

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DL070
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Name of Service:	Little Learners Pre-school
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Address of Service:	The Cairn, Drumaweir, Greencastle, Co. Donegal
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Eircode:	F93 K76R
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Name of Registered Provider:	Claire Norris
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	16/04/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	15	PM	0
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Donegal Early Years Inspectorate, St. Conal's Campus, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. F92 TD92
Inspection undertaken by:	N Toner
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).

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Description of service

Little Learners Pre-school is in a rural setting in the Drumaweir district of Greencastle, some four kilometres from Moville town in Donegal's Inishowen peninsula. The premises consists of a single-story building. There is also an office and sanitary facilities. An outdoor play area for the children extends outwards from the front of the building. The service is registered to operate as full day care from 0830hrs to 1700hrs.

Staffing

There is a total of four adults employed within the service which includes the registered provider. All four adults 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 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.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 19, 23, 25, 26, 27 and 28.

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 -

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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 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.*

(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

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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 has a designated person in charge and a named person who can deputise as required.

(b)

On the day of inspection, the person in charge was on site for the duration of the inspection.

(c)

There was 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)

On the day of the inspection, the person in charge confirmed that there were four staff members who worked in the service. Recruitment files in respect of the four staff members were reviewed. The following information was available:

(a)

There were two references from past employers, in particular the most recent past employer was on file for two staff members.

(b)

There were four references from other sources, in the absence of a past employers, for three staff members.

(c)

Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all four adults. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d)

International police vetting was not required for any of the staff files reviewed on the day of inspection, as they had not resided outside the state for a period of six months or more as an adult.

(4)

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Documentary evidence on file to demonstrate that four staff members had obtained a major award in Early childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)

(a)(b) No references were on file from previous employers or from other sources, in the absence of a past employers for one staff.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

No response received.

Supporting documentation submitted

No response received.

Summary Comment

This regulation remains outstanding as no CAPA response was submitted. The registered provider must ensure that this noncompliance is corrected and prevented.

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,

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Compliance Information

- (1)
On the day of inspection there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the preschool children attending the service.
- (2)
The minimum adult to child ratios were provided on the morning of the unannounced inspection in accordance with the required ratios considering the ages of the children and the length of time each child spent in the service. Three Adults cared for 15 children from ages 3 years to 5 years of age.
- (8) (a)
A review of the staff ratios demonstrated that the registered provider ensured that two adults were always present on the premises.

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
 - (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)
There was strong evidence of respect and compassion throughout the service. Staff members were observed to be respectful, gentle and kind in their interactions with the children. During snack times, staff sat at the tables and engaged in social conversation with the children, promoting a relaxed and positive atmosphere. Snacks came in from home on the day of inspection. Snacks were seen to be healthy consisting of fruit, sandwiches, wraps and crackers with cheese. Children had their drink bottles at the tables and staff were there to refill drinks throughout

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the day. All of the children's lunchboxes stored in the fridge when not in use. Younger children were held and comforted, contributing to a warm and welcoming environment. The indoor areas were arranged to facilitate a wide range of sensory and creative experiences, including arts and crafts activities and modelling clay trays. Children were observed using the water tray in the morning exploring different textures. Fine-motor development was supported using jigsaws, shape sorters, crayons and drawing materials, and magnetic shapes. Gross-motor development was encouraged through ride-on toys, climbing equipment and outdoor ball play. The care room contained a variety of play-based materials that promoted stimulation, exploration and imagination. These resources were stored on open, accessible shelving, supporting children's independence, choice and spontaneous play.

Interest areas were spacious, uncluttered and well-resourced, offering an adequate range of toys and materials. Defined areas included a role-play kitchen with child-sized wooden appliances and utensils, dress-up areas with a variety of costumes, a reading area with a selection of books to support language development, and a construction area with small cars and trucks. There was a strong emphasis on art and design, with children's creations displayed throughout the service. The children were encouraged to use paints and express their creativity. Positive teamwork was observed when staff informed the children it was time to move outdoors; the children worked together to tidy the room and took pride in their efforts before going outside. Children in the service enjoyed a large, fenced outdoor play area subdivided into three interconnected sections via a sloping pathway and steps. The upper area features all-weather synthetic grass with transient resources like blocks and rocker boats, leading down to a middle gravel section equipped with a wooden climb-and-slide frame, swings, and tires. The lower section offered a mix of gravel and concrete, featuring a large wooden boat, digging areas, a shelter, and space for ride-on toys to support gross motor development.

The service supported children's relationships by keeping parents and guardians fully informed of daily activities using communication books, which provided updates on activities throughout the day. Photographs of the children's families displayed on the walls of the care rooms further supported children's sense of security and connection to home. Each child had an individual activity book which documented outings and activities as well as samples of the children's art and craft work and records of the themes explored, including the current theme of Easter and Spring. Information was given to parents at handover at the start and end of the day as numbers in the service allowed for one-to-one handover between parents and staff. Ongoing observations and assessments were recorded and contributed to building a well-rounded picture of each child's learning and development. These

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observations were individual to each child and outlined completed tasks and future learning goals. Children's language development was supported through one-to-one and group songs, storytelling and regular circle time, which was observed in all rooms on the day of inspection, with all children encouraged to participate.

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 main entrance into the premises was safely secured preventing children exiting unsupervised or persons gaining unauthorised entry. The perimeter of the outdoor play area was fully enclosed by stone walls and fencing which incorporated gates with closing mechanisms.
- All toys and play resources available on the day of inspection were noted to be clean, in good repair and appropriate for the age range of children proposed to attend the service.
- Internal doors and the kitchen area was appropriately secured to prevent children accessing unsafe areas or hazardous items.
- Window blind cords were secured.

Infection Control:

- Templates for recording daily cleaning activities were available and displayed in the premises to help ensure that regular cleaning was carried out and documented.
- Foot pedal operated bins were available in the pre-school room and sanitary facilities. The service's central waste storage facilities were out of reach of children in an outside area that was inaccessible to the children from their outdoor play area.
- Thermostatically controlled warm water, liquid soap and single use paper towels were available at the wash hand basins in the service's sanitary accommodation.
- A refrigerator was available to facilitate the safe storage of perishable food items brought from home and a sink was available in the room to support staff to engage in effective hygiene practices.

Administration of Medication:

- Details are recorded of any medication given to a child attending the service with signed parental or guardian consent.

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Fire Safety:

- Staff described to the inspector that emergency fire evacuation drills are scheduled monthly and all children are familiar with the evacuation drills. This was further evidence by a review of the documented fire evacuation drills in the service.
- Fire evacuation plans were displayed throughout the service.

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

There was a first aid responder in the service on the day of inspection, immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service.

(2)

(a) There was a first aid box safely stored in each room and easily accessible to staff on the premises.

(b) The first aid box was adequate to the children attending the pre-school service on the day of inspection.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 26 - Fire safety measures

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of-

- (a) any fire drill that takes place in the premises, and*
- (b) the number, type and maintenance record of fire fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises.*

(4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire shall be displayed in a conspicuous position in the premises.

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Compliance Information

- (1) (a) A record of the fire drills that take place monthly was available. The most recent fire drill was recorded on 16 March 2026.
- (b) The annual maintenance certificate for the fire extinguishers was dated February 2026, and the smoke alarms was dated 06 June 2025.
- (4) The fire evacuation procedures were displayed throughout the service in appropriate positions near exits, which contained details in relation to the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

A registered provider shall ensure that the pre-school service is adequately insured.

Compliance Information

The registered provider had insurance cover in place for 22 pre-school children attending the service. The policy showed that the service had insurance in place from 28 March 2026 to 27 March 2027. This policy covered numbers of a sessional service.