

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CW041
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Name of Service:	Stepping Stones Childcare Centre
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Address of Service:	Moneybeg, Royal Oak Road, Bagenalstown, Carlow.
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Eircode:	R21 N838
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Name of Registered Provider:	Finuala McGuinness
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	27/07/2023
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No of pre-school children:	AM	37	PM	29
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla Child & Family Agency, Athy Road, Carlow
Inspection undertaken by:	Norma Thornton
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
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Description of service

Stepping Stones Childcare Centre is a full day childcare centre, located in a purpose built premises on the grounds of Bagenalstown's multi-faceted family resource centre in Bagenalstown county Carlow. The service provides sessional, part-time, and full day childcare services, Monday to Friday, for 50 weeks of the year, closing for a week at Christmas and Easter. The service operates from 08:00 to 18:00 hours and also provides a school age service. The centre contains a total of five early years classrooms and two designated school aged classrooms. There is a spacious outdoor area, which is further divided into separate play areas, each of which, can be directly accessed from each classroom, and a further larger outdoor grass area with sensorial areas and physical challenging elements, for the children.

Staffing

There were 22 staff employed in the service including 19 staff members working directly with the children, 2 cleaners and a chef. The registered provider is a member of the voluntary board of management that governs the service and does not work in the service.

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 inspections may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under the following regulations:

- 9(1)(2)(3)(4)-Management and Recruitment,
- 11(1)(2)-Staffing Levels,
- 16(1)-Record in relation to Pre-School Service,
- 20(1)(a)(b)-Facilities for Rest and Play,
- 22-Food and Drink,
- 23-Safeguarding Health, Safety, and Welfare of child,
- 25-First Aid,
- 26- Fire Safety Measures,

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under Regulation 20 (1)(a)(b). As a result, the scope of the inspection included the following rooms: The Sunshine room, the Acorn room, the Sky room and the Forest room.

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 person in charge, 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.

(3) The procedures specified in paragraph (2) shall be carried out prior to any person being appointed, assigned, or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the pre-school service.

(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 designated person in charge on the day of inspection.

(b)The designated person in charge confirmed that there was also a second named person available to deputise as required. Both were present for the duration of the inspection.

(c) A clear outline of the management of the structure was displayed in the service, identifying the lines of authority, accountability, the roles, and responsibilities of individual staff members in the service.

(2) Staff files for 22 staff members employed in the service were reviewed by the inspector.

(a)(b) Two references were available on file for each of 18 staff members, 16 of which were validated, from either a past employer or from a reputable source.

(c) Garda vetting certificates were available on file, for each staff member working directly with the children.

(d) Police vetting was available for each of nine staff members, who had lived outside of the state for a period longer than six months.

(4) Certificates of qualifications were available in each staff member's file, demonstrating that each staff member held a qualification at the minimum level 5 and above on the national framework of qualifications.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a)(b) 1. Two references available on file for two staff members had no record of validation documented.

2. There were no references available on file for four staff members working in the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The following corrective and preventive response was submitted.

Corrective and Preventive Action

References have been sought and validated.

All new staff references will be checked and validated prior to the start date being given.

Staff files will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copies of relevant validated references were submitted to the office of the early years inspector.

Summary Comment

The actions submitted are appropriate to address the non-compliances. The implementation of these actions will be reviewed on 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.

Compliance Information

- (1) There were always, during the inspection, an adequate number of staff members working directly with the children. The designated person in charge and an additional two staff members were supernumerary and available to provide support in any of the three classrooms in operation and to provide relief for staff breaks.
- (2) The following adult to child ratios were observed in the morning and afternoon of the inspection:
- In the Sky room there were 3 staff members caring for 8 children aged from 1 to 2 years, throughout the morning, and 3 staff members caring for 6 children aged 1 to 2 years, in the evening.
- In the Forest room, 3 staff members cared for 11 children aged 2 to 3 years in the morning and 8 children aged 2 to 3 years in the evening.
- The Sunshine and Acorn rooms had joined together and there were 3 staff members caring for 18 children aged 3 to 4 years in the morning and 15 children aged 3 to 4 years in the afternoon.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of the following information in relation to the service:

- (a) the name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee, unpaid worker and contractor;
- (b) details of the class of service and the age profile of children for which the service is registered to provide services;
- (c) details of the adult:child ratios in the service;
- (d) the type of care or programme provided in the service;
- (e) the facilities available;
- (f) the opening hours and fees;
- (g) the policies, procedures and statements the service is required to maintain in accordance with Regulation 10;
- (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;
- (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;
- (j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent;
- (k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)-(k) The registered provider developed, maintained and appropriately stored the following relevant documents and records required in the service: (a) staff records, (b) the type of service and the age profile of the children, that the service is registered to provide, (c) details of the adult: child ratios in each classroom within the service, (d) the programme of care provided in the service, (e) the facilities available, (f) the opening hours and fees of the service, (g) the policies, procedures, and statements that the service is required under Regulation 10, (h) each child's daily attendance details, (i) staff rosters, (j) administration of medication records and (k) accident and incident records, involving ant early years children attending the service.

A sample of the records reviewed by the inspector were observed to be completed in full, with the relevant details recorded.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 20 – Facilities for rest and play

(1) Subject to this regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) having regard to the number of pre-school children attending the service, their respective ages and the amount of time they spend on the premises, there are adequate and suitable facilities for each child 19 to play indoors and, where required by these Regulations, outdoors, during the day, and

(b) there are adequate and suitable facilities for a pre-school child to rest during the day, and in the case of an overnight pre-school service, during the day and the night.

(2) A registered provider-

(a) of a full day care service, a part-time day care service, a sessional preschool service or a childminding service that is registered for the first time on or after 30 June 2016, or

(b) of a full day care service, a part-time day care service, a sessional preschool service or a childminding service that moves premises on or after 30 June 2016,

shall ensure that a suitable, safe and secure outdoor space to which the preschool children attending the service have access on a daily basis is provided on the premises.

Compliance Information

(1)(a) The service had five early years classrooms, each created and planned to a specific age group of children ranging from one to five years of age.

The three classrooms in operation on the day of inspection were observed to have clearly defined areas of interest such as home corners, rest and relaxation areas, construction areas, reading areas, sensory areas and a designated area to reflect children's current emergent interests, for example one group of children had expressed interest in a shop, while another class had created a doctor's surgery, in keeping with current topics of interest in the groups.

Age appropriate children's tables, chairs and play equipment such as tuff trays were adequately supplied in each classroom. Staff who were supernumerary on the day of inspection were observed cleaning, maintaining, and auditing equipment and play resources in the rooms that were not in use, in preparation for the new school year in September.

In the main corridor of the service which led from the entrance door through to the back, a service library had been developed in a curved annex, with an extensive supply of diverse reading materials provided, catering for all age groups and in the national language of many of the diverse cultures attending the service. The designated

person in charge explained that it was used in the same manner as a community library, with all the children afforded an opportunity to choose books, check them out and return them on a weekly basis.

From each of the early years classrooms, there was direct access through double doors to a designated outdoor area, which each contained a variety of outdoor interest areas such as outdoor kitchens, construction areas containing natural stone or brick materials, sand play and water play.

Beyond these areas children under supervision could avail of a soft play/ grass area with swings, playhouses, slides, large musical chime, xylophones, and tympanic instruments. A large construction area was clearly identifiable with pebbles, gravel, sand, shovels, play diggers and construction signs. Children had access to water play daily, with a specifically designed water play area where children could pump water and transfer it to other interest areas such as the construction area, sand box, and gardening areas or use it to paint on walls and chalk boards.

(1)(b) There were two designated sleep rooms available in the service to cater for the needs of children under two years of age. The sleep rooms, one adjacent to the Sky room and the other adjacent to the Sunshine and Forest rooms provided a total of 10 standard cots for the children aged 1 to 2 years, who slept during their time in the service.

The rooms were dimly lit, maintained between the required temperature of 16 to 20 °C and naturally ventilated with openable windows. A supply of stackable beds was also available for older children attending the part-time and full day care service, should they wish to sleep. Staff informed the inspector that these would be placed in a quiet area of the classroom if required. Each classroom had developed rest areas appropriate to the age group of the children in attendance, which were comprised of child sized vinyl covered couches, soft rugs, cushions, and soft plush toys with adjacent mini-reading libraries.

(2)(b) The large extensive area was observed to be safe and secured with a 10-foot coated metal fence surrounding the boundary of the service.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 22 – Food and drink

A registered provider shall ensure that adequate and suitable, nutritious and varied food and drink is available for each pre-school child attending the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

The service had a kitchen for preparation of all meals and snacks onsite. There was an adjacent dining area which, prior to the Covid pandemic, was used by all the children for their main meals of the day.

A healthy eating and nutrition notice board was displayed on the wall outside of the kitchen, clearly displaying visuals of healthy food portions and examples of healthy snack ideas. A four-week menu plan was in place in the service.

Each classroom was provided with a refrigerator and with a water station where children could always access drinking water.

On the day of inspection, the inspector observed that water stations had also been provided at designated points in the outdoor areas. A bowl of fresh fruit was provided in each classroom daily, for any child that was hungry in between snack and mealtimes.

A selection of breakfasts/snacks were provided at 10:00 ranging from a selection of cereals to homemade banana muffins, yogurts, strawberry and banana bread, rice cakes, cheeses and healthy traybakes with fruit. On the day of inspection, the children had strawberry and banana bread with homemade custard for snack time. The main meal was savoury mince and vegetables with mash, afternoon snack consisted of homemade brown bread, cheese and yogurts with ham and cheese wraps served at teatime.

The chef in the service informed the inspector that alternatives such as toasted sandwiches or soups were available should a child not like what was on the menu.

The inspector observed that children who had special dietary needs or food allergies were catered for in a safe manner with their foods transferred in a special colour coded container to ensure no allergen cross contamination.

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:

Access to the service could only be gained by contacting the designated person in charge through the keypad call system at the main door. No unauthorised persons could gain access to the service and no child could leave the service unsupervised. The boundary of the service and outdoor area was secured by a 10-foot-high coated metal fence. CCTV surveillance to monitor the security of the service was also in operation.

The kitchen was inaccessible to all children and to staff who were not assigned to kitchen duties. Cleaning equipment, materials and solutions were all stored safely and securely in a secure storage area away from the children.

Staff were able to demonstrate that a daily outdoor risk assessment of the outdoor areas and play equipment was carried out daily and outcomes recorded to ensure the physical play environments were safe for the children.

Infection Control:

Each classroom had adjacent child sized toilet facilities and a nappy changing area sufficient to meet the numbers and needs of the children in each room. Handwash basins were supplied with liquid hand soap and paper towelling, which the children could easily access and use.

Children were observed to use the toilet and hand washing facilities with ease, ensuring they washed their hands correctly after using the toilet, after messy and outdoor play and before snack and mealtimes. Personal care stations were observed in a few of the classrooms, where tissues a mirror and a pedal operated bin were provided for the children to blow their noses and dispose of the tissues before going to wash their hands.

The staff were observed to monitor handwashing ensuring children were prompted on occasions of forgetfulness and staff demonstrated to the children how they frequently washed their hands after similar tasks.

Administration of Medication:

On the day of inspection, there was no child in the service that required prescribed or emergency medication. On review of past administration of medication records maintained by the service, records were completed appropriately in line with the service's administration of medication policy.

Safe Sleep:

The inspector observed that staff were familiar with best practice in safe sleep, ensuring that children were positioned on their backs, with their feet to the foot of the cots, when going to sleep.

The staff were observed carrying out physical checks on each sleeping child at ten-minute intervals, checking and recording the findings of each child's colour, breathing and sleep position. Staff continually monitored the temperature of the sleep room to ensure that it remained between 16 °C- 20°C. These practices were in line with the service's safe sleep policy and safe sleep procedure, which were displayed in each of the two sleep rooms.

Fire Safety:

The service ensured that fire safety procedures and precautions were carried out as per fire safety guidelines in preschool settings. On review of records, it was determined that the fire alarm system and firefighting equipment were serviced annually. Fire drills were carried out routinely, monthly. Emergency fire exit doors were observed to be clear, well-lit, with fire emergency procedures in the event of a fire displayed throughout the service. A fire assembly area was clearly signposted in the outdoor area. There was evidence of documented fire training in staff files.

Outings:

The service had an adequate outings policy in place in the service, however due to the availability of the large outdoor space in the service, have not in recent years implemented the policy. The policy detailed comprehensively the preparation, risk assessment and communication with parents/guardians prior to the outing, the precautions and procedures taken prior to and during the outing and the procedures to be carried out in the event of an emergency.