

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2022WW001
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Name of Service:	Willow House Childcare
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Address of Service:	Ballinahinch Woods, Ashford, Co. Wicklow
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Eircode:	A67 HW24
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Name of Registered Provider:	Yvonne Tierney
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	20/08/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	40	PM	40
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	The Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, St John's Road West, Dublin 8.
Inspection undertaken by:	S. Early O'Brien, H. Bourke & K. O'Neill
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

This private childcare facility is registered to provide full day care for pre-school children aged 0-6 years. The hours of operation are between 07:00 to 19:00 and the service can accommodate a maximum number of 77 children at any one time. The service is located in a two-storey purpose-built standalone building and comprises of five care rooms named Little Angels (age 15-18 months) Little Steps (age 1-2 years), Little Giggles (aged 2 years and 3 years), Little Stars Junior (age 2 and 3 years) and Little Stars Senior (age 3 to 4 years). In addition, there are two sleep rooms, sanitary accommodation for both children and adults, a kitchen, staff room, two storage rooms, an office and an entrance hallway.

On the day of inspection four of the care rooms were in operation, namely, Little Steps, Little Giggles, Little Stars Junior and Little Stars Senior. The outdoor play area for the service is situated at the rear and side of the premises and car parking is provided at the front of the building.

Staffing

The registered provider employed 11 staff members to work in the service, including the person in charge and a chef. On the day of inspection, there were 10 staff members working directly with the children in the service. The area manager arrived after the inspector's arrival. The registered provider does not work directly in the service and was not 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

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This inspection was unannounced and focused on the area of governance, health, welfare and development of child, safety and records. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

Regulation 9 (1)(a)(b)(2)(4) - Management and recruitment,
Regulation 11 (1)(2)(8)(a) - Staffing levels,
Regulation 16(1)(h)(i)(j)(k) – Record in Relation to a Pre-School Service,
Regulation 19 (1)(b) - Health, welfare and development of child,
Regulation 20 – Facilities for Rest and Play,
Regulation 23 - Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child,
Regulation 26 – Fire Safety Measures

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 16(1)(h)(i)(j)(k) - Record of a Pre-School Child across all care 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 inspectors wish 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*
- (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.

Compliance Information

(1)

(a) The service manager is the designated person in charge of the service and there is a named person appointed to deputise as required.

(b) The manager was present and in charge of the service throughout the inspection.

(2)

Upon review of the staff roster and staff files, it was identified that there were four new staff members employed to work in the service since the last inspection on 08 October 2025. All staff files were reviewed in relation to regulation 9(2)(c).

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Documentation was reviewed in respect of these four adults and met regulatory requirements as follows:

- (a) Of the eight validated, written references that were required, five were available from a past employer.
- (b) Of the eight validated, written references that were required, three were available from a source other than a past employer.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures were on file and had been obtained for 12 staff members, demonstrating that the service adhered to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
- (d) Police vetting was required and available for four staff members who had lived outside of the State for a period of more than six months as an adult.

(3)
The records outlined in regulation 9(2) above were dated prior to the commencement date of employment of the adults in the service.

(4)
Records were available demonstrating that all adults employed since the last inspection held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or above or a qualification deemed equivalent 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)-

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(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)
An adequate number of adults were working directly with the children at all times during the inspection.
- (2)
The minimum ratio of adults to children for full day care services was adhered to at all times during the inspection. On the day of inspection there were 40 children attending the service being supervised by 10 adults.
- 8(a)
There was a minimum of two adults on the premises at all times during the inspection. This was confirmed on review of the staff roster

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:*
- (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.*

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Compliance Information

(1)

(h) Children's attendance was recorded on an online application on the day of inspection. These records included details of each child's arrival and departure times from the service.

(i) A record of the staff roster was available and was reflective of the staff present on the day.

(k) Twelve accident and incident records were reviewed on an online application, and all were completed as required by the regulation.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)

(j) Twelve administration of medication records were reviewed on an online application but two of these records had not been signed by the child's parent/guardian.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

To correct this non-compliance, the parents/guardians of the children were contacted immediately. The medication administration records were presented to them for signature at collection, and the completed and signed records have now been correctly filed in the children's individual files. Management also reviewed the medication records to ensure that all required information and signatures were completed. Staff have been retrained and reminded of the importance of following the medication administration procedure correctly, including ensuring that all required signatures are obtained before records are filed.

To prevent a reoccurrence of this non-compliance A two-stage document control system has been introduced with immediate effect. All medication administration records awaiting a parent/guardian signature are now placed in a clearly designated folder/tray and are not permitted to be filed in the child's individual file until the required signature has been obtained. Once signed, the record is placed in a separate designated tray for management review. The Manager or Assistant Manager will verify that all required sections and signatures are complete before the document is archived in the child's file.

All staff have been retrained on the medication administration procedure and reminded of the importance of obtaining and verifying all required signatures. Management will continue to monitor medication records as part of ongoing administrative checks to ensure continued compliance.

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Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence of signed records and documentary evidence of staff training.

Summary Comment

The inspectorate has deemed that the actions submitted adequately address the non-compliance and will inform the next inspection.

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

(1)(b)

Appropriate and suitable care practices were observed to be in place in all care rooms on the day of inspection. In their interactions with the children, the adults were respectful and actively listened to the ideas, opinions and needs of each child. While it is acknowledged that there were children in each of the care rooms who had just transitioned all adults were familiar with their names and ages. They reported on the likes, interests and care needs of the children within the care rooms. The adults responded sensitively to children's cues and emotions and allowed time for the children to communicate and engage while prioritising a secure trusting relationship. The routine of the day was observed to be child led and children were visibly content and engaged in play during the inspection.

Meals and snacks were offered to the children regularly throughout the day. Lunch comprised of chicken curry with rice. Additional portions were available to children who requested more with alternatives available to meet the children's dietary needs and preferences on the day of inspection. Drinks of water were available within the rooms. Milk was offered to children at breakfast and dinner time. Self-feeding was promoted in younger care rooms and staff assisted children where required. The staff supported the children in managing their personal care. Children's nappies were changed routinely and as needed. Staff used opportunities when providing personal care for warm one-to-one interactions. Staff addressed children by name and spoke to them in gentle positive tones. Children were comforted promptly if they became upset.

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Younger children were provided with the opportunity to sleep at a designated time with an appropriate number of cots and floor beds available. Staff reported that children could be accommodated to sleep outside this time if they displayed signs of tiredness. The children were made comfortable for sleep, with staff removing their shoes and outer clothing and providing soothers to those who used them. The environments were calm and conducive to sleep, with staff sitting with the children and soothing them as needed. Staff reported they communicate daily with parents regarding individual children's care, including information about diet, activities, sleep, and nappy changes.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 20 – Facilities for rest and play

(1) Subject to this regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) having regard to the number of pre-school children attending the service, their respective ages and the amount of time they spend on the premises, there are adequate and suitable facilities for each child to play indoors and, where required by these Regulations, outdoors, during the day, and

(b) there are adequate and suitable facilities for a pre-school child to rest during the day, and in the case of an overnight pre-school service, during the day and the night.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

The indoor environment consisted of four care rooms with their own sanitary accommodation and one cot room. The care rooms were bright and warm with adequate space for the children. They were adequately laid out with interest areas accessible to the children. Children had access to an outdoor play area located to the rear and side of the building which was suitable to the ages of the children. This space consisted of a grass surface and was well resourced with a variety of toys for the children to use.

The staff advised the inspectors that they facilitate daily outdoor play. The outdoor area and the equipment and materials available provide appropriate learning opportunities for the children based on their age and stage of development.

(b) The service had a designated sleep room with cots suitable for babies and young children under two years in addition to sleep beds suitable for older children. In the rooms where children required sleep, all bedding and sleep bags were stored in individual labelled storage. On the day of inspection, lights were turned down and blinds pulled down. Bedding was changed as appropriate and laundered weekly. All care rooms had a cosy/rest area

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comprising of soft mats and cushions to provide space for rest and relaxation for children who may require time out from the normal activity within the room.

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 door leading into the service was appropriately secured to prevent children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises.
- The toys and play equipment observed in use by the children in the indoor and outdoor areas on the day of inspection were safe and in good working order.
- The person in charge had taken measures to ensure the indoor and outdoor play environments were safe and free from hazards.
- Medication, which is only administered in an emergency, was stored safely and out of the reach of children.
- Storage facilities for hazardous cleaning materials were inaccessible to children.

Infection Control:

- Liquid soap, warm water and paper towels were available to facilitate handwashing for staff and children in the sanitary areas adjacent to the care rooms.
- Foot pedal bins were in working order and available throughout the service for the safe disposal of used hand towels and other waste products.
- Tables were observed to be cleaned before and after snack time.
- A system was in place for effective sterilisation of soothers and mouthed toys.
- Individual bed linen was provided for children.
- Cleaning schedules were available in all care rooms and the service appeared clean

Safe Sleep:

The sleep needs of the children in the Little Steps and Little Giggles rooms were supported with a designated time for sleep after dinner. Staff reported that children had an opportunity to sleep outside of this time if they showed signs of tiredness or if they didn't normally sleep during the day. The service had an adequate number of cots to

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accommodate the age profile of the children who required cots for safe sleep. All shoes and heavy clothing were removed before children who required sleep were placed in their cots and on floor beds. Each care room had a cosy area for children to use who did not sleep during their day. In Little Giggles room, sleeping children's breathing, position and colour was recorded in addition to the temperature of the room.

Non-Compliance Information

Safe Sleep:

1. On the day of inspection, while it is acknowledged that staff remained in the cot room to supervise sleeping children, the sleep records for these children had not been documented between 12:10 and 12:40. Despite children sleeping from 12:00, the first recorded sleep check happened at 12:40. This practice poses a risk to the safety of children.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Safe Sleep:

The children were under continuous direct visual supervision by staff present in the sleep room throughout the period identified during the inspection. However, the required sleep checks had not been recorded in the Little Vista app between 12:10 and 12:40.

The Room Leader immediately addressed the recording issue and ensured that the sleep records were updated. Management has retrained all relevant staff on the service's Safe Sleep procedures, with particular emphasis on the requirement to complete and record sleep checks accurately and at the required intervals. Staff were reminded that both continuous supervision and timely documentation of sleep checks are essential requirements of the Safe Sleep procedure.

To prevent this from happening again in the future, all relevant staff have been retrained on the service's Safe Sleep procedures, with particular emphasis on the requirement for sleep checks to be carried out and recorded accurately at the required intervals.

The Manager has assigned responsibility for recording sleep checks to a specific staff member at the beginning of each sleep period. This ensures clear accountability for completing the required Little Vista records.

The Manager has also implemented regular monitoring of sleep records to ensure that all checks are documented consistently and at the required intervals. Management will continue to carry out regular reviews of sleep records to ensure ongoing compliance with the Safe Sleep procedures.

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Supporting documentation submitted

Safe Sleep:

Documentary evidence of staff training.

Summary Comment

The inspectorate has deemed that the actions submitted adequately address the non-compliance and will inform the next 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.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

There was evidence of monthly fire drills having taken place within the service. The last fire drill took place in July 2026.

(b)

There was a maintenance record of the smoke detection system in the premises dated 07 July 2026

(4)

There was a notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire, displayed within the care rooms and the main hallway of the service.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)

(b) On the day of inspection, there was no maintenance record available for the fire extinguishers in the service.

The last available documented service record was dated March 2023. Not having fire extinguishers maintained annually poses a risk of safety to staff and children attending the service.

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Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

Following the finding identified during the inspection, the fire maintenance company was contacted immediately and a full service of the fire extinguishers was arranged for the following day.

The fire extinguishers have now been serviced, and an up-to-date service certificate has been obtained and retained on the premises. Management has also reviewed the fire safety documentation to ensure that the current maintenance records are readily available within the service.

A recurring fire safety maintenance reminder has been added to the service's facility management calendar to ensure that future servicing is arranged before the required renewal date.

A designated Fire Officer has been assigned responsibility for monitoring the fire safety maintenance schedule, checking service dates and contacting the approved maintenance provider in advance to arrange the required servicing.

A dedicated Fire Safety Records folder has also been established and will contain all current fire safety maintenance certificates, service records and relevant documentation. The Crèche Manager will periodically review the folder and maintenance schedule to ensure that all required records remain current and readily available.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence of service certificate and annual service checklist.

Summary Comment

The inspectorate has deemed that the actions submitted adequately address the non-compliance and will inform the next inspection.