

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DL129
--------------------------	-------------

Name of Service:	Smallworld Childcare LTD
-------------------------	--------------------------

Address of Service:	Drumlonagher, Donegal Town, Co. Donegal
----------------------------	---

Eircode:	F94 FF82
-----------------	----------

Name of Registered Provider:	Louise Gately
-------------------------------------	---------------

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

Date of Inspection:	09/04/2025
----------------------------	------------

No of pre-school children:	AM	68	PM	62
-----------------------------------	----	----	----	----

Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Donegal Early Years Inspectorate, St. Conal's Campus, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. F92 TD92
Inspection undertaken by:	L McGlynn and N McEndoo
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).

Conditions if applicable	Not applicable
---------------------------------	----------------

Description of service

Smallworld Childcare LTD is a privately owned and operated full day care service located on the outskirts of Donegal Town, County Donegal. The service currently provides full day care, part time and sessional preschool to children aged 0 to 6 years and operates from 7.45am to 6.00pm each weekday. The service is also registered to provide school age care. The premises is located within an industrial unit and comprises of one semi-detached two storey building, purposely adapted for the provision of an early years' service. The service consists of five preschool rooms, three on the ground floor and two on the first floor. The ground floor also houses a designated sleep room and sanitary accommodation for both staff and children. There is an office and sanitary accommodation for children on the first floor as well as two preschool rooms. There are three outdoor play areas available on site for use by different groups of children, these are located to the front and side of the building.

Staffing

There were 23 adults employed to work in the service which included the registered provider who is on the premises and works directly with the children on a daily basis. In addition to this, there were five adults working in the service on educational placement.

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

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 19. As a result, the scope of the inspection included the baby, wobbler and toddler rooms.

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

This unannounced inspection was carried out in response to a feedback and concern received by the Early Years Inspectorate.

Acknowledgments

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

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.*
- (7) A registered provider shall ensure that all employees, unpaid workers and contractors are appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training, including in relation to the following:*
- (a) the policies, procedures and statements of the service specified in Schedule 5;*
 - (b) Part VIIA (inserted by section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (No. 40 of 2013)) of the Act, and*
 - (c) these Regulations.*

Compliance Information

- (2) At the time of inspection, the registered provider confirmed that there were 23 staff members who worked in the service. Four of these staff members had commenced working in the service since the previous inspection. A review of records demonstrated that the vetting documentation for 19 of the staff had been reviewed during previous inspection and were found to be compliant under this regulation. With reference to the above listed elements of Regulation 9, recruitment records in respect of the four newly recruited staff members and five adults on student placement were reviewed and the following information was available:
- (a) Two references from past employers, in particular the most recent past employer was on file for seven staff members. One past employer reference was on file for one staff member.
 - (b) In the case where there were no past employers, a second reference from a source other than a past employer was accepted for one staff member.
 - (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for the nine staff members. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
 - (d) International police vetting from the relevant state was available for one staff member.

(4) Documentary evidence was presented to demonstrate that two staff members had obtained a major award in Early childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework and one staff member had obtained a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Non-Compliance Information

(2) (a) The second reference on file for two staff members was from a source other than one of their listed past employments.

(4) It could not be determined from the information provided that one staff member had obtained 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.

- (7)
1. Contrary to the services policy on supervision which states, *'all staff members must have regular and consistent supervision'*, *'all staff members are entitled to regular and uninterrupted supervision'* and *'the following methods are used to support staff; one to one supervision'* both management and the staff members confirmed that one to one supervision meetings are not carried out in the service.
 2. The services policy on supervision also states, *'all new staff members should have an appraisal carried out before the end of their probationary period and annually thereafter'*. There are 22 staff members currently employed in the service. A record of an appraisal was available for only four of the staff members, all of which were dated in 2023.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(2) (a) The educators have updated their CVs to ensure they correspond with the references. We have updated our checklist to ensure all references must correspond with the CV.

(4) The educator has completed their third year with ATU and we have a letter from ATU stating their current qualification, however we now also have a letter of qualification recognition from DCEDIY. We will ensure we get the letter from DCEDIY to validate qualifications.

(7) 1. The reason supervision has not been formally documented to date is that it has been carried out informally through regular room chats and ongoing check-ins with the team. These informal discussions have allowed for consistent support and communication among staff. However, we acknowledge the importance of adhering to our supervision policy and maintaining clear documentation. Going forward, we will ensure that all supervision sessions are carried out in line with our policy and are fully documented to reflect professional practice and accountability.

2. At the time of inspection, the 2024 appraisals had not yet been completed. This was due to time constraints and our priority to ensure the continued smooth running of the service. We acknowledge the importance of timely appraisals and have since completed the outstanding 2024 reviews as a matter of priority. To ensure we remain up to date going forward, we have now implemented a new appraisal timeline, attached which will help us carry out all future staff appraisals within the expected timeframes.

Supporting documentation submitted

Documentation was submitted to demonstrate compliance.

Summary Comment

The assurances provided by the registered provider have been accepted in addressing the non-compliances observed on inspection. The practice will be reviewed on the next inspection.

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 following policies were reviewed and were deemed to meet the requirements of the Regulation.

- (b) Complaints policy.
- (e) Policy on managing behaviour.
- (t) Staff training policy.
- (u) Supervision 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.

(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.

Compliance Information

- (1) On the day of inspection there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children in the service.
- (2) The required minimum adult to child ratio was met. On the morning of inspection, there were 68 children being cared for by 15 staff members in four care rooms.
- In the baby room, two adults cared for five children aged 0-1 year.
 - In the wobbler room, three adults cared for 10 children aged 1-2 years.
 - In the toddler room, three adults cared for 12 children ages 2-3 years.
 - In the senior ECCE room, four adults cared for 21 children 3-5 years.
 - In the junior ECCE room, three adults cared for 20 children aged 2-4 years.

There were two additional adults working in the service on education placement. The registered provider and deputy person charge were also on the premises throughout the inspection.

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.*
- (3) A registered provider shall ensure that no practices that are disrespectful, degrading, exploitive, intimidating, emotionally or physically harmful or neglectful are carried out in respect of a pre-school child whilst attending the service.*

Compliance Information

(1) (a) The children brought in their morning and afternoon snacks from home. There was evidence that healthy eating was promoted within the service, with snacks consisting of sandwiches, fruit, yoghurts, and cheese. The main meal was provided by the service, and a two-week menu plan was in place. During mealtimes, children were observed to feed themselves with staff helping when required with younger children. The sleep needs of children in the baby and wobbler rooms were met in line with their individual routine as evidenced by children sleeping at various points throughout the inspection. Children in the toddler room were placed to sleep for a scheduled period in the middle of the day. Nappy changing was carried out regularly and in timely manner, older children used the toilet independently.

There was ample space in the rooms for children to move freely between play areas. Younger children in the baby room were observed to be given time on the floor to lie, roll, creep and crawl. Children spent considerable time in the outdoor area on the day of inspection and suncream was applied by staff prior to going out. Younger children also wore sun hats while outdoors and staff ensured children had access to drinking water.

Interactions observed on the day were positive and staff spent time playing with children, reading stories, singing songs and role playing. In the care rooms, good communication between both staff members and children was observed, expectations were well managed in terms of what was happening next and transitions worked well. Staff in the baby room spoke at length about children's individual care needs and how practices were amended in line with children's individual needs, care plans were in place where required. Staff informed the inspectors that a digital application was used to communicate with parents on a daily basis regarding their child's care, routine and activities.

The service comprised of five care rooms and three outdoor areas. Each of the rooms were well resourced with various materials and toys appropriate to the age and developmental stage of the children attending. These included jigsaws, arts and crafts, home corners, construction areas, building blocks, dress up and sensory play. Equipment was stored in open shelving units at the children's reach and low-level tables and chairs were provided. The baby and wobbler rooms were equipped with items specific to younger children including wall mounted mirrors, pre walker toys, pull up bars and fiddle toys.

The outdoor areas were well resourced with a variety of play equipment to cater for the development needs of children attending. Children in the toddler room had access to a sheltered area with ride on toys, plastic blocks, a small climbing unit and wall mounted water play items.

- (b) Care practices observed on the day were deemed to be appropriate to the age of children each staff member was caring for. Staff members carried out care practices such as nappy changing and feeding in a caring and respectful manner.
- (2) There was a policy on managing behaviour in the service which sets out the practices that are prohibited. The staff members caring for children who were present during the inspection demonstrated an awareness of what behaviour management methods were acceptable and unacceptable to use and used positive approaches to managing children's behaviour.

Non-Compliance Information

- (3) The services child protection policy states '*our policy is to suspend the member of staff on full pay for the duration of the investigation*' when an allegation has been made against a staff member. A concern was received by the Early Years Inspectorate and issued to the registered provider on 31 March 2025 which included allegations against a staff member. On the day of inspection, the registered provider confirmed that they had not informed the staff member of the concerns against them or carried out an investigation.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(3) Following the initial concern, human resources were contacted for advice and guidance on appropriate next steps. In alignment with their recommendations, a series of investigation questions were drafted to support a thorough and fair inquiry. To ensure transparency and safeguard all involved, additional staff members were temporarily assigned to the room to enhance monitoring. Furthermore, relevant CCTV footage was reviewed as part of the investigative process. Moving forward, we are committed to ensuring that similar incidents do not occur again. As a result of this experience, we now have clearer protocols and a more structured approach in place, allowing us to gather the necessary information and carry out any future investigations more efficiently and promptly.

Supporting documentation submitted

No documentation submitted.

Summary Comment

The assurances provided by the registered provider have been accepted in addressing the non-compliances observed on inspection. The practice will be reviewed on the next inspection.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

A registered provider shall ensure that pre-school children attending the service are supervised at all times.

Compliance Information

The correct adult to child ratio was maintained in line with the requirements of the regulation. Staff members were observed appropriately supervising children, mainly by sight, both indoors and outdoors on the day of inspection. The weather on the day was particularly warm and children spent considerable time in the outdoor play areas. Staff were observed to strategically place themselves in areas where children were playing and at times bringing smaller groups indoors for respite from the sun. On each occasion, when moving between areas, staff counted children and communicated ratios to ensure all staff were aware who remained in the area and who had moved indoors. In the baby room, staff were observed carrying out and recording physical checks on sleeping children. Both staff and children were signed in to each room on arrival and departure and management reorganised staff in response to unexpected absences to ensure appropriate supervision in each room.

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.*

(3) A record in writing referred to in paragraph (2)(a) shall-

- (a) include the nature of the complaint and the manner in which the complaint was dealt with, and
- (b) be open to inspection on the premises by an authorised person.

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (2)(a) is retained for a period of 2 years from the date on which the complaint has been dealt with

Compliance Information

(1) There was a complaints policy in the service which detailed;

- (b) the manner in which a complaint would be dealt with by management
- (c) the process for which a person who makes a complaint will be informed of the manner in which it is being dealt with.

(2) (a) (3) (4) The registered provider confirmed that, except for the current concern submitted to the Early Years Inspectorate, they had not received any complaints in the previous two years.

Non-Compliance Information

- (1) (a) The procedure to be followed when making a complaint was not clear on the service policy as incorrect contact information was detailed within the policy.
- (2) (b) A concern received by the Early Years Inspectorate regarding the service was issued to the registered provider on 31 March 2025. The registered provider confirmed they had not carried out an investigation into the concern despite the services complaints policy stating that complaints will be '*dealt with promptly*' and '*in a timely manner*'.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

- (1) (a) The complaints policy is now updated and concerns the correct contact information.
- (2) (b) We have updated our policies to include clearer guidelines, ensuring that complaints are addressed and investigated more promptly. We have reviewed and strengthened or existing procedures and reassessed current policies to identify any gaps and ensure they clearly outline responsibilities and response protocols.

Supporting documentation submitted

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report Pre School

No supporting documentation submitted.

Summary Comment

The assurances provided by the registered provider have been accepted in addressing the non-compliances observed on inspection. The practice will be reviewed on the next inspection.