

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CN054
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Name of Service:	Small Steps Childcare
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Address of Service:	Unit 4 and 5 Aeta Place, Gortnaskesh, Cavan
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Name of Registered Provider:	Anne Reilly
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date(s) of Inspection:	14/03/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	35	PM	11
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Family Resource Centre, Commons Road, Navan, Co. Meath
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Inspection undertaken by:	C Tunney and AM Cunningham
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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 Steps Childcare is a privately operated Early Years' Service located in Cavan town, in operation since 2013. The childcare service provides full day care, part time and a sessional service to children aged from 1 year to 6 years. The service operates from 08:00hrs to 18:00hrs Monday to Friday and participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme. The pre-school comprises of three pre-school rooms, Toddler Room, Pre-school 1 and Pre-school 2 Room. A school aged service is also provided. A partially covered outdoor play area was located to the rear of the pre-school.

Staffing

Nine staff members are employed in the service including the manager, a cook and the registered provider. Additionally, three students are undertaking placement in the pre-school, of which two students were present on the day of inspection. The manager is the designated person in charge. The registered provider is not service based.

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 announced and focused on the area of governance/ health, welfare and development of child/ safety/ premises and facilities. The inspections may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under Regulation 9 Management & Recruitment, Regulation 11 Staffing Levels, Regulation 15 Record of pre-school Child, Regulation 19 Health, Welfare & Development of Child, Regulation 21 Equipment and Materials, Regulation 23 Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of Child, Regulation 24 Checking In and Out and Record of Attendance, Regulation 25 First Aid, Regulation 26 Fire Safety Measures and Regulation 28 Insurance. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report. The three pre-school rooms in operation on the day of inspection were inspected.

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 in relation to excessive water temperatures throughout the service. Additionally, an Immediate Action Notice was issued in relation to a staff member caring for pre-school children who did not have Garda Vetting Clearance. The registered provider submitted a timely response to the Immediate Action Notices which were accepted by the inspectorate.

A referral was made to Cavan County Council Fire Officer.

Acknowledgments

The inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the manager, 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,
- (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.

(7) A registered provider shall ensure that all employees, unpaid workers and contractors are appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training, including in relation to the following:

- (a) the policies, procedures and statements of the service specified in Schedule 5;
- (b) Part VIIA (inserted by section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (No. 40 of 2013)) of the Act, and
- (c) these Regulations.

Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider had identified a manager and a named person to deputise as required.

(b) The manager was present on arrival of the inspector and was present for the duration of the inspection.

(2) Nine staff files and three student files were inspected.

(a) Twelve written past employer reference were available, of which 7 references were verified by the registered provider.

(b) In the absence of past employer references eight reference from a source other than an employer was available, of which 3 were verified by the registered provider.

(c) Garda Vetting was available in respect of the seven staff members and three students, of which 10 certificates were issued within three years as per the Regulatory Notice.

(d) Not applicable as the adults had not lived outside the state for a period of more than 6 consecutive months.

(4) Of the eight staff members providing direct care to pre-school children, seven staff members held a major award in Early childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualification Framework.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a)

- Two required references were not available in respect of one staff member.
- A second reference was not available in respect of one staff member.
- A second reference was not available in respect of a student.

Of the 18 staff references available, 10 were not verified by the registered provider.

(c) Garda Vetting was not available in respect of one staff member providing direct care to pre-school children. An immediate action notice was issued to the registered provider requesting a response.

(4) There was no evidence to demonstrate that a staff member providing direct care to pre-school children held a major award in Early childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualification Framework.

(7) There was evidence that the registered provider did not have an induction procedure in place or a system for staff supervision. Documentation in relation to the induction procedure or training offered was not available. The inspector was told a new staff member commenced on the day of inspection. The induction consisted of the “ we went through policies and procedures and what to do in the rooms when the staff member came in last week in the afternoon”. There was no documentation available. The procedure outlined to the inspector was inadequate to ensure the staff member was provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training as outlined in regulation 9(7). Additionally, there was no evidence of staff meetings or staff supervision to demonstrate adequate support and supervision is provided to staff members.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

2(a)

- Two references have now been placed in staff file.
- Second reference has now been verified and place in staff file.
- All references have been verified in relation to a student.

(c) Garda vetting had been applied for staff member before she started in Sept 2023, it had come through and wasn't printed for file. Vetting has been printed and placed in staff file.

(4) Staff member Transcript of awards was in staff folder with level of qualifications of each subject and level passed. The staff member certificate has now been photocopied and put into file.

(7) Manager is working on an Induction policy

As stated on day of inspection – there was a staff meeting organised for Friday 22nd March which was on staff roster for the following week.

Preventative Action:

- Going forward the manager will make sure all files are up to date, garda vetting and references are available and printed off and placed in all staff files.
- Manager will make sure all policies are up to date and staff meetings will take place regularly with records maintained for inspection.

Supporting documentation submitted

Vetting and qualification documentation submitted.

Summary Comment

The response from the manager has been accepted. Vetting procedures are available in respect of each staff member and student working in the service. The inspectorate has accepted that the induction policy is under development (the manager has recently commenced her new position). Regulation 9 has been addressed and will be reviewed at the next inspection.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 10 - Policies, procedures etc. of pre-school service

A registered provider of a pre-school service shall ensure that the written policies, procedures and statements specified in Schedule 5 are in place for the service.

Non-Compliance Information

A staff induction policy was not available to demonstrate the induction and staff support / supervision procedures in place.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action:

The manager is working on an induction policy for all staff.

Preventative Action:

Manager will ensure all policies are up to date.

Summary Comment

The response from the manager has been accepted as this policy is underdevelopment (the manager has recently commenced her new position). Regulation 10 remains outstanding and will be reviewed at the next inspection.

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)-

(a) 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) There was an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the service.
- (2) The adult to child ratios were correct in the service when the inspectors arrived.

The following adult to child ratios were observed as follows:

- **Toddler Room:** Two adults cared for 8 pre-school children, (aged between 1 year 6 months to 2 years 8 month) of which 5 children were attending for full day care.
- **Pre-School Room 1:** Two staff members cared for 10 pre-school children (aged between 3-6 years), of which 5 children were attending for full day care.
- **Pre-School Room 2:** Two staff members cared for 17 pre-school children (aged between 3-6 years), of which 2 children were attending for full day care.

- (8) There was evidence that two staff members are present, at all times in the service as required by Regulation 11 (8) as evidenced from examination of the staff roster and staff sign in records.

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

Basic Needs:

- Children's lunches were observed to be nutritious and healthy. Children attending for full day care were provided a snack by the service of fruit, yogurt and bread sticks. Dinner was cooked in the service and consisted of beef stew served in an age-appropriate consistency. The staff members sat with the children during snack time / dinner and was attentive to their needs; conversations and interactions between the children and the adults were observed to be informative and playful.

- The children's personal care was attended to. Hand hygiene was carried out at recommended times, prior to mealtimes and following personal care and outdoor play. The children were supported to be self-caring, suitable to the age and stage of development, including hand washing, toileting and caring for their belongings.
- Nappy changing was carried out at a timely manner.
- Rest areas were available for the children to avail of quiet time.

Supporting Relationships:

- Positive engagement between the staff members and children were noted. The staff members used age-appropriate soft tones, used the child's individual name and engaged respectfully with the children.
- The staff members were attentive to the children especially to the children who required additional support. Transitions are clearly announced and signalled by staff. Children enjoyed group activities in the toddler room such as singing children's favourite songs, and storytelling.
- An adult chair facilitated staff to provide nurturing care during bottle feeding or assist a child if unsettled.
- In group time the children enjoyed familiar songs and spoke about the weather and activity topics. The staff members appeared familiar with the children's interests and choices; they promoted the children's independence while offering adequate support as required.
- In the toddler room a daily communication sheet is sent home with a record of their child's activities to share with parents.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 21 – Equipment and materials

A registered provider shall ensure that there is adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment and materials available on the premises of the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

- The play materials and furniture in the Toddler Room included a sand tray/ sensory material, construction toys such as trucks and large blocks, a small slide, climbing mats, a play kitchen with support material and arts n crafts. Evidence of the children’s artwork was displayed. There was a soft seating area and an adult armchair to support the young children.
- The two Pre-school Rooms contained play materials including dress up clothes, arts and crafts, construction toy area, kitchen with support material, playhouse, soft toys, small animals, beauty sets and dolls & prams to support imaginative play. There was evidence of seasonal themes such as St Patricks day, Spring and Easter art activities which were displayed.

Non-Compliance Information

1. The layout of the play materials in toddler room did not adequately facilitate meaningful play. For example, as there was no storage area for the outdoor play equipment, excess small tractors and small scooters was stored in the toddler room. This equipment took up valuable space required for age group of children who attend the toddler room. Additionally, there was a limited supply of books and other age-appropriate play material such as puzzles.
2. Our family Tree and pictures of the children added a pleasant ambiance for the young children attending but it was situated at high level and not visible to the young children who might benefit from looking at pictures of their parents and siblings.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

1. The small tractors & scooters weren’t stored in toddler room, these were bought for the children to play indoors to help develop gross motor skills.
There is range of books supplied in the toddler room, 3 massive shelves full. The toddlers had thrown all around the room. New puzzles had been bought a few days before the inspection and one staff member had taken a few out to play with.
2. Our family tree in the toddler room has been placed lower in the room.

Preventative Action:

1. Manager has placed one or two tractors & scooters outside but will be leaving the rest in the room as children love playing with these indoors.
Manager will get more books when needed for toddler room.
More new puzzles will be bought.
2. Manager will keep the family tree at a level for the children to see.

Summary Comment

The response from the manager has been accepted. Regulation 21 has been addressed and will be reviewed at the next inspection.

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 premises were appropriately secured to prevent pre-school children from exiting unsupervised and restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the pre-school.
- Cleaning agents were stored out of reach of children.
- Children's attendance was recorded daily, staff members also recorded their attendance.
- The outdoor area was adequately secured.

Infection Control:

- Hand washing was carried out as recommended, children were encouraged to be independent, and assistance was given as required.
- Prior to the children's meals, tables were cleaned.
- A system was in place for managing children's linen.
- Soothers are sent home on a daily basis in individual named containers.
- Mouthed toys are cleaned in warm soapy water.

Administration of Medication:

- There was evidence that medication was administered as per the service policy with parents' signature.

Safe Sleep:

- The sleep room contained four cots which were maintained in a proper state of repair. Ten-minute sleep records were recorded for children who availed of sleep, in relation to position, colour and breathing status.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. The water temperature in the building was excessive which posed a safety hazard. The water temperature recording at the children's hand basin in pre-school room was 68°C, the water temperature at the children's hand basin in the hallway was 48 °C and at the hand basin the toddler room which read 48°C. The manager took immediate action when requested by the inspector and reduced the temperature at the heating pump. An immediate action notice was issued for the registered provider to take immediate action to reduce the water temperature to a safe temperature of less than 43°C.
2. Garda Vetting clearance in respect of two adults employed in the service were issued in 2019, and not issued within three years as per the Regulatory Notice which posed a safety risk.

Infection Control:

3. The soap dispenser was not working in the staff toilet which posed an infection control risk as appropriate hand washing was unable to take place.
4. The bins in both the staff toilet and children's toilet were placed on a ledge therefore both staff and children lifted the lid to dispose of paper towel which posed an infection control risk.

Corrective and Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. Manager has all water systems turned down & we are waiting on a plumber to call out.
2. One staff members garda clearance was already applied for before inspection and has been placed in file. Second member of staff has been renewed and placed in file.

Preventative Action:

1. Manager checks water temperatures every morning.
2. Manager will keep up to date on garda vetting for all staff.

Infection Control:

Corrective Action:

1. The soap dispenser was working the day before, as all staff replace soap when it runs off. New batteries have been placed in the soap dispenser.
2. All staff members that open will check that all bins are on floor to allow for the bin to be foot operated.

Preventative Action:

1. All staff will check each evening that soap dispensers are working.
2. All staff members that open will check that all bins are on floor to allow for the bin to be foot operated.

Supporting Documentation:

- Evidence of updated Garda Vetting.
- Evidence of daily water temperature recording.

Summary Comment

The response from the manager has been accepted. Updated Garda vetting documentation was submitted. Documentation in relation to water temperature recordings were reviewed and were within the accepted temperature readings. Regulation 23 has been addressed and will be reviewed at the next inspection.

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-

(a) no person other than-

(i) pre-school child attending the service,

(ii) a person dropping or collecting such a child,

(iii) an employee, or

(iv) an unpaid worker, can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee, and

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

Compliance Information

(1) A record was kept of each child's time of arrival and departure on a daily basis by the staff members.

(3)(a) and (b) A system was in place to ensure that no person other than the children's parents / guardians, employees or authorised visitors can enter the pre-school. A visitor's book was maintained, there was evidence that visitors were requested to record their attendance, the inspectors were requested to record their arrival and departure times.

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) Three staff members were trained in First Aid Response (FAR) and available to the children attending the pre-school service on the day of inspection.
- (2)(a) and (b)
- The first aid box was suitably equipped and safely stored in readily accessible positions in the care rooms out of the reach of children.

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) A record was maintained of fire drills which had been completed in the service. Fire drills were carried out monthly. The last recorded fire drill took place on 23/01/2024.
- (b) A record was kept of the number, type and maintenance of the fire extinguishers in the premises, which were last serviced 11/01/2024.
- (4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was conspicuously displayed in the premises.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) (b) An up-to-date maintenance record was not available in respect of the smoke alarms in the premises, the last service took place on 07/12/22.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

Corrective Action:

Someone was out to check alarms and replaced all batteries.

I have been in contact with the landlords of the building, the main fire alarm system activates the whole building.

Preventative Action:

Maintenance on the smoke alarm maintenance will be carried out on a yearly basis going forward.

Supporting documentation submitted

Invoice -batteries for smoke alarm

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider was inadequate. Evidence of purchasing batteries for a smoke alarm was not accepted as all smoke alarms must be mains powered operated. A valid smoke alarm maintenance certificate was not submitted to the inspectorate despite repeated requests to do so. A referral to the Fire Officer was made on the 30/04/24. Regulation 26 remains outstanding.