

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CE129		
Name of Service:	Stepping Stones Montessori		
Address of Service:	Community Centre, O'Callaghan's Mills, Clare, Co. Clare		
Eircode:	V94 K5DY		
Name of Registered Provider:	Gerardine O'Driscoll		
Service type:	Sessional		
Date of Inspection:	01/12/2023		
No of pre-school children:	AM	11	PM N/A
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Quality and Regulation Directorate Tusla Child and Family Agency Ennis Primary Care Centre Station Road Ennis County Clare V95TY4E		
Inspection undertaken by:	Á.McCarthy		
Title:	Early Years Inspector		

Authority to Inspect

The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate carries out inspections of Early Years Services under Section 58(J) of the Child Care Act 1991 (as inserted by Section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013).

Conditions if applicable

Not applicable

Description of service

Stepping Stones Montessori was notified as a sessional service in 1998. The service is located on the first floor of the community centre, in the rural village of O'Callaghan's Mills, in County Clare. The programme of care and learning is facilitated Monday to Friday from 08:45 to 11:45 for children ranging from three to five years for 38 weeks of the year. The service is facilitated in one care room and in an enclosed outdoor play area to the rear of the building.

Staffing

On the 1st of December 2023 the registered provider worked directly with the children in attendance. The registered provider holds an award in Early Childhood Care and Education at level 8. A person is available as an emergency contact.

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. 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. The inspectorate reserves the right to edit responses received for reasons including clarity, completeness and compliance with administrative and legal processes. The contents of the report are compiled by the inspectorate body.

Acknowledgments

The inspector wishes to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider and the 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*

(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)

The registered provider was the designated person in charge and a person is available within close proximity of the service in the event of an emergency.

(b)

The registered provider was available throughout the inspection.

(2)

Two files were available and reviewed by the inspector. The findings included the following:

(a)

Two past employer references were available and validated where required.

(b)

Two references were obtained from a source other than a past employer.

(c)

Garda vetting disclosures were available in respect of the registered provider and the emergency contact person.

(d)

International police vetting was not required as the adults had not lived in another state for a period longer than six months.

(4)

The adult working directly with the children held a level 8 qualification 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)

The registered provider ensured that the children attending the pre-school service were supervised at all times.

(3)

On the 1st of December 2023 the minimum ratio of adults caring for the children was maintained at all times. One adult worked directly with the eleven children in attendance.

(8)(c)

The service is operated singlehandedly by the registered provider. In the event of an emergency a relief person is available within close proximity to care for the children.

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-

- (a) a parent or guardian of a pre-school child but only in respect of the record relating to that child,*
- (b) an employee who is authorised in that behalf by the registered provider, and*
- (c) an authorised person.*

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (1) is retained for a period of 2 years from the date on which the child to whom it relates ceases to attend the service.

Compliance Information

(1)
Enrolment forms were available for the thirteen children registered in the service. These forms were reviewed and detailed the required particulars outlined in (1) (a)-(i).

(3)
The children's registration forms were available for review by the inspector in the service.

(4)

The registered provider confirmed that the records referred to in paragraph (1) are retained for a period of two years after the children cease to attend 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

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

Basic Needs of Children:

The inspector observed the children's learning, development and well-being to be supported by the registered provider. The children were treated with respect and positive regard, this was observed by the registered provider using a soft, gentle tone of voice, positive language and consistent praise and encouragement. Positive behavioural strategies were used during all individual and group interactions.

The children were told in advance of changes in activities and learning and the transitions in the programme were completed with ease. Children were encouraged to be independent with their personal belongings, during play, while having their lunches and drinks and while using the toilet. The children's individual cues for assistance were responded to promptly and in a sensitive manner. The registered provider demonstrated an awareness of each child's interests, capabilities, and preferences. The service operated an open-door policy whereby parents communicated informally upon the children's arrival and collection from the service. Photographs of the children's experiences are shared daily with each parent.

Physical and Material Environment:

The indoor and outdoor environment provided an experience that was developmentally challenging, diverse, creative and enriching for the children. The children engaged in open-ended free play upon the inspector's arrival to the service. During the programme of learning the children engaged in various forms of play and learning activities that included pretend play in the kitchen; manipulative play using the magnets, shape sorters, jigsaws and expressive play through their individual colouring activities. The children discussed the Christmas story and the Christmas concert that was due to take place. Each child took a turn to open the advent calendar and a fun task was assigned to each child. The children share the responsibility daily in preparation for mealtimes; the tasks included choosing and placing the tablecloth, choosing and placing a centrepiece, organising the crockery and place settings and distributing the children's lunches. The children led the programme of learning and were consulted for planning activities. Mealtime was observed to be a fun and sociable occasion whereby the children conversed amicably with each other.

The indoor area was well planned with distinct interest areas offering lots of space for different types of play and learning activities. Low level tables and chairs were available for tabletop activities and for dining at mealtime. The areas of interest included a rest and an adjacent area with a large range of reading materials. Appropriately resourced, defined areas included a pretend kitchen, a pretend shop, an art station and a relaxation area. A large range of Montessori materials and equipment were available on low level shelving and accessed by the children in accordance with their individual preference. The walls displayed a range of themes and learning materials that included a calendar, a poster demonstrating animals in the snowy weather, photographs of community helpers, an illustrated story completed by the children called "The Tonga Story" and a creative artwork with the children's handprints. Individual learning journals were available demonstrating the children's learning journey through preschool. The outdoor area, located to the rear of the building, offered a space where the children could freely move, explore, exercise, and learn.

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:

- Both internal and external access to the service were appropriately secured with a bell operated system.
- The children's arrival and departure times were recorded in a logbook.
- Cleaning agents were secured appropriately out of reach of the children.
- The equipment and materials within the service were secured and maintained in good condition.

Infection Control:

- The service was maintained in clean condition and records of completed cleaning schedules were available.
- Running warm water, liquid soap, hand paper towels and lidded bins were available in the sanitary facility. Child friendly posters were available as prompters demonstrating good hand hygiene practices.
- The children washed their hands at appropriate intervals.

Administration of Medication:

- The registered provider confirmed that medications are not administered in the service.

Fire Safety:

- The fire exit routes and passageways were clear from obstruction.
- The fire assembly point was readily identifiable adjacent to the building.
- The service completed monthly fire drills to prepare for an evacuation of the service.

Outing:

- The registered provider demonstrated a good knowledge of the service's outings policy. An outings checklist and a risk assessment were available for completed outings.

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 had a record of up to date First Aid Response training.

(2)(a)

A suitably equipped first aid box was stored in an accessible position in the service.

(b)

A first aid box was available for use by the adults in the event of an emergency.

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.*
- (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)

Records were available to demonstrate that monthly fire drills were carried out in the service. The last fire drill took place on the 17th of November 2023.

(b)

Up-to-date records of the number, type and maintenance service were available for the firefighting equipment and the smoke alarm system. The most recent service of the firefighting equipment and the smoke alarm system took place on the 15th of November 2023.

(4)

A fire action notice was available demonstrating the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire.

Part VI – Safety

Regulation 28 – Insurance

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

Compliance Information

Up to date insurance cover was available for eleven children attending the sessional service. The policy is valid until the 1st of December 2024.