

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2023GY001		
Name of Service:	Sonas Early Learning Centre		
Address of Service:	Block D, Fánán, Letteragh Road, Ragoon, Co. Galway		
Eircode:	H91 N2XK		
Name of Registered Provider:	Theresa Murphy		
Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional		
Date of Inspection:	08/07/2026		
No of pre-school children:	AM	45	PM 46
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla – Child and Family Agency, Early Years Inspectorate, Quality and Regulations Directorate, Clinical & Administration Building, Block A - (1st Floor- Green Corridor), Merlin Park, Co. Galway.		
Inspection undertaken by:	S. Meehan and F. Kelly.		
Title:	Early Years Inspectors.		

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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).

Description of service

This purpose-built full day care service is based in the westside of Galway city in a residential area called Fanan. The service operating hours are 8 am to 6 pm, from Monday to Friday, for children aged from 1 to 6 years old. The service caters for full day-care, part-time care, Early Childhood Care and Education scheme (ECCE) and sessional pre-school care programmes operate from 9 am to 12 pm. This ground floor premises has a total of four playrooms- the Lamas room, Turtles room, Penguins room and the Koalas room. The service has a designated kitchen where food is prepared and cooked on site. To the rear and side of the premises children have access to three outdoor play areas.

Staffing

The service currently employs 14 adults, which includes the manager, an adult in the kitchen and the allocated area manager working in the service. The registered provider does not work in the service and is not detailed on the staff roster

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

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 area manager, 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.*

(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*

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(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 manager was the designated person in charge and there was a named person who was able to deputise as required.

(b) During the period of inspection the manager was in charge and facilitated the inspection.

Following a review of the service files and discussion with the person in charge, it was confirmed that there were 14 adults employed in the service, which included a cook and an early year's student on work placement. The secretary of the company was also present during the inspection. The registered provider did not work in the service on a daily basis. It was confirmed that there were 3 new staff members and 1 student working in the service since the last inspection dated the 03/03/25. There were 4 staff garda vetting disclosures reviewed on the day of inspection.

(2)(a) Three of the required 8 written and appropriately validated references available were from the adult's most recent employer.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for 8 of the adults working in the service. However, the service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew garda vetting every 3 years. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.

(d) Police vetting was not required for 2 adults working in the service, as they did not live outside the jurisdiction for more than 6 months.

(3) The procedures specified in paragraph (2) was not carried out prior to any person being appointed, assigned or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the pre-school service.

(4) There 6 adults working directly with children had obtained an award in Early Childhood Care and Education ranging from level 6 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualifications deemed to be equivalent by the minister. In addition, one adult had a temporary letter of eligibility to practice from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

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Non-Compliance Information

- (9)
- (2)(a)(b)
1. On the day of inspection, there were two adults that did not have the required two validated references each from a recent employer or a reputable source available for inspection.
 2. One adult had only one validated reference on file when two validated references were required.
- (3) All recruitment procedures were not carried out prior to adults working directly with children.
- (4) There was one adult who was unable to provide evidence that they had acquired an award in Early Childhood Care and Education at level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework. This person stated on their history of experience that they had acquired a qualification at level 6, but there was no evidence submitted to support this statement.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider stated in their response:

Corrective and Preventive Action

- (2)(a)(b)
- 1 & 2 All 5 references, validations for the 3 adults and have been provided and updated in the files for the staff highlighted in the inspection. A physical copy of the relevant level 6 qualification has been updated and added to the staff members files.
 - (3) A recruitment retraining has taken place following this inspection to ensure that policies and procedures for the safe recruitment of staff in our services is maintained.
 - (4) Evidence of the outstanding qualification has been received and submitted to the Early Years Inspector.

Supporting documentation submitted

- (2)(a)(b)
- All 5 references were submitted to the Early Years Inspectorate.
- (3) A copy of the recruitment policy.
 - (4) Copy of the outstanding qualification for 1 adult.

Summary Comment

2(a)(b), (3) & (4)

The evidence submitted was reviewed by the Early Years Inspector and has been deemed to have met the regulatory requirements of this part of the Regulations.

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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,*

Compliance Information

- (1) An adequate number of adults were working with the children on the day.
- (2) The registered provider ensured that the minimum ratio of adults to children was adhered to.
There were 11 adults working directly with 45 children in the morning and 11 adults working with 46 children in the afternoon.
- (8)(a) Documentary evidence on the roster indicated that at least two adults were on the premises when the pre-school was operating.

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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.

Compliance Information

1 (k) Details of accidents and incidents were electronically recorded and there was evidence available that parents were informed following an accident or incident involving their child.

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.

Compliance Information

19(1)(a)

Basic Needs:

- The children were observed to move freely in the playrooms and had a change of environment to the outdoor play areas. The children were dressed appropriately to go outside.
- Handwashing reminders were also given to the children by adults, after toileting, outdoor play and before meals.
- Children wore nappies and these were changed at regular intervals and in a timely manner.
- The toilet trained children were encouraged to be independent with toileting and supervision was also provided by adults as required.
- The morning snack consisted of fruit, cheese and crackers. The main hot meal of the day was Asian chicken with rice and an alternative vegan option was provided and offered.
- Children had free access to their drinks and water stations were available in the playrooms.
- Soft seating was provided in each of the play rooms for children to rest or take time out during the day from activities.

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- Tables and chairs were available and were appropriate for the age and stage of the development of the children.
- Children were observed in the outdoor area playing in the various interest areas.

Non-Compliance Information

Physical and Material Environment

- The Llamas and the Penguins playrooms were poorly equipped with special interest areas for example there was limited dress up costumes, sensory play, imaginary play and small world toys for the number of children attending both playrooms. This may impact on the cognitive, physical and social/emotional development of a child.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider stated in their response that:

(19(1)(a))

Corrective and Preventive Action

Physical Environment

Areas have been redefined and more equipment has been provided based on the developmental needs of the children and their interests. Implemented a weekly audit system for managers to ensure they are efficiently monitoring areas of interest and replenishing and reorganising as needed. Photographic examples of fully restocked areas have been issued to the managers and this will help to maintain a standard across the service.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence of interest areas and sample template of a weekly audit.

Summary Comment

19(1)(a) The photographic and documented evidence submitted has been deemed to have met the requirements.

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 into the pre-school was secure to prevent unauthorised access by a person or the unsupervised exiting by a pre-school child. There was a buzzer access system.

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- The outdoor play areas were secure, so that unauthorised persons could not access or enter the area or children could not exit unsupervised.
- The doors into the kitchen, staff toilet, staff room and utility areas had a system of security.
- Fire doors throughout the building were unobstructed.
- All cleaning agents and equipment were stored out of children's reach.
- All toys and play equipment were observed to be safe and in good condition.
- The three highchairs were fitted with safety harnesses.

Safe Sleep:

- There was a designated sleep room with three cots. Sleep beds and stackable beds were also available for older children for sleep.
- The service kept physical sleep checks on the service childcare applications. Records for sleeping children included a record of the room temperature and the position, colour and breathing of the child as per the safe sleep for under 2's best practice guidelines for childcare services policy.
- The sleep room temperature was maintained between 16 °C and 20 °C. When children were put down on sleep beds and sleep mats in the playrooms the temperature was maintained between 18 °C and 22 °C. The temperatures were regularly checked throughout the day.
- All 5 sleep plans were reviewed by the inspectors for children over 15 months who were on sleep beds on the day. These were compliant with the service policy and signed by the parents/guardians.
- A supply of clean linen was available for each child. All linen provided was clean, dry and stored in sealed labelled containers within the sleep room.

Infection Control:

- Perishable items from children's lunch boxes were stored in each playroom fridge.
- Hand washing facilities were provided with a supply of warm water, liquid hand soap and disposable paper hand towels.
- The children were observed washing their hands before eating their morning snack, dinner, toileting and outdoor play. Hand washing was supervised by the staff.
- Airtight, pedal operated, sealable bins were available for the disposal of used nappies in the nappy changing areas. Disposable aprons and gloves were available.
- The children's belongings for nappy changing were individually labelled and in designated storage containers.

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- Children's soothers were sterilised in accordance with best practice guidance.
- Tabletops and work surfaces were cleaned with disposable paper towels and disinfectant spray

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

- There was no hot water in the taps in the children's nappy changing area off the Turtles playroom and this may pose a risk of cross infection for a preschool child.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider stated in their response that:

Corrective & Preventive Action

Infection Control:

- A plumber has assessed the hot water system and the issue has been rectified by the installation of a new water heater.

Supporting documentation submitted

Infection Control:

- Photograph of the new water heater.

Summary Comment

The actions taken by the registered provider has been deemed to have met the requirements.

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

During the inspection the area manager, manager and staff ensured that the preschool children were adequately supervised in the indoor and outdoor environments.

The adult/child ratio was maintained in each playroom and in the outdoor play area. This was evidenced by the staff roster and observations of the inspectors on the day.

It was observed on the day that the staff ensured that children were supervised during sleep, mealtimes, in the playrooms, in the outdoor play area, while children used the sanitary areas and during nappy changing. The staff were observed to supervise children by sound and by sight.