

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DL129
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Name of Service:	Smallworld Childcare LTD
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Address of Service:	Drumlonagher, Donegal Town, Co. Donegal
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Eircode:	F94 FF82
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Name of Registered Provider:	Louise Gately
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	23/03/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	64	PM	63
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	TUSLA Child & Family Agency, Markievicz House, Barrack St, Sligo, F91 XC84
Inspection undertaken by:	S. Killeen & K. Folan
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
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Description of service

Small world 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 two outdoor play areas available on site for use by different groups of children, these are located to the back and side of the building.

Staffing

There were 19 staff members employed to work in the service 18 of which were present on the day of inspection. The 18 staff members include the register provider, deputy person in charge 16 staff employed to work directly with the children.

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.

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The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9,11,19,23,25,26, and 28. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

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 inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, deputy 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,*

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- (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) The registered provider ensured that.
- a) There was a designated person in charge and a named adult to deputise in their absence.
 - b) The designated person in charge was available on the premises throughout the period of inspection.
 - c) There was 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.
- (2) Following a review of previous inspection information, information available on inspection and discussion with the person in charge it was determined that three new staff members had been employed since the previous inspection on 10 October 2025. In addition, Garda Vetting renewal was requested for two staff members whose Garda Vetting had expired since the last inspection on 10 October 2025.
- The records of three new adults employed in the service and the Garda Vetting disclosures for two adults were reviewed. The following vetting information was available:
- (a) Five written validated references from past employers for three of the adults.
 - (b) One written validated reference from reputable sources for one of the adults.
 - (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for five staff. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
 - (d) Police vetting from the police authorities in another state was not required as employment records demonstrated that no adults had lived outside the state for a period of six consecutive months or more.

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- (4) Evidence of completion of a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent was on file for three staff members from the Department of Children, Disability and Equality.

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)-*
- (1) *a registered provider of a pre-school service other than a child-minding service or a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that there are at least 2 adults on the premises at all times,*

Compliance Information

- (1) On the day of inspection, there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the preschool children attending the service.
- (2) The minimum ratio of adults to children was maintained at all times throughout the inspection.
- On the morning of the inspection the following ratios were observed:
- In the toddler room, 2 adults cared for 9 children aged 2 years and 8 months to 3 years and 3 months.
- In the wobbler room, 2 adults cared for 9 children aged 1 year and 2 months to 2 years and 4 months.
- In the baby room, 2 adults cared for 5 children aged 9 months to 1 year.
- In the junior preschool room, 4 adults cared for 20 children aged 3 to 4 years.
- In the senior preschool room, 5 adults cared for 21 children aged 4 to 5 years.
- In the afternoon, the following ratios were observed:
- In the toddler room, 2 adults cared for 9 children aged 2 years and 8 months to 3 years and 3 months.
- In the wobbler room, 2 adults cared for 9 children aged 1 year and 2 months to 2 years and 4 months.

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In the baby room, 2 adults cared for 5 children aged 9 months to 1 year.

In the junior preschool room, 3 adults cared for 19 children aged 3 to 4 years.

In the senior preschool room, 6 adults cared for 21 children aged 4 to 5 years.

- (8) The registered provider ensured that there were always at least two adults on the premises when children were present in the service as evidenced in a sample review of rosters reviewed.

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

(1) A registered provider shall, in providing a pre-school service, ensure that-

(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

19 (a) (b)

The playrooms were large, bright, and well laid out, with clearly defined interest areas that encourage purposeful play and learning. Children's artwork was displayed throughout the rooms. Across all five care rooms, the spaces were designed to match the age and stage of the children. There was a wide mix of materials available—from puzzles and art supplies to dress-up clothes and construction toys. These were kept on low, open shelves so children could easily pick what they wanted to play with.

In the baby room, staff created a calm atmosphere where the babies could safely practice physical milestones like rolling, crawling, and pulling themselves up. The room was stocked with age-appropriate toys, including a mini-kitchen, soft toys, sensory items, and building blocks to support their early development. Materials in the baby room consisted of a small slide and climbing frame on soft mats for safe, active play. A wall mirror helped with visual development, while low-level furniture gave babies a safe way to practice standing and balancing. An adult-sized armchair was used for feeding and comforting, and a rest area consisting of soft matting and cushions that the babies were observed resting on a different time during the day.

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The toddler room was bright and welcoming, decorated with colourful bunting. The space was divided into defined interest areas to keep children engaged, including: A sensory and sand play station with buckets and tools for hands-on fun. Low shelving that let children lead their own play and stay independent. A cozy rest area with soft flooring and child-sized couches for relaxing. A large playhouse and kitchen set, complete with toy appliances and play food to encourage "real-life" role play. A dress-up zone with a variety of costumes to spark imagination and storytelling. A building area with a large road map with toy cars, trucks, and tractors to help with fine motor skills.

The wobbler room was specifically designed for younger toddlers. It focused on early movement and sensory play, featuring wall mirrors, tactile "fiddle" toys, and climbing frames to keep the children safely engaged. The junior preschool room was spacious with enough room for the children to play in small or large groups. Play materials such as loose parts, animals and Montessori materials were neatly organised on shelving and accessible to the children. The walls were decorated with the children's artwork. In addition, photographs of focal points within the community such as Donegal castle, the health centre, the Garda station and the local playground were displayed and labelled to support children's learning and understanding of the local community.

The senior preschool room was set up with different activities such as sensory tables with modelling dough, magnetic bricks, open ended construction blocks, plastic bricks, puzzles and an art area. The children were observed to move freely around the room, joining in any activity they chose. The room contained a home corner which included a "looking after baby" activity with items and matching labels available to develop children's language. On the day of the inspection, the children were learning about China and its culture with children actively participating identifying pictures of flags and the shape of the country.

Outside play was a big part of the day and this was observed on the day of inspection. Staff assisted the children by helping them into their coats, hats, and wellies. The outdoor area was divided into three zones: a sheltered baby area with artificial grass for safe exploring. A nature zone with a wooden deck and a soil area for gardening and sensory learning. A physical play zone for older children with climbing frames and slides to help them stay active.

The service provided the main hot meal, while snacks were brought from home. A two-week menu showed a variety of healthy options. On the day of the inspection, children enjoyed a lunch of fish fingers, carrots, and potatoes. Water and milk were available throughout the day accessible to the children as they wanted. Staff encouraged the older children to independently feed themselves. In the baby room, finger foods were used to help infants gain confidence, with staff nearby to help when needed. Mealtimes were social and inclusive, tables

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and chairs in each room were appropriate to the age and stage of development of the children attending the rooms.

Children who were toilet trained were encouraged and supported to use the toilet independently as required. Staff promoted and encouraged independence by prompting children on the process, including dressing and handwashing. Younger children's nappies were changed on a scheduled basis and more frequently if required. Children were observed hand washing at various intervals throughout the day, including after toileting, prior to mealtimes and after messy play. Aprons were available for messy play.

The service had a designated sleep room; the staff informed the inspector that sleep is child led. This was observed on the day of inspection with children asleep on the inspector's arrival to the service. The staff were observed to be consistently kind and caring to the children. The children appeared very settled and happy with their daily routine. One baby who was completing their first full day was observed to be comforted and reassured by staff. Staff were observed showing her a picture of her family pointing out mammy, daddy and her siblings.

The service used a digital app to keep parents informed about eating, sleeping, and napping. Staff also shared photos of the children's activities through the app, which helped to reassure parents. A key-worker system was in place in the service with named staff members assigned the responsibility for creating close relationships with a designated group of children and their parents. This promoted the development and sustainment of relationships between the children, their parents, and the staff in the service.

Transition from one activity to the next was handled smoothly. Staff gave children a five minute reminder before their next activity ensuring children had time to finish their activity. Children's choices were always respected, and staff were quick to adapt activities based on what the children were most interested in at the time. Staff were observed completing head counts of the children under their supervision before leaving a care room and on transition back into their rooms.

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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 main entrance into the service was found to be secured upon the inspectors' unannounced arrival to the service. A buzz entry system was provided allowing staff to control access preventing persons entering unauthorised and children from leaving the building unsupervised.
- All outdoor play areas were securely enclosed with high-level fencing and gated access points. Safety mechanisms on gates were positioned out of children's reach, ensuring secure boundaries while allowing supervised access.
- The staircase was fitted with a low-level handrail for children's use.
- Materials were observed to be in a good state of repair.
- Warm running water was available for hand washing at a temperature below 43°C.
- Cleaning products and equipment were stored out of the reach of children.
- Highchairs within the baby room were fitted with a 5-point safety harness and were in good state of repair.

Infection Control:

- The materials and resources throughout the service were visually clean.
- Tables and highchairs were observed to be cleaned prior to and after mealtimes in both care rooms.
- Foot operated pedal bins were available within the service for safe disposal of waste.
- There was adequate handwashing facilities provided throughout the service with thermostatically controlled warm water, liquid soap and paper towels.
- Aprons and gloves were available and observed in use by staff when changing of a child was required.
- Sanitary facilities were observed to be kept maintained and clean.
- Ventilation across the service was provided through a combination of openable windows and mechanical systems.
- Children were consistently supported to wash their hands at appropriate times, including before meals, after outdoor play, and following toileting or nappy changes.
- Child friendly handwashing posters were placed beside the sinks. Handwashing was supervised by the adults to ensure all hands were cleaned effectively.

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- Up-to-date cleaning schedules were in place and available for review. These schedules outlined routine cleaning practices across the service.

Administration of Medication:

- Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities regarding the safe administration of medication. Although no medication was administered during the inspection, medication administration forms were reviewed and completed in full.

Safe Sleep:

- The service had two designated sleep room with appropriate cots available to children.
- Sleep checks were observed to occur every ten minutes.
- Standard cots were available for babies under two years of age.
- Stackable floor beds and floor mats were available for children over two years of age.
- All standard cots had the required waterproof coverings and cellular blankets were provided.

Fire Safety:

- Fire doors were observed to be unobstructed throughout the service.
- Fire evacuation procedures were clearly displayed in the care room.
- Fire extinguishers were on the premises and easily accessible.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

- (1) A single-user trampoline was observed in one of the care rooms; these are not permitted for use unless clinically prescribed.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

The single use trampoline was removed immediately on the day of the inspection and has been permanently removed from the service.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

The inspector observed the trampoline being removed on the day of inspection

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Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection. This regulation is now compliant.

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) Evidence was available to demonstrate that five adults held current first aid responder

(FAR) certification, and this adult was rostered to work at the service during the hours of operation.

(2)

(a) There was sufficient first aid equipment supplied in the service which was stored out of reach of the children.

(b) The first aid supplies were accessible at all times should they be required.

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.

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(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 procedure was in place to practice and record monthly fire drills. The last documented fire drill was dated the 25/02/2026.
 - (b) A record of the number, type, and maintenance of firefighting equipment and smoke detection system in the service was on file. Records indicated that the last annual maintenance for the firefighting equipment was dated 26 August 2025. The records for the smoke detection system indicated the last service occurred on 27th January 2026.
- (2) The record referred to in paragraph (1) was available and open to inspection by-
- (c) an authorised person.
- (4) On the day of inspection, a notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire were observed to be displayed in a conspicuous place within the premises.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured adequate insurance was in place for the full day care service for 82 children up until 27 March 2026.