

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015GY258
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Name of Service:	The Den Creche Limited
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Address of Service:	Unit 21, Barna Village Centre, Barna, Co. Galway
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Eircode:	H91 W621
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Name of Registered Provider:	Tara Cunningham
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time
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Date(s) of Inspection:	10/02/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	30	PM	24
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	TUSLA - Child and Family Agency, Early Years Inspectorate, Quality Assurance Directorate, Clinical & Administration Building, Block A - (1st Floor- Green Corridor), Merlin Park, Galway.
Inspection undertaken by:	F. Nic Dhonnacha
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

This privately operated ground floor pre-school is in a commercial unit in the heart of Barna village. The service offers full day care and part time care provision from 07.30 to 18.30, for children aged between 1 and 6 years of age, from Monday to Friday. Additionally, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) pre-school care programmes and sessional care programmes are offered. The service is registered to cater for a maximum number of 33 children at any one time. There are two pre-school playrooms, namely the Montessori room this caters for children between the age of 3 and 6 years of age (the room is divided into two sections to accommodate the children attending Junior and Senior Montessori) and the Wobbler/Toddler room caters for children between the age of 1 year and 3 years. There is a kitchen where the main meals and snacks are prepared, cooked and stored on site. There are stackable beds for children's sleep provision. Quiet rest areas are available in each playroom for children to rest and relax. There are outdoor play areas to the side of the premises. The service offers a child centred play-based pre-school curriculum focusing on the children's emerging interests.

Staffing

The registered provider works in the service daily. There is a named person in charge and a deputy person in charge. There are nine staff working in the premises including the registered provider. Eight staff hold a Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) at a Level 5 to 8 in Early Childhood Care and Education. One of the nine staff is awaiting recognition of her qualifications from another state therefore is working in housekeeping at present. The staff have documentary evidence of ongoing training and education.

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, premises and facilities. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 16 Record in Relation to Pre School Service.

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 *registered provider, 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.

(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.

Compliance Information

- (1)(a) There was a designated person in charge and there was a named person available to deputise in the service.
- (b) The deputy person in charge was onsite when the early years inspector arrived. The registered provider came on duty at 10.45 and remained on site for the duration of the inspection. Documentary evidence indicated that either the designated person in charge or deputy were available on the premises when the pre-school children were present.
- (2) Nine files were reviewed which included the registered provider, manager (deputy person in charge) six childcare workers and a kitchen-based staff member.
- (2)(a) Fifteen of the 18 validated references on file were from a past employer.
- (b) Three of the 18 validated references on file were from a source other than a past employer.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all nine adults. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew garda vetting every three years.

- (d) Four adults, who had lived outside the jurisdiction for longer than 6 consecutive months, while over the age of 18 years, had the required police vetting. It was recognised that where applicable, these vetting's were translated by a reputable source.
- (4) Eight adults working directly with the children had evidence of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 5 to Level 8, in Early Childhood Care and Education.

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) At all times during the period of the inspection, the registered provider ensured that an adequate number of staff were working directly with the children.
- (2) The person in charge ensured that the minimum ratio of adults to children specified was maintained.
On the morning of the inspection, there were 30 children present.
 - 4 children were aged between 1 and 2 years of age
 - 8 children were aged between 2 to 3 years
 - 18 children were aged between 3 to 5 years

There were seven staff directly caring for these children.

The registered provider acted as childcare relief and the deputy manager assisted with the administration parts of the inspection.

There was a staff member designated to kitchen duties, preparing and serving the service meals.

In the afternoon of the inspection, there were 24 children present.

 - 4 children were aged between 1 to 2 years

- 7 children were aged between 2 to 3 years
- 13 children were aged between 3 to 5 years

There were six staff directly caring for these children. The person in charge and deputy person in charge acted as childcare relief and assisted with the administration parts of the inspection. Additionally, there was a kitchen staff preparing the meals and snacks for the preschool children.

(8)(a) The registered provider ensured that there were two staff on the premises while the pre-school was operating.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of the following information in relation to the service:

- (a) the name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee, unpaid worker and contractor;
- (g) the policies, procedures and statements the service is required to maintain in accordance with Regulation 10;
- (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;
- (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;
- (j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent;
- (k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.

Compliance Information

- (1)(a) The name, position, qualifications and experience of the registered provider, person in charge and of every other employee was available on file.
- (g) The service policies procedures and statements were maintained and available onsite in both English and Irish.
- (h) Details of children’s attendance was accurately recorded.
- (i) A staff roster was available and accurately maintained.
- (j) Documentation was available to demonstrate that signed parental consent was required prior to administering medication to a child, should it be required and that administration of medication should be witnessed.

(k) Details of accidents and incidents were recorded and there was evidence available that parents were informed following an accident or incident involving their child.

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.

Compliance Information

Basic Needs(1)(a)

- The staff encouraged and supported the children to be as independent as possible.
- The children were given sufficient time to eat in an unhurried manner. The staff complied with the service's healthy eating policy.
- The tables and chairs were suitable for the children's ages and stages of development.
- The children had unrestricted access to the toilet and did not have to wait to use the toilet. The staff used the correct language surrounding toileting. On the day of inspection, 11 children who wore a nappy were changed in a sensitive manner on a regular basis.
- Children had plenty of opportunities to move themselves, to practice and improve their emerging skills, such as co-ordination and balance. Play activities and experiences were developmentally appropriate and suitably challenging.
- The staff advised that the children play in the outdoor play area on a regular basis.

Supporting Relationships

- The children were observed at free play, making puzzles, stacking and building. The children talked about the theme of the week, which was Springtime, the days of the week and the weather. The staff and children learned some Irish words and phrases while playing. The staff read stories and children questioned the characters and gave their views. The staff acknowledged a child's achievements and the children were observed playing and having fun.
- The staff supported children in forming and sustaining positive relationships by -
 - having a key person system for each child

- showing respect for each unique child and developing their trust
 - listening to the voice of the child as they communicate their needs, thoughts and experiences both verbally and non-verbally, by reading children’s cues, gestures and body language
 - using soft tones, the child’s individual name and getting down to their level and making eye contact
- On speaking with the staff, the inspector was informed that they verbally provided parents with daily information on their child’s experiences in the pre-school including the child’s likes, interests and preferences, about the food that was eaten and toileting practices. This information was provided at collection times or by phone calls and by email if necessary.
 - The staff created individual learning journals/scrapbooks for each child, showing the themes, experiences and activities engaged in, along with photographs. Themes included were Autumn, Manners, Self Care, Independence, Fire Safety, Emotions, Road Safety, Halloween, Ag Spraoi as Gaeilge, Christmas, Winter, Valentines and Springtime to date.
 - The staff provided significant opportunities for the children to decide their play activities and experiences. The inspector noted the staff acknowledged a child’s achievements- ‘that is great’ ‘well done’ and used questions such as ‘what should we do next?’, ‘is there any other way to do this?’, to allow children to critically think and explore.
 - On the day of the inspection the staff showed kindness. They were thoughtful, supportive and reassuring whilst caring for the children.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 22 – Food and drink

A registered provider shall ensure that adequate and suitable, nutritious and varied food and drink is available for each pre-school child attending the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

- There was a healthy eating policy. The healthy eating was promoted within the service by visual aids and adherence to best practice guidelines. There was a 3-week menu displayed on the notice board and kitchen door.
- The service had a designated staff member who prepared and cooked the meals and snacks.
- From 07.30 until 09.00 the children had the opportunity for breakfast cereals with milk and toast.

- At 10.00, the children had their morning snack provided by the service which consisted of yogurt, raisins and a selection of chopped fruit including pears, apples, oranges and bananas.
- At 12:00, the main meal was offered which consisted of chicken curry, wholegrain rice and vegetables. The children had the opportunity for seconds and an alternative. Milk or water was offered to drink.
- At 15:00, the children had waffles, fruit, hummus and yogurt with water or milk to drink.
- From 17:00, a snack consisting of brown bread and butter with baked beans was offered by the service.
- Cutlery, plates and crockery were offered for children's meal/snack times.

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:

- The external doors were appropriately secured to prevent a child gaining unsupervised access and unauthorised persons gaining access to the premises.
- The outdoor play areas were secured by fencing and gates so that unauthorised persons could not access or enter the area or children could not exit unsupervised.
- The door into the kitchen, staff toilets, storage areas and staff room had a system of security.
- All toys and play equipment were observed to be safe and in good condition.
- There were intact safety straps as per manufacturer's instructions, on the highchairs in the Nursery room.
- Blinds had fastener devices as a safety measure preventing any potential hazardous access.
- The heating system was thermostatically controlled, to ensure the temperature was maintained between 18°C to 22°C.
- The water was thermostatically controlled with a temperature reading of 32°C and 34.7°C, on the day of inspection.
- Documented risk assessments for the playrooms and outdoor play areas were available for review.
- Cleaning products were stored out of child reach within each of the playrooms and in designated utility areas.

Infection Control:

- Staff prompted and supervised the children to wash their hands before eating and following nappy changing/toileting, messy play and outdoor play.
- Adequate liquid soap and paper towels were available at the wash hand basins in the sanitary areas and the playroom wash hand basins.
- There were two designated nappy changing areas. The nappy mats were intact. The children's barrier creams were individually labelled. There was an airtight sealable foot operated lidded bin for the disposal of nappies in each of the nappy changing areas. Staff involved in the serving of food wore disposal aprons when nappy changing. On the day of inspection three children wore nappies.
- The toys and play equipment were maintained in a clean and hygienic condition.
- A cleaning and disinfection schedule was available in the service. There were suitable cleaning products available in the service. The inspectors noted high contact areas were cleaned regularly, as per best practice guidance. The outdoor play equipment was cleaned prior to/after a child's use, with documented records maintained.
- Adequate supplies of disposable tissues were readily available in each of the playrooms.
- There were foot pedaled lidded bins in the sanitary areas and playrooms.

Safe Sleep:

- The children under 2 years of age and some under 3 years of age were observed sleeping in cots in the designated sleep room. Sleep check records were accurately maintained.
- In each playroom, quiet rest areas with a child size seating and soft matting were available for children to rest or opt out of an activity if he/she wished.
- The children in the Montessori room did not show cues of tiredness on the day of inspection. A period of relaxation was offered where the staff and children listened to calming music, read a story and had some down time from activities. The children were observed to sit on mats, look at books or some children chose to relax in the tree house on soft cushions.
- Floor mats and individual bed linen were available for the older children requiring sleep provision if required. The staff advised they were aware of the requirements of rest/sleep and relaxation for all children in the service.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that each pre-school child attending the service is checked in and out of the service by an employee or an unpaid worker.

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) no person other than-

(i) pre-school child attending the service,

(ii) a person dropping or collecting such a child,

(iii) an employee, or

(iv) an unpaid worker, can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee, and

(b) a daily record in writing is kept of the entry on the premises of any such person.

Compliance Information

(1) A record book detailed the children's arrival and departure to and from the service daily.

(3)(a) The registered provider ensured that no person other than the persons outlined in (i) to (iv) entered the service without prior approval. All visitors recorded had written approval by the person in charge.

(b) A written record was available recording all visitors at the entrance to the service.

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 service provided evidence that a person trained in first aid for children was available at all times to the children attending the pre-school service. Two staff had current training in (FAR) first aid for children and six staff had training in first aid with a paediatric content.

(2)(a) There was a first aid box with a supply of first aid items. The first aid items were safely stored, easily accessible, in a conspicuous position and in date.

(b) The service demonstrated that the first aid box was fully equipped and available to the children attending the pre-school service.

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 firefighting 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 written record was available of the monthly fire drills completed in the service. The last recorded fire drill was dated 16/1/2026.
- (b) Records were available in relation to the number, type and maintenance of fire-fighting equipment with the annual service dated 5/02/2026.
- The smoke and fire detection alarm system for the premises had the last annual service dated 5/02/2026.
- (4) Notices were displayed within the service of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire on the premises.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

A registered provider shall ensure that the pre-school service is adequately insured.

Compliance Information

The service's insurance specifying the address of the service, catering for full day care service for 33 children at any one time, with an expiry date of 28th of March 2026, was available. The insurance covered -

- public liability,
- personal accident,
- against fire and theft,
- buildings
- outings undertaken as part of the service provision.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-

- (b) safe and secure,*
- (c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated*
- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and*
- (e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.*

Compliance Information

- (b)
- Fire exits were clearly identified and visible during service hours.
- (c)
- The room temperatures of the playrooms were within normal parameters 16–20 °C. The air exchange ventilation system was in operation on the day of inspection.
 - Openable windows were available in each playroom and designated sleep room. Mechanical ventilation was available in both the sanitary areas and nappy changing area.
- (d)
- The environment both indoors and outdoors was clean, well maintained and records were available and signed by staff after cleaning/checking was complete.
 - The playrooms were newly painted during the year; they were bright and colourful.
 - New skirting boards were installed during the year throughout the premises.
- (e)
- There were three child size toilets and two wash hand basins in the sanitary area. The wobbler/toddler room had a wash hand basin and the Montessori room had two wash hand basins.
 - There was a designated nappy changing area with a pull-down change unit steps up and a wash hand basin for nappy changing purposes only.
 - Additionally, there was a staff toilet and wash hand basin on the premises.