

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DL016
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Name of Service:	Buncrana Community Playgroup
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Address of Service:	Shore Road, Shore Front, Buncrana, Co. Donegal
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Eircode:	F93 KX97
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Name of Registered Provider:	Karen Doherty
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Service type:	Part Time
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Date of Inspection:	22/10/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	7	PM	7
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Hampton Court, Cootehill Road, Drumalee, Co Cavan. H12 YY84
Inspection undertaken by:	S Mc Kenna
Title:	Early Years Inspector

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).

Conditions if applicable	Not Applicable
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Description of service

Buncrana Community Playgroup is a community run preschool service located on the shore front in the heart of the town of Buncrana, Co. Donegal. The service provides part time preschool care for children aged 2 to 6 years and operates from 9am to 2pm, Monday to Friday during the preschool year and delivers the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme from 9am to 12midday. The service operates from a single-story building with one preschool room. Sanitary accommodation for both staff and children is available. A secure outdoor play area runs along the left-hand side of the building.

Staffing

There is a total of four adults employed within the service to work directly with children, two of whom are employed on a community employment scheme. An additional adult takes part in work experience one day per week. The registered provider does not 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

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

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under Regulation 9 Management & Recruitment, Regulation 11 Staffing Levels, Regulation 19 Health, Welfare & Development of Child, Regulation 23 Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of Child, Regulation, Regulation 25 First Aid and Regulation 26 Fire Safety Measures.

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 inspector wishes to acknowledge the cooperation of the 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, and

(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

(1) (a) The service had a designated person in charge, who is the service manager, and a named person to deputise in their absence.

(b) Following discussion with the person in charge, it was confirmed that when the preschool service was in operation the designated person in charge or the named person in charge were on the premises.

(2) The files for 4 staff and 1 work experience student were reviewed.

(a) (b)

A total of 6 written and validated references from a previous employer were on file.

A total of 3 written and validated references from a reputable source were on file.

One written reference was available on file.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for 4 staff and 1 student. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years for all employed staff.

(d) A review of the employment history for 4 staff and 1 student, demonstrated that no staff or student had lived outside the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months. Therefore, police vetting was not required.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that the 4 staff employed to work with children, held an appropriate childcare qualification at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications. A qualification for the 1 student was not required.

Non-Compliance Information

(2) (a) (b)

A second reference on file for the one student was not validated.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

Reference for student was sought and validated and forwarded to inspector on 23/11/2025.

Going forward all students will have 2 validated references on file.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of validated reference.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider and supporting documentation submitted has adequately addressed the non-compliance in Regulation 9 (2) (a) (b).

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) On the day of inspection there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) The adult to child ratios were correct in the service when the inspector arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection. The following adult to child ratios were observed. Three adults cared for 7 children aged 2 years 5 months to 3 years 8 months, all of whom attended on a part time basis.

(8) A review of the staff attendance records and discussion with the person in charge confirmed that the registered provider ensured that 2 adults were present on the premises at all times.

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.

Compliance Information

The following examples demonstrate how children's learning, development and well-being was facilitated in the service:

Basic Needs

Snack time was observed to be a relaxed time where staff sat with the children and had their own lunch also. The staff and children engaged in conversations about the children snack items and discussions about their homelife was also observed. The children were encouraged to use the toilet independently and were also provided with gentle prompts to use the toilet before going outside. The children experienced a change of environment to the outside play area and went for a walk on the day of inspection and were observed to be dressed appropriately for the weather. A rest area of a wooden bench with a large soft blanket provided an area for children to rest during their time in preschool. Floor mats were provided should the children require a sleep during their time in preschool.

Supporting Relationships

The atmosphere upon the inspectors arrival was calm and playful. The staff were observed to be consistently engaged with the children who were observed playing in the home corner, playing with small world houses and dressing up in Halloween clothing. The children appeared familiar with those who cared for them and actively called for staff members where support was required such as where a child became upset, or when they wanted a seat to sit next to a group of children. The staff were observed to use soft gentle tones when interacting with the children. Staff used gentle encouragement for children to be mindful of other children's feelings and were observed to promote positive behaviour, with praise given for positive interactions such as turn taking. The staff were observed to treat each child with respect and addressed each child by name. The discussions between staff and children demonstrated familiarity from the staff regarding the child's family and homelife events. Communication with parents is in person upon arrival and collection each day.

Physical And Material Environment

The indoor preschool room was pleasant and laid out to suit the needs of the children present. The designated play areas in the preschool room provided a range of enriching learning experiences for the children, areas included; construction, home play, dress up with mirrors, role play to include dolls and equipment, a rest area with books and teddies, table top areas, floor play toys, painting easels, a creative area and a sensory themed table to include Autumn and Halloween materials. The play materials were freely available and accessible to the children on low level shelves. Many displays of art work to include leaf printing, hedgehogs and bats were on display. A family tree and a birthday chart was also available and displayed at the children’s height, along with a photo display which included recent free play, and planned activities the children took part in. The outdoor area is located to the side of the premises with a ground surfacing of patio slabs and an area with some artificial grass. A section of the area was covered allowing for play outdoors in inclement weather conditions. The materials available were a music wall, painted tyres, wooden logs and sand and water trays with play equipment.

Programme of Activities

Observations were recorded and documented in an annual journal where links to the curriculum framework was demonstrated. Photos of activities and written comments were detailed, and the book was shared with parents for example on open days. The curriculum planning allowed for flexibility and incorporated children’s emerging interests for example where a child had a new baby at home. An activity planned for the day of inspection was a walk to the town to see the Halloween decorations. The children wore hi visibility vests in preparation of their walk and displayed signs of excitement getting to “go see the decorations”. The daily routine on display outlined that a large section of the preschool day is allocated to child led free play, which was observed on the day of inspection. The children were observed to enjoy self-directed play with dress up materials, connecting toys, reading books, caring for dolls, along with imaginary play such as “going to the gym” and “going on a bear hunt”.

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:

- Upon the inspectors arrival the premises were appropriately secured to prevent a child from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises. The outdoor area was secured by high level fencing and a secured gate.
- Toys and play equipment used by the children were observed in good working order.
- Storage areas were inaccessible to the children.
- Blind cords were secured.
- Floor coverings were presented in good condition.
- Cleaning agents were stored out of reach of children.
- Fire exits remained free from obstruction during the inspection.
- The staff were observed to adequately supervise the children during the inspection.

Infection Control:

- Warm running water, liquid soap, paper towels and foot operated bins were provided for handwashing. Hand washing was observed in practise after children used the toilet and before snack time.
- Sanitary areas were ventilated through means of mechanical ventilation.
- Tables were observed to be cleaned before and after snack time.
- Children's food items taken in from home were stored in the fridge
- Cleaning schedules were completed up to date, and the service was presented in a clean and hygienic manner throughout.
- External bins were stored securely and were inaccessible to the children.

Administration of Medication:

- Staff outlined the procedure for administering medication to children.
- Records available for review demonstrated that the service had obtained prior parental consent where emergency medication was provided.
- Medication was stored in a high-level cupboard out of reach of children.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 25 - First aid

- (1) A registered provider shall ensure that a person trained in first aid for children is, at all times, immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service.
- (2) A registered provider shall ensure that a suitably equipped first aid box for children-
- (a) is safely stored in an easily accessible and conspicuous position on the premises, and
 - (b) is available to the children attending the pre-school service at all times.

Compliance Information

- (1) The registered provider ensured that a person who held in-date First Aid Response (FAR) training was at all times immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service. Two staff members rostered to work on a daily basis held in-date FAR training certificates.
- (2) (a) & (b) A suitably equipped first aid box was available on the premises and was stored in an accessible and conspicuous location out of the reach of children.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 26 - Fire safety measures

- (1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of-
- (a) any fire drill that takes place in the premises, and
 - (b) the number, type and maintenance record of fire fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises.
- (4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire shall be displayed in a conspicuous position in the premises.

Compliance Information

- (1) (a) A record of the fire drills that take place was available. The most recent fire drill was recorded in September 2025.
- (b) The annual maintenance certificate for the fire extinguishers was dated November 2024, and the smoke alarms was dated August 2025.
- (4) The fire evacuation procedures were displayed on walls in the service, which contained details in relation to the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire.