff members were observed to work well as a team, exchanging information with each other prior to break times, communicating well regarding supervision of children and completing tasks.

Physical Materials:

- The care rooms were laid out to facilitate sensory experiences for the child through arts and crafts and sensory tables including water and sand play. Fine motor development was supported using jigsaws, puzzles and arts and crafts. Opportunities for imaginary and role play were provided in the home corner and dress up area as well as construction area and farm animal areas. The toddler room was resourced with equipment suitable to the age and stage of development of the young children, including home corners, construction areas, animals, and musical instruments and soft toys.
- There was an extensive library area in the EECE room with two comfortable chairs. Children were observed to enjoy this space throughout the day. All equipment was stored on open shelving at children's heights so that choice can be facilitated.
- The baby and toddler room supported the needs of the younger child. The baby room was suitably equipped with soft matting and laid out to create open spaces for crawling and learning to walk. Wall mirrors and sensory walls provided sensory experiences for the younger child.
- The outdoor play area provided an alternative change of environment for the children. Children were observed moving throughout the different interest areas using gross motor skills on the various structures including slides, a wooden playhouse and slide including climbing ladder an outdoor kitchen and crafts table outdoor area. There were an outdoor shed and a covered area for shelter if required. To the rear of the outdoor area is a picnic area. The external perimeter of the outdoor area is protected by a wooden fence. The outdoor area had a mixture of tarmacadam, concrete paths and soft surfacing ensuring a soft surface for risky play. Push bikes were available to the children for gross motor and balance skills.

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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 entrance to the premises including the play area was secured to prevent preschool children from exiting the service.
- All internal doors were appropriately secured to prevent children accessing unsafe areas.
- The kitchen which contained cooking facilities and hazardous items was not accessible to the children.

Infection Control:

- Children demonstrated good hand hygiene practices after using the toilet.
- Staff cleaned tables before and during the meals in the service.

Administration of Medication:

- No medicine was administered on the day of inspection; however, staff advised the inspector of the correct procedure to be followed in the event of a child requiring medicine.
- Records of previously administered medication were available for review, and the correct details were recorded.

Safe Sleep:

- Children over the age of two years slept on low level stackable beds.
- Physical sleep checks were carried out every 10 minutes on sleeping children.
- Sleep records were correctly maintained with the child's name, sleep position, breathing pattern and skin colour recorded.
- The temperature in the sleep room was monitored to ensure it was within the correct range of 16-20° Celsius.
- The designated sleep room was equipped with stackable floor bed and standard cots for children under two years of age.

Fire Safety:

- Fire evacuation plans were displayed throughout the service.
- Fire doors and evacuation routes were maintained clear for safe evacuation.

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Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. An unsecured and unlocked gate was observed in the outdoor play area. This gate directly leads to the rear of the service premises, which houses two outdoor boilers. This posed a risk of safety as preschool children could access the area.
2. A gap was identified in the wooden boundary fence enclosing the outdoor play area. This gap failed to maintain a secure perimeter, creating a direct opening through which a preschool child could exit to the adjacent open field.
3. One of the swings sets in the outdoor area was significantly rusted. The swing could be unstable and pose a risk to the preschool children.

Infection Control:

4. There were no foot operated bins in the EECE room or the EECE sanitary areas. Children were observed to touch the bins after hand hygiene which could lead to an infection control issue.
5. A couch located inside the outdoor shed was found to be damaged with a large rip extending through the centre of the fabric. Because the inner foam sponge insert is completely exposed, the surface cannot be effectively cleaned, sanitised, or disinfected leading to an infection control risk.
6. There were six pots and pans in the outdoor kitchen which were severely rusted. This could pose a risk of contamination to the preschool children.
7. Nappy Changing practices were inadequate to control the spread of infection. Staff in some areas of the service did not follow the nappy changing policy adopted by the service, to include washing the children's hands after nappy changing, changing aprons between nappy changes and washing adults' hands between nappy changes.
8. The sleep room in the baby/wobbler room consisted of a mix of standard cots and floor beds. The inspector observed during sleep time, as children slept that a floor bed was positioned beside a standard cot and not the 50cm apart to limit the spread of infection.

Safe Sleep:

9. One mattress in the sleep room was not the recommended size meaning that gaps had formed between the mattress and the cot which could pose a risk to the preschool child.

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Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. All staff have been made aware of the importance of the shutting gate after themselves and ensuring it is always locked. Signage has been secured to the gate to prevent further occurrence.
2. The gap in the fence has been fixed. The service will ensure that regular risk assessments are carried out by the caretaker of the outdoor area to prevent future occurrences.
3. The damaged swing has been removed from the matted area. A new wooden swing will be added soon. A check list of outdoor equipment, along with risk assessments at regular intervals will be carried out to mitigate future risks.

Infection Control:

4. New bins have been purchased with foot pedal opening. Usage of foot pedal has been reinforced with adults and children in the service.
5. This damaged couch has been removed and disposed of. Regular checks and risk assessments will be done moving forward in outdoor area to identify risks.
6. Kitchen utensils have been removed and replaced by new ones in the outdoor area. The outdoor area will be regularly checked, and unsuitable items will be removed.
7. A staff meeting was held in the service to reinforce the importance of good hygiene practice in the nappy changing area. Multiple signage is in place in all key areas to always reinforce safe practice.

Safe Sleep:

8. Cot beds have been removed to and placed in the sensory room to allow more space between cots.
9. New mattress has been purchased and the older ones have been removed.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

1. Photographic evidence submitted for review to the inspectorate.
2. Photographic evidence submitted for review to the inspectorate.
3. Photographic evidence submitted for review to the inspectorate.

Infection Control:

4. Photographic evidence submitted for review to the inspectorate.
5. Photographic evidence submitted for review to the inspectorate.

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6. Photographic evidence submitted for review to the inspectorate.
7. Photographic evidence submitted for review to the inspectorate.

Safe Sleep:

8. Photographic evidence submitted for review to the inspectorate.
9. Photographic evidence submitted for review to the inspectorate.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider and supporting documentation submitted has adequately addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 23.

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) Nine adults were trained in First Aid Response for children and were immediately available to the children attending the service.
- (2) (a) The first aid equipment was safely stored in conspicuous positions in the service. There was a sign in each care room which stated the location of the first aid equipment in the building.
 (b) Suitably equipped first aid boxes for children were available to the children attending the service.

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Part VI - Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

A registered provider shall ensure that pre-school children attending the service are supervised at all times.

Compliance Information

Supervision was observed to be adequate indoors and outdoors on the day of inspection. Staff members were observed to communicate well with each other when moving in and out of rooms ensuring all children were accounted for. Staff members were observed to position themselves to ensure children were in view at all times. In the outdoor play area, staff members ensured they were positioned to supervise the children in the various sections of the outdoor space.

Non-Compliance Information

On the afternoon of the inspection, it was observed that no adult remained in the sleep room of the baby wobbler room, while children slept on stackable floor beds. On discussion with staff, they confirmed the practise is to wait in the room until all children are sleep and then complete physical sleep checks. This poses a safety risk should the child wake in between the ten-minute physical checks.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

Cot beds have been moved to the sensory room, which is located within the main toddler room, ensuring that supervision is always provided. All adults working in the service has been informed of policy changes and to be aware of regular policy updates.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence submitted for review to the inspectorate.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider and supporting documentation submitted has adequately addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 27.

Part VIII - Notifications and Complaints

Regulation 32 – Complaints

- (1) A registered provider shall ensure that the complaints policy of the service specifies-
- (a) the procedure to be followed by a person for the purposes of making a complaint in relation to the service,
 - (b) the manner in which such a complaint shall be dealt with, and
 - (c) the procedures for keeping a person who makes such a complaint informed of the manner in which it is being dealt with.
- (2) A registered provider shall ensure that-
- (a) a record in writing is kept of a complaint made to the provider in respect of the pre-school service, and
 - (b) the complaint is duly dealt with in accordance with the provider's complaints policy.
- (3) A record in writing referred to in paragraph (2)(a) shall-
- (a) include the nature of the complaint and the manner in which the complaint was dealt with, and
 - (b) be open to inspection on the premises by an authorised person.
- (4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (2)(a) is retained for a period of 2 years from the date on which the complaint has been dealt with.
- (5) The requirement in paragraph (4) is without prejudice to any requirement to retain the record in writing referred to in paragraph (2)(a) under any other enactment or rule of law.

Compliance Information

- (1)
- A complaints policy was in place in the service and adequately outlined the following;
- (a) Details of the procedure to be followed by a person for the purposes of making a complaint in relation to the service.
 - (b) Details of how a complaint will be dealt with by the service.
 - (c) Details of the procedures in place outlining how the person who makes such a complaint in relation to the service will be informed of how the complaint is being dealt with.
- (2) (a) (b)

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The person in charge demonstrated the process followed for a concern received through a third party which was dealt with in adherence to the service policy.

(3) (a)(b)

The person in charge stated they are aware of their obligation to detail the nature of any complaint made and the way it will be dealt with. The person in charge stated a record of any complaint made will be kept in the service and available for inspection on the premises.

(4)(5)

The person in charge in the service stated during discussions with the inspector they are aware of the statutory requirement to retain records for the required period set out in regulation.