

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CE130
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Name of Service:	Stepping Stones Pre-School
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Address of Service:	Stonehall National School, Newmarket on Fergus, Co. Clare
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Eircode:	V95 EY06
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Name of Registered Provider:	Rachel Mulcahy
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	07/05/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	14	PM	0
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla Early Years Inspectorate, Quality and Regulation Directorate, Ennis Primary Care Centre, Station Road, Ennis, Co. Clare V95TY4E
Inspection undertaken by:	J Hayes
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).

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Description of service

This is a privately operated sessional service caring for pre-school children between the ages of two and six years.

The service is open from 09:00hrs- 12:00hrs Monday to Fridays.

This service operates in a prefabricated structure on the grounds of Stonehall Primary School in Newmarket on Fergus, Co Clare. One room is available to the children, and it can accommodate up to 22 children on a sessional basis at any one time.

The children have the use of three outdoor play areas, an enclosed astro turf play area, the school field, and an enclosed sheltered play area. These are located to the front and side of the premises;

Staffing

The registered provider operates the sessional service assisted by two adults who were all present on the day when the inspection was carried out.

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.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations:

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Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment (1)(a)(b),(2)(a)(b)(c)(d) and (4)

Regulation 11 - Staffing levels (1)(3)

Regulation 19 - Health, welfare and development of child (1)(a)

Regulation 23 - Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance (1)(3)(b)

Regulation 27 - Supervision

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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, 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*

(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,*

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(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)

On the day of the inspection, the registered provider was the designated person in charge and there was a named person available who was able to deputise if required.

(b)

During the period of the inspection the registered provider and the designated person in charge were present on the premises.

(2)

Three files were available in respect of the registered provider and the adults employed by the service. These files were reviewed, and the following was noted:

(a)

Five written and validated references from past employers were available.

(b)

One written and validated reference was obtained from a source other than a past employer.

(c)

Garda Vetting disclosures were available in respect of the three adults in the service. The service adhered to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d)

International police vetting was available in respect of one adult who had lived outside the state for a period of longer than six consecutive months as an adult.

(4)

The three adults working directly with the children held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education ranging from level 5 to level 8.

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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.

Compliance Information

(1)

On the day of Inspection there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children who attended the service.

(3)

The staff roster showed that the registered provider ensured that the minimum ratio of adults to children was adhered to in the service. On the 07 May 2026 three adults cared for fourteen children attending the sessional 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)

The children's learning, development and well-being was facilitated within the service through the provision of appropriate activities, interactions, materials, and equipment having regard to the age and developmental stage of the children.

Basic Needs of Children:

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The children were encouraged to be independent while caring for their belongings, their play materials and equipment, at mealtime and whilst using the toilet. Good personal hygiene practices were observed. The children were encouraged and supported to manage their own personal care appropriate to their age and level of development. Children could access the toilet at any time during the session. Staff supervised children's hand washing and provided assistance when needed.

Parents/Guardians provided the children's lunches which included various types of fruit, vegetable, sandwiches, crackers and yoghurt. Drinking water was available to the children at all times. The children and adults sat together at child size picnic benches in the outdoor area and conversed amicably during mealtime. Mealtime was observed to be a relaxed and sociable occasion with an unhurried atmosphere allowing children to complete their lunch at their own pace.

The outdoor play environment was intentionally prepared by the adults to encourage gross motor, fine motor and imaginative play experiences for the children. The children were observed to enjoy the free play opportunities in the well-resourced outdoor area which encouraged use of imagination, creativity, exploration and discovery.

Supporting Relationships Around Children:

The adults interacted with the children in a caring, kind and respectful manner. The adults listened attentively and conversed with the children at their level and responded promptly to their cues for assistance. Positive behavioural strategies were used during interactions, and the children were offered praise and encouragement. The adults demonstrated an awareness of the children's personal interests, preferences and capabilities. The transitions in the changes of activities were facilitated with ease, as the adults notified the children in advance of any changes in the programme of care and learning. The adults supported the children as they played individually and as part of a group. The children were provided with opportunities to develop good social skills as the adults encouraged them to play co-operatively and share toys and equipment. The children worked well together throughout the session and had high levels of motivation and interest in their play and learning.

The children were provided with opportunities to choose their individual activities and explore freely within the provided environment, these play experiences were guided by the adults. The adults promoted speech development through open ended discussions with the children. An informal communication approach was observed during interactions with parents/guardians at collection time. Parents and guardians were warmly welcomed into the service and informed of their children's activities of that day.

The setting maintained strong links with the adjacent primary school and the adults shared information in learning journals to support effective transitions between educational settings.

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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 entrance and exit to and from the service was secured to prevent unauthorised persons accessing the service.
- The outdoor play area was secured with fencing and a gate to protect the children within.
- The children were supervised at all times during the inspection.
- Cleaning agents were stored in a secured area out of reach of the children.

Infection Control:

- The service was maintained in a clean and hygienic condition.
- A cleaning schedule was available demonstrating measures taken to maintain and clean the service.
- The sanitary facilities were equipped with warm running water, liquid soap, hand paper towels and a lined, lidded pedal operated bin.
- The children washed their hands at regular intervals during the day. This included after using the toilet and prior to mealtime.

Fire Safety:

- The fire exits and routes were clear from obstruction throughout the service.
- Written records of completed monthly fire drills were available.
- A fire assembly point and fire exit signage were readily identifiable on the premises.
- Records of completed fire safety training were available for the adults working in the service.

Outing:

- The adults stated that outings are undertaken by the service.
- Documented risk assessments carried out prior to outings were available in the service and reviewed.
- An outings checklist was available and the adults demonstrated a good understanding of the safety measures to be in place for any outings undertaken by the service.

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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 arrival and departure times for each child attending the service was recorded on a daily basis. The attendance logs were kept within the playroom for easy access by the adults. The attendance register was maintained accurately and reflected the number of children in the service on 07 May 2026.
- (3)(b)
A record was maintained of any visitors to the service.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

A registered provider shall ensure that pre-school children attending the service are supervised at all times.

Compliance Information

The service ensured that children were appropriately supervised during the inspection. The ratio of adults supervising children was maintained at all times in the indoor and outdoor learning environments. Three adults with the required qualifications supervised the fourteen children in attendance. The children's arrival and departure times were recorded in a written record book. Children were always within sight or hearing of the adults.

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Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The insurance certificate for the service was available and was valid to 27 March 2027. The required cover was available for a maximum of 22 pre-school children to attend on a sessional basis.