

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

**TUSLA Identifier:** TU2015CN054

**Name of Service:** Small Steps Childcare

**Address of Service:** Unit 4 and 5 Aeta Place, Gortnaskesh, Cavan, Co. Cavan

**Eircode:** H12 TX63

**Name of Registered Provider:** Anne Reilly

**Service type:** Full Day

**Date of Inspection:** 13/03/2025

<b>No of pre-school children:</b>	AM	39	PM	13
-----------------------------------	----	----	----	----

<b>Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:</b>	Early Years Inspectorate, Hampton Court, Cootehill Road, Drumalee, Co Cavan. H12 YY84
<b>Inspection undertaken by:</b>	S Mc Kenna M Mc Donnell
<b>Title:</b>	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** Click or tap here to enter text.

### 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 sessional care to a maximum of 59 children aged 1 to 6 years. The service operates from 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday and participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme from 9am to 12 midday and 9.30am to 12.30pm. The service comprises of three care rooms named the Toddler Room, Junior Preschool and Senior Preschool rooms. An office, a staff room and a kitchen are also provided. An outdoor play area is located to the rear of the service. Car parking is available to the rear of the premises. School aged childcare is provided.

### Staffing

Eleven staff members are employed in the service including the service manager, a cook, the registered provider and one adult employed under the Access and inclusion Model (AIM). Additionally, one student is undertaking placement in the service but was not present on the day of inspection. 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 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.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under Regulation 9 Management & Recruitment, Regulation 11 Staffing Levels, 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 26 Fire Safety Measures, Regulation 28 Insurance. However, on inspection an additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 29 Premises. 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, service 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*
- (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,*
- (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;*

### Compliance Information

(1) (a) The service had a designated person in charge who is the service manager, and a named person in charge to deputise in their absence.

(b) Following discussion with the manager and a review of the staff roster it was confirmed that when the preschool service was in operation the designated person in charge or the named person in charge were on the premises.

(c) A management structure was in place, which was clearly identifiable through review of the staff roster and discussion with the staff team.

(2) Of the 11 employed staff, 8 staff files were reviewed upon the service's last inspection on 14/03/2024.

The files for 3 new staff and 1 student on work experience have been reviewed upon this inspection.

- (a) A total of 4 written and validated references from a previous employer were on file.

- (b) A total of 4 written and validated references from a reputable source were on file.
- (c) Four Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years for 11 employed staff.
- (d) A review of the employment history for the 3 staff and one student, demonstrated that 1 staff member and 1 student had lived outside the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months. Two police vetting certificates were available on file.
- (4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that two staff employed to work with children, held an appropriate childcare qualification at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications, or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent. A qualification for the cook and one student was not required.
- (7) (a) Induction checklists in line with the recruitment policy where available and demonstrated where staff sign off to acknowledge that they have received an induction process and have reviewed policy and procedure training.

### Non-Compliance Information

(9) (2) (c)

Service specific garda vetting had not been obtained for one staff member. The garda vetting on file was from the staff members recent college work experience placement which took place within the service.

### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

#### **Corrective and Preventive Action**

Garda Vetting had been applied for, but unfortunately the relief staff member has left and will no longer be relief for us. Took note in our new staff folder to always apply for vetting even if vetting has been sourced from the college even when just relief work.

#### **Supporting documentation submitted**

Evidence of original application made.

### Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider stating the employee has now left the service, and therefore no Garda vetting is now required adequately addresses the non-compliance in Regulation 9 (2) (c).

### art 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) On the day of inspection there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) The adult to child ratios were correct in the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection.

The following adult to child ratios were observed when the service was operating at full capacity in the morning:

Two adults cared for 10 children aged 1 year 2 months to 3 years 2 months in the Toddler room.

Two adults cared for 15 children aged 3 years 4 months to 4 years 3 months in the Junior Preschool.

Two adults cared for 14 children aged 4 years to 5 years 2 months in the Senior Preschool.

In the afternoon a total of 13 preschool children were being cared for by 3 adults.

Two school aged children were present also.

In addition to the above, the service manager covered staff lunch breaks in the Toddler room.

(8) A review of the staff rosters and the staff sign in and out records, demonstrated that there are at least 2 adults on the premises while the full day care service is in operation.

### 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

The following examples demonstrate how the registered provider ensured that the children's learning, development and well-being was facilitated within the daily life of the service:

##### Basic Needs

Healthy eating was promoted within the service. The snacks and meals eaten by the children were varied and suitable for their age and stage of development. The younger children were encouraged to feed themselves where they could, with supports provided by staff when needed. The children in the Toddler room had their own individual placemats which were observed to be used at meal times. Drink bottles were accessible to the children in the Preschool rooms, with the drinks stored on a shelf in the Toddler room where children were observed to signal to the staff that they wanted their drinks throughout their day.

Care for children's appearances was provided through the use of bibs at meals times for younger children, and the use of aprons at messy play activities. The younger children's noses were observed to be cleaned by staff when required.

The toilets provided for the children attending the Senior preschool room were located directly off the care room, and the children were observed to use this area by themselves with adults close by if needed. The Junior preschool toilets were located down a hallway from their care room, and when the children needed to use the toilets a staff member remained with them at these times. The younger children who were toilet training received gentle reminders from staff, and the younger children had their nappies changed in line with their routine.

The sleep needs of the children in the Toddler room were in line with their individual needs, which was observed during the inspection. Areas of rest were provided in all the care rooms with soft mats and blankets, cushions and teddies, along with soft seating available for the children to take time out to rest during their day.

Younger babies were observed to play and roll on soft floor areas in the Toddler room. Soft foam shapes provided an area where the children were observed to have fun sliding and jumping while staff sat and played with the children.

The children in the Junior and Senior preschool room availed of outdoor play in the morning and afternoon time, with the children in the Toddler room observed playing outdoors in the afternoon.

### **Supporting Relationships**

A key worker system was in place which allows close relationships to be formed between the children and staff. Individual care plans were in place where children required additional care and supports. Staff spoken to, were aware of strategies to support children and they were observed using these supports on the day of inspection.

There was minimal staff change over observed during the inspection, with the children in all care rooms demonstrating familiarity with the staff who cared for them. Opportunities for children to play with their siblings was facilitated in the afternoon when the Toddler and Junior preschool rooms joined, and also during outdoor play times.

The staff used gentle encouragement for children to be mindful of other children's feelings and encouraged turn taking and positive interactions. The staff were observed to praise the children for positive interactions with their peers using words such as "*well done*".

The staff were observed to demonstrate sensitivity, warmth and positive regard for children and their families. New children were given adequate time to settle in at a pace that suits their needs and development, with staff working with parents to ensure the transition time suits the children's needs.

The staff in all the care rooms were observed to treat each child with respect and addressed each child by name. Discussions about the children's home life were observed which demonstrates the staff's familiarity with the child's home life and family members.

The staff were observed to communicate using soft gentle tones while interacting with the younger children. Outside of mealtimes, nappy changing or sleep times the staff in the Toddler room were observed to spend a significant amount of time playing on the floor with the younger children. A fun energetic atmosphere was provided by the staff using gentle but upbeat tones in singing and talking with the children.

The staff in the preschool rooms provided a warm and welcoming environment to the children within their care.

The staff were observed to interact well with the children, with the children's freedom of choice respected.

Communication with parents is upon arrival and collection times, with communication sheets used in the Toddler room to advise parents of their children's eating, sleeping and play interests each day.

The staff across all care rooms appeared familiar with all the children when they joined together in the afternoons. The staff team were observed to communicate clearly with one another which ensured transitions were smooth.

### 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 three care rooms were set up with clearly identifiable play areas, which were suitable for the age of the children in each room and were developmentally appropriate for the children in attendance on the day of the inspection. Play materials and equipment were well organised, available, and accessible at a low level and within the children’s reach. There was an adequate quantity of materials to allow for children’s freedom of choice and to allow for opportunities of play in small and large groups. The equipment available provided many opportunities for enriching play experiences for the children. Play equipment was observed to be durable and easy to clean.

Areas of play in the Toddler room included a sand tray, a soft play shapes area with a mirror, a construction area with dress up materials, a creative arts section, a cosy seating area where children could relax and read books.

Also inclusive of a play kitchen with play materials, dolls and suitable play equipment, table top toys to include jigsaws, and small ride on trucks for children to experience gross motor play opportunities while indoors.

The Junior and Senior preschools were laid out similarly to include an art area with paper, sponges, paintbrushes and paint readily available for the children to use. There was a construction area with tools Hi-Vis jackets and hard hats, alongside cars, railway tracks and a road play mat. The dress-up area had a dressing table and mirror alongside dress-up clothes. The cosy corner contained a low bookshelf with easily accessible books. There were two small couches for the children to sit on in this area. Table top toys to include jigsaws and connecting toys were provided. Small world play houses and figures along with dolls and doll equipment provided role play opportunities. Sensory play to include rice, pine cones and sand was provided for use.

Displays of the children’s creative art work to include recently themed Spring activities were displayed on the walls in the service, with birthday displays, family photos, “our community” and “all about me” displays located at levels easily viewed by the children. The older children in the Toddler room took great pride in showing their own “all about me” page to the inspector, talking about their family members and also naming out their friend’s pages based on the photos on display.

The tables, chairs and highchairs provided for the children were suitable for the age stage and development of the children present in each care room. Seating for adults was provided and a nursing chair in the Toddler room

allowed for space for the adults to relax and comfort the younger children and to bottle feed the younger children when needed.

The outdoor area had a soft ground surface which was enclosed by wooden fencing and secure gates. A section of the outdoor area was covered to allow play outdoors in inclement weather conditions. Support poles were appropriately padded. Play equipment available included a variety of ride-on, push-a-long and hop-on toys. A tunnel, slide, sand tray with play equipment and a seating area was also provided.

The service manager advised the inspectors that the staff team had worked closely with a quality development team within the last 12 months, which they stated had in turn positively influenced the experiences for the children and the play environments provided within the service. The changes discussed by the manager were observed during the inspection by the inspectors such as the free flow of play time to allow for children's choice, the easy availability of play materials and equipment for the children, and the sensory materials available in the care rooms during the inspection. The staff team also discussed the benefits of outdoor play, and the child's choice and availability of toys within their indoor environment with the inspectors.

### 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 following safety measures were observed on the day of inspection:

- Upon the inspectors arrival the premises were appropriately secured with a secured key coded main entrance door, to prevent a child from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises. The inspectors were requested to sign the visitors book upon arrival.
- The enclosed outdoor area was observed to be free from hazards and was secured with high level wooden fencing and lockable gates.
- The children were observed to be adequately supervised both indoors and outdoors during the inspection.
- The toys and play materials used by the children were maintained in good repair.
- Windows in each of the care rooms had high level openable sections which were out of reach of the children.
- The storage areas were locked an inaccessible to the children.

- Cleaning materials were stored on high level shelving out of the reach of children.

### Infection Control:

The inspectors observed the following infection control measures in practice within the service:

- Warm running water, hand soap, pedal operated bins and paper towels were provided at each wash hand basin.
- The children were observed to wash their hands after using the toilet and before meal times.
- Sanitary areas were ventilated by mechanical ventilation.
- Cleaning schedules were in place and completed up to date.
- The children that had soothers, were stored in individually labelled containers and the staff explained the recommended cleaning process to the inspector.

### Administration of Medication:

- Staff outlined the process if a child required medication while attending the preschool service to the inspector. No children were observed to be given medication during the inspection.

### Safe Sleep:

- A sleep room with 5 cots was provided for children's use.
- Individual bedding was used for each child and washed on a weekly basis, or more frequent if required.
- Sleep records were maintained for all sleeping children and included recording of the colour, position and breathing pattern at 10-minute intervals for each child. The sleep room temperature was also recorded, and staff informed the inspector if the temperature rose above the recommended 20°C the steps they would take to cool the sleep room down.

### Fire Safety:

- Fire drills occur monthly, demonstrated by records available for review. The fire exits remained clear during the inspection.

## Non-Compliance Information

### Infection Control:

The food items taken in from home for the children were observed to contain perishable items such as yogurts, meat and cheese. These food items were stored in the children's bags in the hallway and not in a refrigerator at the recommended storage of 5°C or below.

### Action submitted by the Registered Provider

#### Corrective & Preventive Action

##### Infection Control:

We have placed all snacks in our main fridge. We are in the process of purchasing 3 fridges. One for each room.

#### Supporting documentation submitted

##### Infection Control:

Photographic evidence of fridge order.

#### Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider has adequately addressed the non-compliance in Regulation 23.

### 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.*

*(4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (3)(b) is retained for a period of one year from the date to which it relates.*

#### Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider used written records which detailed each child's arrival and departure time on a daily basis.

(3) (a) The registered provider ensured that only preschool children, a person dropping or collecting a preschool child, an employee or unpaid worker can only enter the premises upon the staff members approval.

(b) A visitor log book was maintained.

### 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 of the fire drills that take place was available.
- (b) The annual maintenance certificate for the fire extinguishers were dated 08 January 2025, and smoke alarms were dated 21 February 2025.
- (4) The fire evacuation procedures were displayed on the walls throughout the service, which contained details in relation to the procedure 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

The registered provider had insurance cover in place for 56 pre-school children attending the service on a Full-Time basis. The policy showed that the service had insurance in place from 28 March 2024 to 27 March 2025.

### Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

#### Regulation 29 - Premises

*A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-*

- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and

#### Non-Compliance Information

(d) The floor covering in the Toddler and Junior Preschool rooms was worn with cracks and holes in places. The areas where the worn flooring was located exposed a concrete underground surface. The exposed areas were not smooth therefore could not be adequately cleaned posing an infection control risk.

## Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

### **Corrective and Preventive Action**

The owner is looking at different places to come fit new flooring for us. Keep up to date with the flooring in all areas to prevent from becoming so worn.

### **Supporting documentation submitted**

Photographic evidence of an invoice for 2 new room floorings to be fitted in July.

### **Summary Comment**

The non-compliance found upon inspection under Regulation 29 (d) remains outstanding as works have yet to be completed. This will be reviewed upon the service's next inspection.