

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

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| <b>TUSLA Identifier:</b> | TU2015DL018 |
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|-------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Name of Service:</b> | Cara Children's Centre |
|-------------------------|------------------------|

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|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Address of Service:</b> | Pearse Road, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|

|                 |          |
|-----------------|----------|
| <b>Eircode:</b> | F92 KW20 |
|-----------------|----------|

|                                     |            |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Name of Registered Provider:</b> | Joe Boland |
|-------------------------------------|------------|

|                      |                      |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Service type:</b> | Part Time, Sessional |
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| <b>Date of Inspection:</b> | 26/02/2026 |
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|                                   |    |    |    |   |
|-----------------------------------|----|----|----|---|
| <b>No of pre-school children:</b> | AM | 39 | PM | 3 |
|-----------------------------------|----|----|----|---|

|                                                 |                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:</b> | Donegal Early Years Inspectorate,<br>St. Conal's Campus,<br>Letterkenny,<br>Co. Donegal.<br>F92 TD92 |
| <b>Inspection undertaken by:</b>                | N Toner & Y Coyne                                                                                    |
| <b>Title:</b>                                   | Early Years Inspector & Inspection Regional Manager                                                  |

### 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).

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| <b>Conditions if applicable</b> | N/A |
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# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

### Description of service

Cara Children's Centre is a registered part-time service opened at the present address since September 2022. The community run service is in a family resource centre in a commercial area of Letterkenny town. The childcare service is in a separate building to the family resource centre. The service cares for children in the age range two to six years and is operational between the hours of 9.00am and 2.00pm. Rooms in the service include an entrance hallway, office, three playrooms, children's sanitary accommodation off each room, two nappy changing rooms, staff sanitary accommodation incorporating a disability access toilet, staff room, staff kitchen, cleaning store room and storage areas off rooms for both toys and equipment.

### Staffing

The service is staffed by 17 adults which includes the person in charge, a contractor, and an administrator. Two of the staff are employed under the Access and Inclusion Model scheme (AIM). The registered provider does not work directly in the service. The person in charge can also work directly with the children as required.

### 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. This inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 16k, 19, 23, 25, 26 and 28.

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

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

An immediate action notice was issued to the registered provider on 10th March 2026 in relation to no Garda Vetting available for one staff member. Please see body of the report for more detail.

### Acknowledgments

The inspectors wish 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*
- (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,*

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

- (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 has a designated person in charge and a named person who can deputise as needed.

(b)

On the day of inspection, the person in charge was always onsite.

(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)

On the day of the inspection, the person in charge confirmed that there were 17 staff members who worked in the service. This included 1 administrator, 2 students and 1 contractor (bus driver/maintenance). Recruitment files in respect of the 17 staff members were reviewed, and the following information was available:

(a) Written and validated references for 23 staff was on file from previous employers.

(b) Written and validated references was on file for 7 staff from other sources.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for 16 staff. However, the service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.

(2)(d) International police vetting was available for 1 adult who had resided outside of the state for a period of six consecutive months or more as an adult.

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

(4) Thirteen adults 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

### Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a)

- No references from either previous employers or (b) from reputable sources was on file for two staff members.

(c)

- An immediate action notice was issued to the registered provider on 10th March 2026 in relation to no Garda Vetting available for one staff member. An adequate response was received from the registered provider on 11th March 2026. The required Garda vetting was received by the inspector on 11th March 2026.

### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

#### Corrective and Preventive Action

(2)(a)

All references have been received from reputable sources and verified by the Childcare Manager. The Childcare manager will use the Referee Verification form for every new staff member, student, volunteer in the future.

(c) Garda vetting (dated 05/04/2025) was sent to inspectorate. A reminder is set for 3 months in advance of all staff member's Garda Vetting expiry dates.

#### Supporting documentation submitted

(2)(a)

All references and verification files have been submitted via email to the inspectorate.

(c) Garda vetting for one staff member was sent on the 11 March 2026 to the inspectorate.

### Summary Comment

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

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

### 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.*

*(4) Subject to paragraph (5), where a registered provider contemporaneously provides-*

*(a) a sessional pre-school service, and*

*(b) a full day care service or a part-time day care service, or both, the minimum ratio of adults to children applicable for the duration of the sessional pre-school service in respect of the children attending that service shall be the ratio specified in paragraph (3).*

#### Compliance Information

(1) An adequate number of staff were caring for the children in the three playrooms in the service.

- Three staff cared for a total of 12 children in the age range 2 to 3 years in the toddler room in the service availing of part-time childcare.
- Two staff cared for 16 children in preschool year 1 in the age range 3 to 4 years who were availing of part-time childcare.
- Three staff cared for 12 children in preschool year 2 in the age range 4 to 5 years who were availing of sessional childcare.

(2) The minimum ratio of adults to children ratio were provided on the day of the inspection in accordance with the required ratio considering the ages of the children and the length of time each child spent in the service

(4)

(a)(b)

The service attendance for preschool year 1 confirmed that the maximum number of children on register and cared for in the room on any one day was 22 for sessional care with 2 staff present. The service attendance confirmed that the maximum number of children on register and cared for in preschool year 2 was 22 children for sessional care with 3 staff present in the room.

# 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:*

*(k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.*

#### Non-Compliance Information

(16)(k)

1. Details were not sufficiently recorded for accidents, injuries or incidents involving preschool children attending the service. Signatures from either staff members completing the incident reports or parents/guardians, were missing from several incident reports reviewed on the day of inspection.
2. The Inspectorate must be notified of a diagnosis of an infectious disease in a child attending the service, or the diagnosis of an infectious disease in an employee, an unpaid worker, a contractor, or any other person working in the service. One case regarding a diagnosis of strep throat was not notified to the inspectorate. It is acknowledged that following inspection, it was subsequently notified to the inspectorate on 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2026.

#### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

##### Corrective and Preventive Action

(16)(k)

1. The service went through all the accident books and dated and signed where possible. Any remaining gaps are from parents whose children have left the service. All staff have been informed that all sections of the accident forms must be completed in full. In addition, the Childcare Manager will double check this before she signs them.
2. The service notified the Inspectorate of the case of Strep Throat the day after our inspection. The service printed off the notifiable diseases from the HSE website. The service is now clear as to which diseases are required to be notified.

##### Supporting documentation submitted

The Inspector was sent an image of the label on the front of the services accident books, and the sheets that the service printed off from the HSE website.

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

### Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider and supporting documentation submitted has adequately addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 16 (k).

### 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 measures were observed to ensure that each child's learning, development, and well-being was facilitated within the daily life of the service.

##### Basic needs

Children's toilets were located directly off each playroom for easy access by children and supervision by staff for both using toilets and supervised hand washing. Wash hand basins were also located in all playrooms in the service. Staff were observed to line up children for hand washing before break time in toddler room and on return from outdoor play in preschool year 1.

Snack times in the rooms were signalled in advance in both sessional rooms and healthy lunches comprising of sandwiches, crackers and cheese, yogurts, pasta, and fruit were enjoyed by children on the day of inspection.

Snack time in both preschool rooms was social with children sitting at low level tables with the staff and engaging in friendly conversation. Staff helped children opening yogurt's and helped some children opening lunch boxes.

Children in all rooms were observed to avail of outdoor play during the inspection starting with preschool room year 1 in the morning time and then preschool year 2 and the toddler room on a staggered basis ensuring plenty of play space for the children. Staff in the toddler room were observed to assist children put on their coats on request for outdoor play. Children were encouraged to do as much as they could for themselves and the staff made it a fun task, singing with the children.

Rest areas were provided in all playrooms. Low level soft couches and floor mats were provided in year 2 preschool. In addition to the provision of a soft floor mat in the playroom, individual low-level beds were stored.

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

in a room off the toddler room for children cared for in the room to rest and sleep on demand. Individually labelled sheets and blankets were also held in storage for use by children. Books in a library area was in place in all rooms, within easy reach of children.

### **Supporting relationships around children.**

The atmosphere in the playrooms was calm, relaxed, and fun. Children were observed to move to interest areas for play which was child led with staff helping and participating in activities as required. Staff in the playrooms were observed to sit at the children's level and to be both caring and kind as children moved to their chosen areas of interest in the rooms. A tree with pictures of family members on branches was used in support a sense of home and belonging in preschool year 2. This was facilitated in preschool year 1 by having pictures of children engaged in activities on the walls. A "wellbeing wall" with a mirror and pictures of children with happy, sad, tired, ill, surprised, tired, hungry, and angry faces was used to promote conversation and an understanding of feelings and emotions in preschool year 2. Pictures of cakes, candles and balloons were used in the playrooms to indicate children's names and their birthdays. Each room featured a notice board to showcase the children's artwork. In the toddler room, the displays focused on ladybirds and their lifecycle, while Preschool 2 used pictures of fish and animals to celebrate the winter season.

The service supported diversity through multicultural themes, including the use of a world globe and photographs. In the entrance hallway, a wall dedicated to each culture was on display. Flag and details of different countries was on display. Each child had a picture of themselves on their respective country. At the entrance to each playroom, staff profiles featuring photos and biographies outlined each key worker's qualifications, roles, experience, and hobbies. To facilitate communication between home and the service, an electronic application was used alongside traditional learning journals and scrapbooks to share updates on children's development, progress, and care.

### **Physical and material environment**

On the day of inspection, the playrooms were found to be clean, brightly decorated, and maintained to a high standard. Each room was furnished with age-appropriate tables and low-level chairs, providing suitable spaces for both tabletop activities and break times. The playrooms were well-resourced, featuring a variety of materials designed to support multiple developmental areas. This included Imaginative and Sensory Play, defined interest areas such as "home corners" were equipped with play cookers, utensils, food items, and dolls. Construction and problem-solving materials were readily available, including blocks of assorted sizes and textures, puzzles, games,

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

and flashcards to facilitate cognitive development. Magnetic shapes were also provided and were observed to be a popular choice among the children in each room. To support creative and messy play, specific zones were dedicated to hands-on exploration and artistic expression. These areas were well-stocked with arts and crafts materials, including paint, paper, scissors, and various shapes and colours. In Preschool Rooms 1 and 2, dedicated sand and water stands were provided to facilitate sensory and messy play.

For imaginative and physical development, the rooms featured small animal figures, wheeled toys, and connecting sets. The toddler room was specifically equipped with a doll's kitchen, a rocking horse, and age-appropriate low-level soft slides, shapes, and toys. To promote independence, all equipment was stored on low-level open shelving or in floor-level containers, allowing children to select materials freely. During the inspection, children were observed moving confidently between these interest areas, engaging in play based on their individual and group preferences.

The outdoor play area featured a durable all-weather surface and was securely enclosed by a combination of concrete walls and high-level timber fencing to ensure a safe environment. Children from all rooms were observed engaging in various outdoor activities, including using the sandbox, and navigating timber balancing blocks. A reserve stock of toys and equipment was maintained in a dedicated storeroom adjacent to Preschool room 1, ensuring a variety of play options remained available. Staff actively participated in both indoor and outdoor play, responding promptly to the needs of individual children. Observations were meaningful staff-child engagement, and the staff were seen working well with the children throughout the inspection in each room.

### Non-Compliance Information

(19) Clean and safe drinking water was not always available and accessible to children in year two room.

### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

#### Corrective and Preventive Action

The bottles are now more accessible to the children on a trolley in the playroom. All staff members have been reminded that the water bottles must not be stored in the fridges. They have to be freely accessible to the children at all times.

#### Supporting documentation submitted

A photograph of the water trolley was emailed to our inspector.

### Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider and supporting documentation submitted has adequately addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 19.

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

### 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 service was secure on the inspectors unannounced arrival to the service.
- The outdoor perimeter was secured with high wooden fencing and locked metal gates.
- Cleaning products were stored out of reach of the preschool.
- Windows had restrictors in place to protect children from injury.

##### Infection Control:

- The service was observed to be clean with up-to-date cleaning schedules in place.
- Warm water, liquid soap, and paper towels were provided for effective hand hygiene.
- There is evidence of the policy on infection control being implemented.

##### Fire Safety:

- On the day evacuation doors remained clear ensuring safe egress from the service in an emergency.

#### Non-Compliance Information

##### General Safety:

- Garda vetting was available for 16 staff members. However, 1 vetting disclosure was not dated within the previous three years in adherence to with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting'.

##### Infection Control:

- Two, foot pedal operated bins were broken in the year one room sanitary area.

#### Action submitted by the Registered Provider

##### Corrective & Preventive Action

##### General Safety:

Garda Vetting was applied for on the 9th of February. The service is still waiting for it to come through. The service have reminders set for 3 months in advance of all staff members Garda Vetting.

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

### Infection Control:

The broken bins were replaced the evening of our inspection. Any broken bins are to be reported to the Childcare Manager and they will replace them straight away.

### Supporting documentation submitted

#### General Safety:

The service have sent correspondence with the Garda Vetting Bureau in relation to one staff.

### Infection Control:

A photo of the bins and a receipt were sent to the inspectorate.

### Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider and supporting documentation submitted has adequately addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 23 in relation to infection control. The Childcare Manager has submitted evidence of an application for renewal to the inspectorate. This will be submitted to the inspectorate when received 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) 12 staff members had up to date first aid responder training.

(2)

(a) (b) A suitably equipped first aid box was available for the children.

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

### 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.
- (2) The record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection by-
- (a) a parent or guardian of a pre-school child attending or proposing to attend the pre-school service,
  - (b) an employee, and
  - (c) an authorised person.
- (3) A registered provider shall ensure that a record referred to in paragraph (2) is retained for a period of 5 years after its creation
- (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 fire drills as conducted was maintained in the service. It was noted that the last monthly fire drill was conducted on 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2026.
- (b) The maintenance record for the firefighting equipment indicated that an annual service was conducted in June 2025. The maintenance record for the smoke alarm system indicated that a service was last conducted In January 2026 and is serviced quarterly.
- (4) A notice of the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire was wall mounted in all playrooms. A fire assembly point was positioned on the grounds at the side of the building.

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

### Part VI - Safety

#### Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

#### Compliance Information

The service demonstrated adequate insurance for children in a sessional and part time service from 9<sup>th</sup> September 2025 to 1st September 2026.