

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DL008
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Name of Service:	Ballaghderg Pre-School
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Address of Service:	Mountain Top, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal
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Eircode:	F92 WV59
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Name of Registered Provider:	Una Gallagher
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	10/06/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	4	PM	4
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Donegal Early Years Inspectorate, St. Conal's Campus, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. F92 TD92
Inspection undertaken by:	N Toner
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).

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Description of service

Ballaghderg pre-school first notified as an early years' service in 1997. It is situated on the outskirts of Letterkenny town in County Donegal. The service is governed by the Health Service Executive and caters for children with moderate to severe learning and physical disabilities. A Full Day care service is available for children aged 2 – 6 years. The hours of operation are from 08.45 – 14.00 hours weekdays. The premises consists of a detached dormer bungalow which was adapted for the provision of this specialised early years' service. Downstairs there are four rooms for children's use, three playrooms and one sensory therapeutic room. The ground floor also includes a kitchen, a utility area and children's sanitary facilities. The first floor contains an office and staffroom facilities. A large multi-sensory garden is provided at the rear of the premises which contains specialised provisions for children with additional needs

Staffing

A total of six adults is employed to work in the service. This included the person in charge and one student. Four of adults work directly with the children. The person in charge does not work directly with the children. The registered provider is not involved in the day-to-day operation of 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

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 15, 16(1)(a), 19, 23 and 25.

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.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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.*
- (c) there is a clear management structure in the service that identifies the lines of authority and accountability in the service and the specific roles and responsibilities of each employee and unpaid worker.*

(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) There was a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise as required.

(b) The person in charge was on the premises for the duration of the inspection.

(c) There was a clear management structure in the service, which identified the lines of authority and accountability in the service and the specific roles and responsibilities of each employee and unpaid worker.

(2) Following a review of previous inspection information, information available on inspection and discussion with the person in charge, it was determined that one student had been employed since the previous inspection on the 20th of January 2025. This student's file was reviewed, and the following information was available for inspection:

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

(a)(b) Two written and verified past employer references were available for the adult.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all six adults including the student. 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 was not required for any adults as they had not resided outside of the state for a period of six consecutive months or more as an adult.

(4) Four of the staff members previously reviewed had attained major awards in Early childhood care and education at level 5 or above on the national framework of qualifications, or qualifications deemed by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) to meet the regulatory requirement.

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) The registered provider ensured that there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the service.

(2) The registered provider ensured that on the day of inspection, the adult to child ratio was always maintained at the minimum specified ratios as follows,

- The Top Room (POD 1) - Two staff worked with 2 children aged 2 years of age to 4 years of age.
- The Bottom Room (POD 2) - Two staff worked with worked with 2 children aged 3 years of age to 5 years of age.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a pre-school service in a drop-in centre or a temporary pre-school service shall ensure that a record in writing is kept in respect of each pre-school child attending the service containing the following particulars:

- (a) the name and date of birth of the child;*
- (b) the date on which the child first attended the service;*
- (c) the date on which the child ceased to attend the service;*
- (d) the name and address of a parent or guardian of the child and a telephone number where that parent or guardian or a relative or friend of the child can be contacted during the hours of operation of the service;*
- (e) authorisation for the collection of the child;*
- (f) details of any illness, disability, allergy or special need of the child, together with all the information relevant to the provision of special care or attention;*
- (g) the name and telephone number of the child's registered medical practitioner;*
- (h) record of immunisations, if any, received by the child;*
- (i) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.*

Compliance Information

- (1) On day one of the inspection, all children's registration forms were reviewed. There was a record in writing containing the following particulars for each of these children.
- (a) The name and date of birth of the child.
 - (b) The date on which the child first attended the service.
 - (c) the date on which the child ceased to attend the service.
 - (d) The name and address of a parent or guardian of the child and a telephone number where that parent or guardian of the child can be contacted during the hours of operation of the service.
 - (e) Authorisation for the collection of the child.
 - (f) Details of any illness, disability, allergy or special need of the child, together with all the information relevant to the provision of special care or attention.
 - (g) The name and telephone number of the child's registered medical practitioner where the family has registered with a general practice.
 - (h) Record of each child's immunisation was available for five children.
 - (i) Written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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.

Compliance Information

(1) (a) Records pertaining to the name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee was held for adults working within the service.

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

(1) (a) (b)

Basic Needs:

Children in the service were provided with sufficient food and drink. Parents/guardians provided the food and drinks for their child to meet with their individual dietary requirements. Arrangements were also in place with parents for children to have a hot lunch off the premises. The adults were aware of the children's individual dietary and care needs and helped with feeding. Sandwiches and yoghurts with drinks of water were consumed by the children. Drinking water facilities were also available in the service. The children attending the service required assistance with toileting. This was carried out sensitively. Nappy change facilities were provided on-site. Attention was given to children's hygiene needs. Each child had their own individual supply of spare clothing. Faces and hands were cleaned after eating. Sleep facilities were available if required and were not used on the day. The playroom used on the day contained two large, padded floor mats where the children could lie or rest on. The sensory room also contained padded mats and specialised sensory calming light features where children could relax or rest. The children attending the service required assistance to move about. Regular changes of their

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

position were observed during the inspection. One child was using a standing aid as part of their mobility support plan during the session. The staff helping the child made it a fun experience and the child enjoyed a sensory activity while receiving the support. The child played with bubbles in water and the staff blew bubbles which the child appeared to enjoy.

Each child had a documented care plan which included strategies for managing the child's behaviour, and for teaching the child how to regulate their own behaviour. The adults demonstrated knowledge of the needs of the children throughout the day. The adults used open, welcoming facial expressions and encouraging vocal tones when speaking to the children. They ensured they engaged at the child's level and gained their attention before speaking to them. Hand sign language was used in conjunction with verbal directions in the bottom room while staff played an interactive game with the children using assistive technology. The children learned about farm animals and were observed to use the assistive technology to identify different farm animals and the noises that they make. The children were offered choice throughout the activity and chose to continue each time. After the activity, children had some circle time where the staff sang songs with the children.

Physical and Material Resources:

The playroom named as pod 2 or the bottom room was set out and ready for use as a playroom. The room contained a good variety of play resources which included a home kitchen section, manipulative toys, puzzles, arts and crafts materials, construction blocks, story books and small world toys. A storage unit within the room contained additional play items.

The double room named as pod 1 or the top room contained two large, padded floor areas for children to rest or play on with large soft balls and an interactive floor mat. There was a shelf unit containing various manipulative toys stacking cups, animal toy, cause and effect toys and push along wheeled items. There was a library display rack of picture story books with their front cover displayed outwards making it easy for children to see and select one. There was a music player with selection of songs and television. Each child had access to a supply of art materials, playdough and educational play resources. Suitable sized tables and chairs were provided for children to comfortably engage in table-top activities. The sensory room contained a large ball pool; padded floor covers and seating and a variety of specialised sensory lighting equipment with electronic control facility.

A spacious outdoor play area was provided at the rear of the premises. A wheelchair ramp passageway led to the lower-level garden. A pathway connected the different sections of the garden. An impact resistant surface area was provided at one side. Mature shrubbery helped to hide different sections. There was a large area under grass, a paved area and a weaving brick pathway to alcove areas with bench seating. A storage shed facility contained

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

some of the outdoor play resources. The section under impact resistant surfacing contained swings, rocking seats, a low-level slide, ride on toys and a wheelchair swing. There was a picnic bench in one area, an open pergola style play hut in another, a swing seat, a therapy trampoline and a hidden garden. Elevated planters were provided for gardening opportunities. All areas of the garden were accessible for children with additional needs. Two features of the outdoor area included a large wooden bus structure and a boat. The staff informed the inspector that the children would take imaginary journeys from the bus to the boat and explore the outdoor space.

Programme of Activities:

Children had journals of their preschool learning in place. These journals included individual projects and art and design. The person in charge informed the inspector that the children have regular outings. One of the outings was on display in the hall of the service documenting a day at a sunflower farm in the local community. Evidence of the curriculum planning both short- and long-term goals were evident in all care rooms.

Communication

Communication with families is done via a text messaging service and a detailed handover process at the beginning and end of each day. There is a notice board for parents in the entrance to the service. Children also have a detailed care plan folder which is updated by their medical team on a regular basis.

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:

- Materials and resources were maintained in a good state of repair.
- The kitchen was inaccessible to the preschool children on the day of inspection.
- All waste bins had the required foot operated pedal.
- Windows were out of reach for all children attending the service.

Infection Control:

- There was adequate handwashing facilities provided throughout the service with warm water, liquid soap and paper towels.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

- Tables were observed to be cleaned prior to mealtimes and after messy play and snack times in all care rooms.
- The materials and resources throughout the service were visually clean, with cleaning schedules displayed and up to date in each care room.
- Children were observed to have their hands washed regularly including before snacks and meals.

Administration of Medication:

- The service has a policy in place that states no medication is administered in the service. All staff have a knowledge of this.

Safe Sleep:

- No children slept in the service. There were suitable safe facilities for rest and relaxation as required.

Fire Safety:

- Fire doors were unobstructed throughout the service.
- Fire evacuation procedures were clearly displayed in the care rooms

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 demonstrated that four adults employed in the service have been trained in first aid for children and are accessible to the preschool child, during hours of operation.

(2) (a) (b) Suitably stocked first aid boxes are available in the preschool rooms and available to the children as required.