Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: Gehlen Catholic Preschool/Daycare

Provider No.: 36599

Address: 709 Plymouth St NE, Le Mars, IA, 51031

County: Plymouth

Director's Name: Lisa Freking

On-Site Supervisor: Alison Bickford

Phone Number: 7125464181

E-Mail: aloutsch@gehlencatholic.org
ABICKFORD@GEHLENCATHOLIC.ORG

HHS Visit Date: 01/12/2026

Licensing Period: 02/01/2026 to 02/01/2028

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 12/18/2024

Comments:

Report Visit Type:

- [ ] PTO
- [X] Licensing Visit
- [ ] Drop In
- [ ] Administrative Change

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

- [ ] Accrediation

Program Duration:

- [ ] Year-Round
- [X] School Year
- [ ] Summer Only

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HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*
Sunday			
Monday		11:00 AM to 3:15 PM	
Tuesday		11:00 AM to 3:15 PM	
Wednesday		11:00 AM to 3:15 PM	
Thursday		11:00 AM to 3:15 PM	
Friday		11:00 AM to 3:15 PM	
Saturday			

Program Population Served:

- [ ] Infant(0-<24 Months)
- [ ] Toddler
- [X] PreSchool
- [ ] School Age
- [ ] All Ages

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Aged	Capacity
General			54		54
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

On January 12, 2025, I completed an unannounced visit to the Catholic Preschool/Daycare located within Gehlen Catholic School. During my visit, I had the opportunity to speak with the onsite lead, Ms. Ali Bickford. Ms. Bickford holds a Bachelor of Arts degree with a focus on early education and brings many years of experience working with children in this age group. Her knowledge and dedication were evident throughout the visit.

The program serves children ages 4 and 5 and operates Monday through Friday from 11:30 a.m. to 3:15 p.m., following the Preschool Initiative program that runs from 8:15 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Children who remain after the morning session participate in religion from 11:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., followed by preschool aftercare until 3:15 p.m. The center uses one classroom and hash 23 children enrolled with 22 children present during my visit.

Throughout the visit, all areas subject to review were thoroughly observed. The environment was warm, inviting, and well-organized. The classroom displayed a variety of educational materials, including colors, shapes, five senses, a picture schedule, job chart, children's artwork, and the alphabet. A posted daily schedule was visible, and staff were actively engaged with children—assisting with activities, reinforcing rules, and encouraging positive interactions. The program utilizes Creative Curriculum, Ages and Stages, and GOLD assessments to support developmental progress. Additionally, the school has added a mental health specialist this year, ensuring children have access to extra support when needed.

The program uses the Creative Curriculum, a research-based approach that supports all areas of child development—social-emotional, physical, cognitive, and language. This curriculum is designed to be child-centered and play-based, allowing children to learn through exploration and hands-on experiences that build on their interests. Staff is currently working on additional signs which are photos of an observe with the word written to help children identify objects.

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During the visit, staff were actively engaged with children at their level, participating in activities and fostering meaningful interactions. The program also benefits from community involvement, utilizing volunteers to enrich the children's experience. A foster grandparent is part of the program and spends time reading to the children, creating a warm and supportive environment that encourages a love of learning and connection across generations.

The center provides nutritious snacks and lunches, following CACFP guidelines. Menus are posted and shared with families. Lunches are prepared by the school, and all food storage areas, including refrigerators, were clean and maintained at appropriate temperatures. Tables were sanitized prior to meals, and sanitary procedures were consistently observed. Health and safety practices are strong.

Medication is administered by the school nurse when available, and Ms. Bickford is trained to administer medication if needed. Fire and tornado drills are documented monthly, and the center has completed radon testing and installed a mitigation system. Annual heating inspections are up to date, and first aid supplies are sufficient. All program areas were clean, well-maintained, and compliant with health and safety standards.

Outdoor play is supported by a fenced, grass-covered playground with shaded areas, a sandbox, playhouse, riding toys, music area, and a shed for equipment storage. Children also have access to a gym for indoor play during inclement weather.

The center does not transport children but uses school buses for field trips. Staff participate in additional training beyond minimum requirements to better serve children and families. Program goals include preparing children for TK or Kindergarten and increasing enrollment.

Their goal is to achieve IQ4K certification.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

I observed positive and meaningful interactions between staff and children throughout the visit. Staff were attentive and responsive, meeting the individual needs of the children in their care. They demonstrated flexibility and understanding, ensuring that each child felt supported and engaged in activities at their level.

The center benefits from strong community support, which is evident in the involvement of volunteers and the presence of a foster grandparent who spends time reading to the children. This partnership creates a sense of connection and enriches the program, offering children additional opportunities for learning and building relationships beyond the classroom.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

4. Any corrective action plans, provisional license, and safety plans-steps to get into compliance

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

Center will email consultant by 04/01/26 confirming that all items below standards have been corrected.

A full license is recommended at this time.

At least one visit will be made to the center during the next year.

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Date: 01/13/2026

HHS Licensing Consultant: Leann Steinhauer

Non-compliance with any of the mandated regulatory requirements listed above may lead to the cancellation or revocation of your Child Care License. Please take steps necessary to completely address each of the violations noted above.

Child Care Resource and Referral is an excellent resource for providers to access training options and support in your area. You can reach Child Care Resource and Referral at **https://iowaccrr.org**.