

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CC391
Name of Service:	Stepping Stones Pre-School
Address of Service:	Derrinagree National School, Derrinagree, Mallow, Co Cork
Eircode:	P51 PT63
Name of Registered Provider:	Marion De Freitas
Service type:	Sessional
Date of Inspection:	08/05/2025
No of pre-school children:	AM 9 PM N/A
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	13 Market Place Mallow Co Cork P51DD5Y
Inspection undertaken by:	B Fraher
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	N/A
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Description of service

Stepping Stones Pre-School is in operation since 2013 and is located in a room leased in a single storey primary school building. The service is situated in a rural area of Derrinagree, North Cork. The sessional service is privately operated and cares for children in the age range of 2 to 6 years. Children currently in the service are aged 4 to 5 years. The service opens from 9:25 to 12:25 and offers the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE). Rooms in the service include an entrance hallway, playroom, storeroom and sanitary accommodations for children. The staff member in the service has access to sanitary accommodations in an adjoining building. An outdoor play area is available at the front of building and access is also available to both basketball courts and a pitch at the back of the premises. Off the road parking is available at the side of the building.

Staffing

The service is staffed by one adult who is the registered provider. One relief staff member is also available who is the emergency contact also.

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

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 children and the registered provider, 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*

(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 person in charge on the day of inspection and an emergency contact available if required.
- (b) The person in charge was on duty when the inspector arrived and remained present throughout the inspection.
- (2) The staff files in relation to two adults were the subject of inspection.
- (a) Of the four required references, two were from previous employers with the required records of validation on file.
- (b) Of the four required references, two were from another source other than a previous employer with records of validation on file.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained and were on file for each of the two adults. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
- (d) Police vetting was required and available for the two adults linked to the service as they lived outside the state for longer than six consecutive months.
- (4) Two adults who worked directly with the children held a qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education from level 5 to Level 8 as listed on the National Framework of Qualifications.

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.

(3) Subject to paragraph (5), a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 2 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) therefore at that reference number is satisfied.

(8) Without prejudice to paragraphs (2) to (7)-

(c) a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that, where the person in charge operates the service single-handedly, a second person familiar with the operation of the service and in a position to provide assistance to the person in charge in operating the service is, at all times, within close distance of the service and available to attend the service to assist the person in charge in the event of an emergency.

Compliance Information

(1) At the time of inspection, there were the minimum number of adults required, responsible for the direct care and supervision of the children in attendance at all times.

(3) The service maintained the minimum ratio required as per regulations in the care room. The nine children attending the service were supervised directly by one adult.

(8)

(c) The registered provider has ensured that a second person, living in close proximity, that is familiar with the operation of the service is available to provide assistance in emergency.

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.*

(3) A record in writing referred to in paragraph (1) or (2) shall be open to inspection on the premises by-

- (c) an authorised person.*

Compliance Information

(1) (a-i) The nine records of the early years children attending the service were reviewed. Each of the children's records were found to contain the required information of (a) to (i) above.

(3)

(c) The records were available to the inspector to review on the day of inspection.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 19 - Health, welfare and development of child

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

(a) each child's learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the pre-school service through the provision of the appropriate activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child, and

Compliance Information

On the day of inspection, the following information was obtained through, direct observation and discussion with the registered provider and examination of relevant documentation.

Basic needs:

- The layout of the care room supported the children to move freely within their environment and to engage in their chosen tasks.
- Food was prepared by parents and guardians and consisted of wraps, melons, rolls, strawberries and yogurt. The food was stored in the refrigerator and was observed to be healthy and nutritious.
- The registered provider was observed helping and assisting the children where necessary at snack time.
- Drinking water was available to the children throughout the morning.
- The children were observed accessing the toilet independently with the registered provider available to provide assistance should it be required.
- Children were observed washing their hands before snack time and after outdoor play and using the toilets.
- A quiet space was incorporated into the care room which allowed children to rest if needed. Children who wished to rest while they attended the service could avail of the use of a couch.
- Children's personal items were stored on a hook in the hallway or in an open shelved area in the room.
- There was a large outdoor play area which the registered provider informed the inspector was used on a daily basis. Outdoor play was promoted and observed at the time of inspection with the registered provider observing and assisting children during play.

Supporting relationships:

- During snack time a social environment was promoted, as the registered provider encouraged conversation. One child discussed a trip to the dentist with children asking him questions around this. The children were afforded plenty of time to enjoy their food.
- The registered provider was observed to demonstrate patience and kindness in her interactions with the children as was noted when children's efforts were readily acknowledged.
- The registered provider sat at floor level with the children singing and interacting in their play, with marbles and moulding sand.
- The registered provider was observed intervening with minor issues to prevent problems arising such as when one child came over and explained what another child had done to make them upset. The registered provider called over both children to discuss the issue helping the children to find a joint resolution to the problem.
- A calm and supportive environment was created for the children, who were acknowledged and encouraged in their activities such as imaginative play, dressing up as police officers and builders, and building with bricks and a marble run.
- An upset child was observed to seek out the registered provider who responded positively to the child.
- Children's artwork, a happy birthday calendar with names and a family wall with family pictures were on display in the care room promoting a sense of belonging.
- Children maintained a garden area outdoors and watered plants using teamwork with the assistance of the registered provider.
- Communication with the parents or guardians was observed at collection when parents entered the hallway individually outside the care room, with the registered provider heard exchanging information regarding the children's day. The service also communicated via text message or email.

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 entrance door was secured. This restricted unauthorised access to the building and prevented the risk of children exiting unsupervised.
- Cleaning products were stored out of reach of the children.

- The toys and the play equipment assessed was in good condition.
- Blinds cords were secured by a tension device.

Infection control:

- Handwashing facilities were accessible to the children with warm running water, liquid soap and paper towels.
- The temperature of the warm water in the sanitary accommodation was appropriate to facilitate hand washing.
- Tables were sanitised in preparation for the mid-morning snack.
- Children's bags and coats were stored off the ground.
- Pedal operated bins were in use throughout the service.
- A refrigerator was used for the storage of perishable foods.

Administration of medication:

- Medication was not observed to be administered to the children on the day of inspection.
- Temperature reducing medicine was kept on site and was stored in the original box. The medicine inspected was in date and parental consent for the administration of this was observed to be available in the children's files.

Fire safety:

- Fire exits were noted to be free from obstruction.
- All fire extinguishers were wall mounted.

Outing:

- One outing is undertaken from the service on a yearly basis. Parents or guardians drive to the destination and remain with their own child for the duration of the outing.

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-

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

Compliance Information

(1) The attendance book was available in which the inspector observed that all of the children present on the day had their check in and out times completed for the duration of inspection.

(3)

(b) Visitor's records were kept in writing of any person entering the premises and the inspector was asked to sign in and out of the premises.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The insurance certificate indicated that there was sufficient cover in place for the provision of a sessional service and the policy was valid until the 27 March 2026.