

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015WD041
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Name of Service:	Little Darlings Childcare Centre
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Address of Service:	Carraig An Ard, Six Cross Roads, Waterford City, Co. Waterford
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Eircode:	X91 K440
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Name of Registered Provider:	Denise Foley
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Service type:	Full Day, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	18/08/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	42	PM	39
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla Child and Family Agency, Community Care Buildings, Cork Rd, Waterford.
Inspection undertaken by:	E Cullen
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 Darlings is a privately run service which has been in operation since 2008. It caters for children from 1 to 6 years of age on a full day and sessional care basis. The service participates in Early Childhood Care and Education and National Childcare Schemes. Opening hours are from 07:45hrs to 17:45hrs. The service operates from a single-story purpose-built early years facility in a residential area on the outskirts of Waterford City. The building accommodates five early years rooms, a kitchen and dining area, sleeping facilities, adult and children's toilets with a nappy changing room. A storeroom for hazardous materials and laundry and an office. The outdoor play area is safely secured at the rear of the building on the grounds of the premises.

Staffing

The service currently employs 18 staff members which includes the registered provider, office manager, early years and kitchen staff. Two international students were also 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.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9 – Management and Recruitment, 11 – Staffing levels, 16- Record in relation to pre-school service, 19 - Health, welfare and development of child, 23-

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Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child, 25 - First Aid, 26 – Fire safety measures and 28 – Insurance. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 16 and 19. As a result, the scope of the inspection included the toddler, junior, senior one and senior two preschool rooms.

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 registered provider, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

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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*

(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)(b) The registered provider was the designated person in charge on the day of inspection, and a named person was available to deputise as required. The staff roster confirmed that a person in charge was onsite during the hours of operation.

(2) Through review of records, and discussion with the registered provider it was determined that six staff and two student files required review. To assess compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years, two vetting disclosures were also identified as requiring review:

(a)(b) Two validated references were available for each staff member from either a past employer, or from a source other than a past employer.

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(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all staff. 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 available for one staff member who had lived outside the state for a period over 6 months and two students who are residents of another state.

(4) Certificates of qualification were available on file demonstrating that staff members held a qualification at the minimum level 5 and above 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.

Compliance Information

(1) On the day of inspection there were adequate numbers of staff working directly with the children at all times. There were 42 children with 9 staff members directly supervising them during the morning of the inspection and 39 children with 9 staff members during the afternoon.

(2) On the morning of the inspection, the staff to child ratios were maintained as follows throughout the service:

- The toddler room, there were 10 children aged 1.5 to 2.5 years old being cared for by 4 staff.
- The junior preschool room, there were 8 children aged 2 to 4 years old being cared for by 2 staff.
- The senior one room, there were 8 children aged 2 years to 4 years old being cared for by 1 staff.
- The senior two room, there were 16 children aged 3 to 5 years old being cared for by 2 staff.
- The baby room was closed on the day.

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:

- (a) the name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee, unpaid worker and contractor;*
- (b) details of the class of service and the age profile of children for which the service is registered to provide services;*
- (c) details of the adult:child ratios in the service;*
- (d) the type of care or programme provided in the service;*
- (e) the facilities available;*
- (f) the opening hours and fees;*
- (g) the policies, procedures and statements the service is required to maintain in accordance with Regulation 10;*
- (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;*
- (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;*
- (j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent;*
- (k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.*

Compliance Information

(1)(a) – (k) The registered provider ensured that all relevant information was accessible and available for inspection by authorised persons. Information notice boards in the lobby displayed relevant staff information, the Tusla registration certificate was on display providing confirmation of the class of service registered. Staff rosters were available on a staff notice board.

Each early years room was responsible for maintaining records of attendance, administration of medication and any accident or incident records. Policies and procedures were available for staff in the office and a parent's handbook was also available.

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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-

(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

All food and snacks were prepared onsite by the service chef. A four-week menu was available and on the day the meal served was spaghetti bolognaise. Alternatives or modified foods were observed being served where specific dietary requirements necessitated same. Drinks were freely accessible to the children in each classroom throughout the day, drinks stations were on low level shelves. Mealtimes observed were unhurried social experiences in all rooms, staff sat with children and engaged in conversation. The children were encouraged to feed themselves appropriate to their stage of development and were assisted as required.

Regular nappy changing took place throughout the day and staff were observed to engage attentively with children during the process. Children who were toilet trained, used the toilet as needed and handwashing was promoted after both nappy changing and toileting. Attention was given to children's appearance with staff observed to clean children's faces and hands after mealtimes. Staff were observed to support self-care, with children using mirrors to support them clean their own faces in an age-appropriate way.

Rooms used for sleeping were sufficiently dark and quiet to promote a restful sleep. Low-level floor beds were available to meet the sleep needs of children over 2 years of age. Appropriate clothing was available for all children to access the outdoor area in all weathers. Buggies were available for younger children who were not yet mobile.

New children and families were supported to transition into the service, through individual settling in schedules in the lead up to commencing full days. Children and families were observed to stay for short periods to familiarise themselves with the service. A transition plan was agreed with a view to longer stays and the addition of a snack time or sleep on a phased basis.

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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:

There was a keypad and buzzer entry and exit system in place on the main entrance door of the building to prevent unauthorised persons gaining entry or children exiting unsupervised. The kitchen and staff areas were inaccessible to children. All cleaning agents were stored safely and out of reach of children.

Accident and incident books maintained a record of any incidents, these were completed in detail and signatures confirmed that relevant parents, staff and a manager were informed. On the day of inspection, staff members were observed to complete records accurately.

Room temperatures were monitored in each room by staff; temperatures were maintained in three of the five early years rooms and kitchen/dining room by wall mounted air-conditioning units. Two other rooms had safely stored fans to assist air circulation. Staff members and management described how they managed the safety of children during recent high temperatures.

All highchairs, tables and chairs used by children were in good condition and suitable for use by the age range of children using them. Equipment and materials used in each of the rooms were appropriate for use by the age range of children using them, for example small items which may pose a risk of choking were not observed in room occupied by younger children. The outdoor play area was maintained to a good standard and free from hazards. The outdoor space was subdivided into dedicated play spaces for the different age ranges of children attending the service, for example the babies had their own secure space.

Infection Control:

The service was clean and well maintained with cleaning schedules maintained daily by staff. Children were observed washing their hands before eating, after outdoor play, toileting, and nappy changing. There was warm running water, liquid soap and paper hand towels available for hand washing throughout the service.

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A system was in place for the appropriate storage and sterilisation of children's soothers. Tables and equipment were cleaned prior to food being served to children and appropriate safe food storage and preparation was observed.

Administration of Medication:

Signed medication record books documented the details of any medications which had been administered in the service in line with the service policy on administration of medication. Medications supplied by parents were stored securely and inaccessible to children. Health care plans were put in place where required.

Safe Sleep:

On the day of inspection children slept in cots in the baby room sleep space and the toddler room catered for the sleep needs of children on floor and low-level beds. Staff were familiar with best practices in safe sleep and carried out physical checks on individual sleeping children, every 10 minutes, recording individual children's sleep positions, colour and breathing. A staff member remained in the toddler room while children were sleeping. The room temperatures were continually monitored by staff, with a digital thermometer located in each sleep room. The temperature was regulated by wall mounted air conditioning units in each room. The room temperatures were within the required temperature range of 18°C to 22°C for children over the age of one.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

Nappy changing practices observed in the toddler room posed a risk of cross infection as follows:

- The nappy bin in use was hand operated and was not in line with Regulatory notice EYI-RN12.1 Use of nappy disposal bins in Early Years Services.
- Child and staff hands were washed in the sink in the care room, while two dedicated sinks were available inside the nappy changing room. Staff members were observed to handle the door to open prior to handwashing.
- Nappy changing units were not routinely cleaned after each use.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Infection Control:

The items identified have now been addressed and the following actions have been implemented:

- The hand-operated nappy bin has been replaced with a new foot-operated nappy disposal bin and is now in use.

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- The correct handwashing procedures have been reviewed with all staff. Staff have been reminded that the dedicated sinks located within the nappy changing room are to be used for handwashing following nappy changing. Staff were also reminded of the importance of avoiding contact with the door and other surfaces after completing the nappy change and before handwashing. The correct sequence of nappy changing, disposal and handwashing has been reinforced with all relevant staff.
- Staff have been reminded that the nappy changing unit must be cleaned and disinfected after every use and between each child. This requirement has been reinforced as part of our infection prevention and control procedures.

A staff meeting was held to discuss the findings and to ensure that all staff were fully aware of the required procedures. Further in-house training was also completed with relevant staff, focusing on appropriate nappy changing procedures, hand hygiene, infection prevention and control, cleaning and disinfection, and the correct use of the nappy disposal system. Staff have been reminded of their individual responsibilities and the importance of always following the procedures consistently.

Management will continue to monitor nappy changing and hand hygiene practices to ensure that the procedures are being followed consistently and that the required standards are maintained.

Supporting documentation submitted

Infection Control:

No evidence.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions submitted. The noncompliance identified has been adequately addressed and implementation will be reviewed on next inspection.

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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) There were four staff members trained in first aid response available to the children attending the early years service.

(2)(a)(b) There was a suitably equipped first aid box stored in an easily accessible and conspicuous position on the premises available for the use of the children attending the early years service.

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.

Compliance Information

(1)(a) There was a record of fire drills which had taken place in the service. The most recent fire drill was recorded as having taken place on 09 July 2026.

(b) There was a record available demonstrating that the firefighting equipment was last serviced on 29 July 2026 and the smoke alarm system was last serviced on 11 March 2026.

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(4) There were notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire displayed beside each emergency exit door on the premises.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service demonstrated insurance cover for a full day care for 80 children. The insurance policy commenced 28 March 2026 and will expire 27 March 2027.