

TÚSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Children's Services Regulation

Summary Report of Tusla Early Years Inspections: Parents Consultation

This report has been prepared by Research Matters Ltd (www.researchmatters.eu) on behalf of Tusla – Child and Family Agency.

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Foreword

Tusla – Child and Family Agency, through the Early Years Inspectorate, is the independent statutory regulator of early years services in Ireland and has responsibility for inspecting preschools, play groups, nurseries, crèches, day-care and similar services that cater for children aged 0–6 years. The role of the inspectorate is to promote and monitor the safety, quality of care, and support of the child in early years provision in accordance with the regulations.

As a parent or guardian, choosing an early years childcare service for your child is often one of the first and possibly one of the most significant decisions you will make. It is important that parents can be confident that the early years service they choose for their baby or young child is a safe and nurturing place, where the child can grow and develop to their full potential.

The involvement of parents in their child’s care and education is crucial to the development and wellbeing of the child; thus, the importance of including the voice of parents/guardians in the early years regulatory process in Ireland is a key objective of the inspectorate.

Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I present this report on consultation with parents about Tusla early years inspections. The report presents parents’ views of Tusla’s inspection of early years services and their views on reflecting the voice of parents in the inspection process. The consultation focused on three key areas:

- The issues parents think are important to inspect in early years settings
- Parents’ awareness, knowledge and requirements in terms of regulatory inspection
- Whether parents should have a voice in early years inspections and if so how this could best work.

Parents identified safety as being paramount to their child’s wellbeing in addition to highlighting the importance of their child being happy and well cared for in an early years setting. Parents told us that they had limited awareness of Tusla’s role as the statutory regulator of early years services and were unaware that service inspection reports are publicly available on the Tusla website. In response to the feedback, Tusla has introduced a number of additional supports for parents. This includes a new forum where parents can provide feedback on the service their child attends. It will for the first time provide a way for parents to share their positive experiences with their service; and will also allow parents to flag any areas of significant concern which may result in an inspection of the service being undertaken.

I would like to thank and acknowledge all those who assisted us with this project. We are very grateful to the providers and personnel in the early years services who arranged for us to meet with groups of parents. A special word of thanks to Childminding Ireland and Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta for their assistance. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Sinead Hanafin, managing director of Research Matters Ltd, for assisting with the consultation and in producing this report.

We are particularly grateful to the parents who gave of their time and shared their knowledge with us; we especially appreciate their willingness to do so with honesty and openness. Their valuable input will ensure that parents will now be given an opportunity to contribute to the inspection process going forward.

Fiona McDonnell

National Service Director of Children’s Services Regulation

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Overview

This report presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations from a consultation with 70 parents whose children attend early years services. The purpose of the consultation was to ascertain parents' views, understanding, knowledge, and requirements in terms of regulatory inspection. The consultation answers three key questions:

1. What issues do parents think are important to inspect in early years services?
2. Are parents aware of and knowledgeable about early years inspections?
3. Should parents have a voice in early years inspections and, if so, how best can that be taken into account?

Issues of importance to inspect in early years services

Summary

An analysis of the findings from the consultation identified a range of areas parents felt the inspectorate should examine; these areas broadly reflect the 2016 regulations under which the inspectorate carry out their work.¹ A summary of the key issues arising is presented as follows.

¹ Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016

Safety

Parents highlighted issues relating to safety as paramount to their child's wellbeing; many parents identified this as the most important issue for inspection. Specific areas identified are the environment, first aid, supervision of children, security of the building, and fire drills.

Health, welfare and development of child

Four main areas were identified in respect of the health, welfare and development of the child:

- (a) The importance of meeting the needs of the child (including having a focus on children's happiness and integrating children with additional needs)
- (b) Care of the child, particularly getting into a good routine, hygiene, nutrition and toileting
- (c) Good relationships between parents and staff; children and staff; and children themselves considered as one area
- (d) Educational activities, including having a structured approach to activities, and preparation for transition to primary school.

Governance

Two main issues were identified in respect of the governance of the service:

Personnel working in the service and their qualifications suitability for working with children, as well as the continuity of personnel. Parents identified being suitably qualified, including being able to identify issues arising, as well as being Garda vetted in this regard. Continuity of personnel, including retention issues and the allocation of a key worker to each child, was identified as important.

Communication about the service and about their individual child, including their development and any incidents arising. Information about staff wellbeing should be incorporated into the inspection report.

Environment

Issues relating to the environment attracted little commentary from parents. In general, it focused on the space available and the nap area, with overcrowding and hygiene being identified as the main concerns. Both the toileting area and outdoor play area were mentioned as important.

Conclusion

There is substantial overlap between the areas identified by inspectors in inspection reports and the issues of importance to parents. This is particularly the case in respect of children's safety, their health, welfare and development, governance of the service, and the environment within which the service operates.

Recommendation

The overlap between the issues identified by parents and that undertaken as part of inspections is significant. It is worth noting, however, that issues relating to the environment attracted the least amount of commentary from parents; some consideration of this should be given when presenting reports on specific services.

Awareness and knowledge of early years inspection

Summary

The findings show that while there is an assumption that inspections do take place and that services operate within a regulatory context, there is a dearth of awareness about them and of the availability of inspection reports. Where parents were aware of early years inspections,

it was generally because of a range of practices and procedures in the service that were assumed to be a regulatory requirement – because a provider had shared information with the parents about an inspection or because of a direct impact of the inspection on a child.

Conclusions

There is a need for parents to have a greater knowledge and awareness about the regulatory Early Years Inspectorate.

There is a need for parents to be given information about an inspection taking place in the service their child attends.

There is a need for parents to be informed about when a report on the service their child attends is published.

Recommendations

1. Information about the inspectorate and the inspection process should be provided. It is recommended that steps be taken to ensure that all parents whose children attend an early years service are provided with information about the inspectorate and the inspection process. Ways in which this can be done include the provision of a short, plain English leaflet that sets out the key elements of the early years inspection process, including who the inspectorate is, the regulatory requirements, inspection process, complaints management, and availability of inspection reports as well as contact details for the inspectorate. This could be developed in consultation with parents. A thorough broader branding of the inspectorate should be undertaken through creating opportunities to raise awareness of the inspectorate at various fora.
2. Parents should have knowledge about the timing and process of an inspection taking place in their service as well as knowledge about the results of the inspection. It is strongly recommended that parents be informed about when an inspection is taking place and that an opportunity to provide feedback to the inspector about the service is made available for those who wish to do so.
3. It is also recommended that parents should be informed about the publication of the report on the inspection of their service.

Parents' involvement with the Early Years Inspectorate

Summary

An analysis of the findings relating to parental involvement in inspections shows that there are mixed views about the involvement of parents in the inspection process. Some parents suggested that parents and children should have some involvement in inspections, while others were opposed to any involvement. This was due, in part at least, to a sense that parents did not have the requisite expertise to identify incorrect or inappropriate practices. It was also due to strongly held views that if parents have a problem with a service, it is their responsibility to bring this forward to the provider and ensure the issue is resolved.

Conclusions

Parents would welcome information about an inspection taking place in their service.

Parents would welcome information about when and how an inspection is taking place in their service. For example, by text message from the provider and/or a poster displayed on the day of inspection about the results of the inspection and about where to make a complaint in the event of a problem arising that cannot be resolved at local level.

There are mixed views on the parent's role in the inspection process.

The views in respect of parental involvement in the process of inspection are more varied. While some parents would welcome an opportunity to give their views to the inspector at the time of inspection, others may not wish to do so.

Recommendations

1. Parents should be informed about when an inspection is taking place in their service. Ways in which this may be done can include a text message from the provider to let parents know and a notice in a prominent place in the service that can be seen by parents. Other mechanisms should also be considered in consultation with providers.
2. Parents should be aware of the outcome of an inspection that has taken place in their service. A mechanism through which this can be done (e.g. a summary circulated by the provider) should be agreed in consultation with providers.
3. Parents should be aware of where to access inspection reports about a service. Information about how to do this should be provided by Tusla as part of a general information communication about the inspectorate.
4. Providers should be encouraged to direct parents to the inspection report on their service at the time of enquiry about the service.
5. Parents attending early years services should be given information about where they can make a complaint about a service and about the process to be followed in such an event. This information can be provided as part of the overall information to be provided to parents about the inspectorate.
6. Parents attending early years services should be offered the choice of sharing their views on the service with the inspectorate.
 - a. Some consideration should be given to how a meeting with the inspector at the time of the inspection could take place. Some challenges will need to be overcome in the context of the unannounced nature of the inspections.
 - b. A suggestion box should be made available at the service, where suggestions could be collated at the time of inspection.
 - c. A short questionnaire based on the findings from this consultation on issues of importance to parents should be made available at the time of the inspection. Issues relating to anonymity and integration of findings with the findings of the inspectorate should be addressed.
 - d. Consideration should be given to collating parents' views at a time outside the inspection. This could be done in a way similar to the UK Ofsted parent views (access at: <https://parentview.ofsted.gov.uk/login?destination=give-your-views>). This approach should be monitored and made explicit that it is not a mechanism for complaints.
7. Some consideration should be given to recognising 'excellent services' and the involvement of parents in the selection and awarding of these. These awards could potentially be developed and implemented by a non-governmental organisation operating in the childcare area.

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