Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: Sugar Plum Preschool

Provider No.: 21917

Address: 213 N Pennsylvania AVE, Mason City, IA, 50401

County: Cerro Gordo

Director's Name: Tammy Hertzel (exec)

On-Site Supervisor: Carol Jara (on-site)

Phone Number: 6414249316

E-Mail: sugarplum.preschool@hotmail.com

HHS Visit Date: 01/15/2026

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

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 12/01/2025

Comments:

Report Visit Type:

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

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

Quality Rating: 3

- [ ] Accrediation

Program Duration:

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

Health and Human Services

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HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*
Sunday			
Monday		8:30 AM to 2:30 PM	
Tuesday		8:30 AM to 2:30 PM	
Wednesday			
Thursday		8:30 AM to 2:30 PM	
Friday		8:30 AM to 2:30 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			25		25
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

An unannounced annual visit was made to the Sugar Plum Preschool on 01-16-25 where I met with center director Carol Jara. Carol became the on-site director of this program in the fall of 2019 and is well qualified for the position with having obtained her masters level Pre-K teaching endorsement in 2015. Michelle Albertson is the assistant teacher and has also been with the program since 2019. The program is located in the Trinity Lutheran Church in Mason City but is operated independently of the church under the oversight of the Mason City YMCA and the executive director of that facility, Tammy Hertzel. The program offers only preschool programming to children ages 3 and 4 year of age. The program offers 3 sessions with 2 sessions offered 2 days a week operated in the morning for 3 year old children, and the other session is operated 4 days a week in the afternoon for 4 year old children. There are currently 25 children enrolled in the program between the three sessions served by two teachers, and a volunteer foster grandparent. All aspects of the program subject to licensing standards were reviewed.

The general layout of the building and classrooms, and operation of the program remains the same as in prior visits. The program makes use of two classrooms which are located across a hallway from each other. One room is primarily arranged with activity centers for gross motor skill activities such as music and movement, and toys that require more space. The other classroom serves as the primary programming space with a group learning area and various activity centers. Both rooms have large banks of windows along the exterior walls that provide ample natural light, a view of the outdoors, and ventilation. The gross motor room has restroom facilities just off the programing space so that children do not need to leave the room and serves as the primary toilet and handwashing facilities for the program. Additional restrooms are located off the main hallways of the church if needed. Both rooms were observed to be clean with no immediate safety concerns noted due to maintenance or layout. Both rooms have multiple exits from the room and all exits were observed to be clear of obstruction. Activity centers are created through the placement of furnishings and play structures which were arranged so

as not to create any blind areas. Activity centers included options such as dramatic play, science, reading, group learning, large and small manipulatives, puzzles, art and crafts, and writing. The toys and materials present were observed to be in good repair and appropriate to the ages of the children present. The center uses the Creative Curriculum, Handwriting Without Tears, and Jolly Phonics program to develop the planned curriculum activities. Copies of the planned curriculum and daily schedule are posted on the parent notice board both for the current and coming month. The curriculum plan is different for the 2 day and 4 day classes. While both plans identify a general learning focus and specific learning concepts the plans are developed to account for the developmental levels of the classes.

Good interactions and engagement were observed on the day of the visit with each of the teachers present. The class was engaged in self-directed large motor center play, and then moved to a teacher lead music and movement activity. The teachers did play with the children talking to them about their play and asking questions to help reinforce learning concepts such as numbers and colors as well as helping the children consider and develop narratives about their play. When engaging in the music and movement activity the teachers did sing and dance with the children. The teachers did use a behavior management approach that was more reactive to child behavior with the use of redirection which was effective in that there were no behavioral concerns noted. There was some limited use of more proactive approaches such as routines of having the children sit on a bench in an assigned spot after restroom use and a transition activity of singing a song while waiting for peers. The teachers do use calm, positive, and encouraging tones when speaking to the children.

Good health and safety practices were observed on the day of my visit. Good handwashing practices were observed with the teachers ensuring the children wash their hands following restroom use and prior to snack service. The center also makes use of hand sanitizer for other times such as after the children finished eating. Due to the limited hours of operation medications are not routinely administered but policies are in place should it be necessary in the future. Children with identified allergies did have response plans present in their files. The first aid kit was reviewed and found to contain the basic materials necessary to address most common first aid needs. Chemical cleaners, personal items, and other items that could pose a safety risk to children were kept in areas where they were not readily accessible to the children. The teachers waited for the children to be out of the immediate area before using chemical cleaners.

The program does not participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program but does follow the guidelines of the program with regard to the nutritional content of the snacks served. One issue that was observed however is that while the snack served on the day of the visit did have both a grain cracker, and 100% juice option available the juice option was not provided to children unless they specifically requested it. When meals and snacks are pre-portioned /served by staff then a full serving of each component must be provided. If served family style where children serve themselves then the children can choose to take as much or little of any component they want provided they have access to each. Both staff wore food service gloves when portioning out the snack. While the teachers did not eat with the children supervision was provided at the tables. A copy of the menu of planned/served snacks is maintained. Good food storage practices were observed for food items maintained at the center.

The center does not have a playground located on site. Approval has been given to waive this requirement given that the center is located in a commercial area, and the program has a room which provides the children with opportunities to engage in gross motor skill development.

A review of administrative records found all required postings were present and readily visible to parents and visitors. All child files were reviewed and found to contained all required information with the exception of 1 that needed a physical, and another that had a physical dated from October of 2023 which would have been valid at the time of enrollment but an updated physical should have been requested due to the fact that it was due to expire soon after enrollment. Full staff files including background checks are maintained at the YMCA main office and files with training certificates and physicals are maintained at the center. In reviewing the files at the center location both were current on all required training. Confirmation was previously provided by the YMCA central office that both had current Iowa SING, and FBI fingerprint background checks. All inspection logs and certificates were available and current.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

Good interactions and engagement were observed on the day of the visit. Each child was met at the door upon arrival where they were welcomed to the class, assessed for illness, and the teachers had an opportunity to speak with their parents. The teachers then began implementing the planned schedule and lesson plan. The center uses the Creative Curriculum, Handwriting Without Tears, and Jolly Phonics program to develop the planned curriculum activities. During the time of the visit the class moved through activities such as large group teacher lead activities, small group large motor play, and snack.

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Both teachers participated in the activities with the children either directly such as dancing with them during a music and movement activity, or talking to them and asking questions about their play. The teachers used proactive approaches such as routines, reminders of expected behavior, and simple redirection. This approach was effective in that there were no significant behavioral issues during the time of the visit, and those minor issues that did arise were quickly and easily addressed. Both teachers were very positive in their interactions and demeanor with the children, and used calm tones and positive word choices when speaking with the children. Ratio was maintained during the visit with a teacher being present with the children at all times.

Good health and safety practices were observed on the day of my visit with the teachers ensuring the children washed their hands following restroom use and immediately prior to snack service. While the church is primarily responsible for cleaning and maintaining the physical facilities the program does maintain the classroom materials. During the visit tables were properly sanitized prior to snack service. Chemical cleaners, personal items, and other items that could pose a safety risk to children were kept in areas where they were not readily accessible to the children. Due to the limited hours of operation medications are not routinely administered but policies are in place should it be necessary in the future. Children with identified allergies did have response plans present in their files. The first aid kit was reviewed and found to contain the basic materials necessary to address most common first aid needs.

The program does not participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program for reimbursement but does follow the guidelines of the program with regard to the nutritional content of the snacks served. The snack on the day of the visit included crackers and 100% juice. Both staff wore food service gloves when portioning out the snack. While the teachers did not eat with the children supervision was provided at the tables. A copy of the menu of planned/served snacks is maintained. Good food storage practices were observed for food items maintained at the center.

The center does not have a playground located on site. Approval has been given to waive this requirement given that the center is located in a commercial area, and the program has a room which provides the children with opportunities to engage in gross motor skill development. The program also has options of going for walks in neighborhood, or closing off areas of the parking lot where children could play.

A review of administrative records found all required postings for No Smoking, Consultant Contact, License Certificate, and Mandatory Abuse Reporting were present and readily visible to parents and visitors. Other required postings for emergency evacuation, emergency contacts, handwashing, disease exposure, curriculum, and daily schedule were present. All child files were reviewed and found to contained all required information. Full staff files including background checks are maintained at the YMCA main office and will be reviewed at a later date when files for all programs overseen by the YMCA are reviewed. Any issues identified will be addressed at that time. All inspection logs and certificates were available and current. The center last completed Radon testing in 2023 which showed levels below the 4.0 cutoff limit. The building does not have a mitigation system and recent changes to requirements allow that retesting will not be required until 2028. The center parent handbook was reviewed and policies regarding confidentiality had not ben included in the last revision.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

Policies regarding Protecting Child Confidentiality was not included in the last parent handbook revision and does need to be added. In addition policies regarding Transportation, and Discipline should be expanded. The policy on Discipline should identify what types of discipline are prohibited. The Transportation policies were also more implied and should be rewritten to clearly state if the center will provide any transportation services for children.

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

Information regarding all required policies along with guidance on development was provided to the center.

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

A full license is recommended at this time. Please provide a written response to the licensing consultant identifying a plan of action to correct and maintain those aspects cited as not meeting licensing standards and identifying an anticipated date of compliance. At least one visit will be made to the center during the next year.

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Date: 01/23/2026

HHS Licensing Consultant: Ray Salsbury

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**.