

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2023LH002
--------------------------	-------------

Name of Service:	Smart Start Playschool
-------------------------	------------------------

Address of Service:	Ballymakenny Business Park, Ballymakenny Road, Drogheda, Co. Louth
----------------------------	--

Name of Registered Provider:	Denise Lynch
-------------------------------------	--------------

Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
----------------------	--------------------------------

Date of Inspection:	18/08/2026
----------------------------	------------

No of pre-school children:	AM	45	PM	44
-----------------------------------	----	----	----	----

Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla Early Years Inspectorate Meath Child & Parent Support Hub, Commons Road, Navan, Co. Meath
Inspection undertaken by:	D. Murray & AM. Cunningham
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).

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Description of service

Smart Start Playschool is a privately owned childcare facility in operation since January 2024. The service provides full day, part-time and sessional care to preschool children between the ages of 1 to 6 years. A school aged service is also provided. The service operates from 7:30 am to 6:00 pm and participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme. The converted two-storey building consisting of 4 care rooms.

Downstairs:

Bumble Bee room facilitated the care of children from 16 months to 2 years.

Busy Beavers room provided care and education to children from 2 years 8 months to 5 years. During term time this room facilitates an ECCE programme from 08:30am to 11:30am and is occupied by school aged children in the afternoons. This room was used to accommodate school aged children on the day of the inspection.

Butterfly room caters for children from 2 to 3 years.

Upstairs:

Bears room provided care and education to children from 2 years 8 months to 4 years.

Badgers room. provided care and education to children from 3 to 4 years.

Other facilities in the service were sanitary facilities, kitchen and 2 offices. A large enclosed outdoor space is available to the side of the building.

Staffing

The registered provider employs a manager, deputy manager, 17 childcare staff, 2 school aged staff members, 1 administration staff, cook and cleaner. The registered provider was on leave on the day of the inspection but does work in the service.

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

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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

A sampling process was used with regard to regulation 15 (1)(f) &(l).

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

The inspection was carried out following receipt of a concern received to the Early Years Inspectorate on the 05/08/2026.

Acknowledgments

The inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the manager, deputy manager, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(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

Following discussion with the deputy manager and review of the staff roster it was confirmed that 2 new staff members were employed since the last inspection on the 27/04/2026. These staff files were reviewed. In addition, Garda Vetting for 2 staff members whose disclosures were identified as due for renewal were requested for review.

(2) (a)&(b) Four validated written references were available from a reputable source.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures have been obtained for the 2 new staff members. However, the service did not demonstrate compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years for all staff. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.

(d) Police vetting was available for 1 new staff member who had resided outside the state for a period of more than 6 consecutive months as an adult.

(4) Both childcare staff members had a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 and above on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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

The registered provider ensured that the following written policies specified in Schedule 5 were available.

- Complaints Policy
- Policy of Administration of Medication
- Policy on Managing Behaviour
- Inclusion Policy
- Policy on Accidents and Incidents
- Policy on Healthy Eating
- Communication with Parents Policy

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.

Compliance Information

(1) Present on the morning of the inspection were the manager, deputy manager and 13 childcare staff providing direct care to the 45 pre-school children. One school aged staff member was also present.

Seventeen school aged children were accommodated in the Busy Beavers room.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a pre-school service in a drop-in centre or a temporary pre-school service shall ensure that a record in writing is kept in respect of each pre-school child attending the service containing the following particulars:

(f) details of any illness, disability, allergy or special need of the child, together with all the information relevant to the provision of special care or attention;

(i) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.

Compliance Information

(1) A sample of 10 children files were reviewed and each child had a registration form with the following completed by a parent or guardian:

(f) Details of any illness, medical care plan, allergies, child's favourite foods/special diets, concerns or worries regarding the child's development or any other relevant information to support the child in the service.

(i) Consent for prescribed medication and written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.

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:

(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)(i) A staff roster was available which demonstrated the staff members working in the service on a daily basis.

(j) Details were available of any medication administered to a pre-school child with signed parental consent. The staff members adhered to their Medication Policy as no medication was administered without clear labelling and instructions regarding dosage, timing and route.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

The Medication Police stated the following:

“Asthma inhalers are considered oral medication and must be prescribed by a GP. The original packaging with manufacturer's instructions clearly labelled must accompany the medication. The service must receive clear written instructions from the parent/guardian regarding how and when the medication should be administered. Written consent from the parent/guardian is required prior to administration of any medication. This consent will be kept on file in the child's records”.

(k) Accident and incidents forms reviewed were documented and signed by the parent or guardian to ensure they were informed as stated in the service Accident and Incident Policy.

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.*

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that no corporal punishment is inflicted on a pre-school child whilst attending the service.

Compliance Information

(1)(a) The following observations were made on how each child's learning, development and well-being was facilitated within the daily life in the service:

- In the Butterfly and Bumblebee rooms any child who became upset or who were settling in were nurtured and cuddled until they were ready to re-join the group. All children were placed to sleep for a scheduled period of rest at the service's designated sleep time after dinner. Children who did not settle were accommodated in the Bumblebee room where they could avail of free play under the supervision of staff members.
- Any child who had dietary requirements or allergies had a laminated care plan displayed in their care room.
- The service embraces outdoor play and learning, which provided a change of environment for children with challenging behaviour who needed additional support and supervision.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

- During activities children were offered choices and sought out staff members for praise, encouragement and reassurance. Children were given advance notice to support transitions to a new activity and for meals and sleep time.

(b) The adult's demonstrated knowledge of the individual care needs of the children. Staff members were heard encouraging children to be mindful of the feelings of those around them which promoted an ethos of friendship and working together. Children were comforted when they became upset with the staff adopting behavioural management strategies such as speaking to the child softly and promoting turn taking and sharing. Challenging behaviour when presented was dealt with in a calm and caring manner and the children responded well to distraction and re-direction.

(2) There was no evidence that corporal punishment was inflicted on any child on the day of inspection, and this was confirmed upon discussion with staff.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)(a) When working in collaboration with parents and guardians of a child who needs additional support there was no documentation of behaviour observed, regular meetings held, topics discussed and plans put in place to best suit the needs of this child.

Early years providers should actively support and collaborate with each child and their family by maintaining ongoing written observations and communication about the child's progress. This includes providing regular updates on the child's activities and conducting frequent reviews of their overall well-being within the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(1)(a) Procedures have been put in place for any children who may need a behaviour management plan in the future. At present in the service no child requires a behaviour management plan. This procedure will include a diary in the classroom to monitor behaviour. A specific diary to log and record minutes of any meetings held with parents is now available to record all information.

Supporting documentation submitted

Diaries see on the day of the inspection.

Summary Comment

The registered provider has addressed the non-compliances. The response received has been reviewed and accepted.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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.

Compliance Information

- (1)(a)(b)&(c) A Complaints Policy was available for the service.
- (2)(a)&(b) There was a chronological log maintained by the deputy manager of a recent complaint regarding a child that had attended the service.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

Two staff members garda vetting disclosures were not dated within the previous three years in adherence to the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting'.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

Garda vetting has been renewed for 1 staff member.

Application has been made for the second staff members garda vetting.

The registered provider will ensure that all staff are vetted every three years as per regulation.

Supporting documentation submitted

Garda vetting renewed for 1 staff member.

Evidence of application made for the second staff member's garda vetting.

Summary Comment

The registered provider has not addressed the non-compliances as updated garda vetting for one staff member remains outstanding. The response received for the second staff member has not been accepted.