

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DL044		
Name of Service:	First Steps Playgroup		
Address of Service:	Old Glencar Road, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal		
Eircode:	F92 FX93		
Name of Registered Provider:	Deirdre McGroary		
Service type:	Sessional		
Date of Inspection:	11/11/2025		
No of pre-school children:	AM	14	PM 4
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, TUSLA Child & Family Agency, Markievicz House, Barrack St, Sligo, F91 XC84		
Inspection undertaken by:	K Folan		
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

First Steps Playgroup is a privately owned and operated preschool service in Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. The service is registered to provide two preschool sessions from 09:00-12:00 and 12:45-15:45 for 38 weeks of the year. The service caters for children aged 2 to 6 years of age and operates from a purpose-built building on the grounds of the registered providers dwelling house. The building contains one playroom, sanitary accommodation for children and adults and a small kitchen/office area. There is a garden area to the side and back of the building for the children to play outdoors while attending the service.

Staffing

There are four adults working in the service, including the registered provider who works with the children on a daily basis. There were two adults present on the day of the inspection, both who were providing care to the children.

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 regulations 9,11,19,23,25,26 and 28, however, on inspection additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 29. 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 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.*

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that each employee, unpaid worker and contractor is suitable and competent taking into consideration the nature of the needs of children, including by-

- (a) consideration of references from the person's past employers, if any, and in particular the most recent employer, if any,*
- (b) consideration of references from reputable sources in the case of a person who has no past employers,*
- (c) consideration of the vetting disclosure received from the National Vetting Bureau of the Garda Síochána in accordance with the Act of 2012 in respect of the person, and*
- (d) ensuring, insofar as is practicable, that where a person has lived in a state other than the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months, he or she provides police vetting from the police authorities in that state.*

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that, without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (2) and subject to paragraphs (5) and (6), each employee working directly with children attending the service holds at least a major award in Early childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Compliance Information

(1)

The registered provider ensured that:

- (a) There was a designated person in charge and a named adult to deputise in their absence.
- (b) The designated person in charge was available on the premises throughout the period of inspection.

(2) On the day of the inspection two adults were present, including the registered provider.

On the most recent inspection dated the 07 September 2022, two staff files were reviewed and satisfactory. It was advised by the person in charge that two new staff had commenced in the service since the inspection conducted on 07 September 2022. In addition, Garda vetting for two staff members whose disclosures were identified as due for renewal were requested for review.

Two staff files were reviewed, and the following information was available:

- (a) Three written validated references from past employers for two of the adults.
- (b) One written validated reference from reputable sources for one of the adults.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all adults. However, the service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.

(4)

Two of the adult files reviewed, evidenced they held a major award at level 5 or above in early childhood care and education on the national qualification framework, or qualifications deemed by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) to meet the regulatory requirement.

Non-Compliance Information

- (d)
1. It could not be determined if police vetting was required in respect of two staff members due to gaps in the employment record.
 2. Police vetting was not available for one staff member who had lived outside of the state for a period of longer than six months.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

1. The employment records were updated.
2. Police vetting is in the process of being applied for.

Supporting documentation submitted

1. Documentary evidence submitted.
2. No evidence submitted.

Summary Comment

1. The evidence submitted has been accepted by the Early years inspectorate and is now compliant.
2. The police vetting remains outstanding. The registered provider is required to furnish the required documentation to the Inspectorate upon receipt. The noncompliance remains outstanding.

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 was an adequate number of adults working directly with the preschool children attending the service.
- (3) On the morning of the inspection two adults cared for 14 children aged between 3 to 4 years of age.
- In the afternoon session, two adults cared for four children aged between 3 to 4 years of age.

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

(1)(a)(b)

Basic need

- The service has a healthy eating policy in place. Snacks for the morning and afternoon sessions are brought from home and perishable items are safely stored in a refrigerator.
- Drinks which the children bring from home are available to them throughout the sessions.
- The service has a key worker system in place with each staff member assigned responsibility for a group of children.
- Children were supported to use the toilet independently with assistance given to those who required it.
- Children with additional needs were welcome and supported in the service, with modifications made to the environment to facilitate their learning and development.

Supporting relationships

- The service places a strong emphasis on the interactions between staff and children with staff taking the time to speak to each child, one to one, throughout the sessions. Staff were observed speaking kindly in Irish and English, to the children throughout both sessions. For example, events in the child's life such as the birth of a new sibling, birthdays, holidays and family events were discussed with enthusiasm and empathy.
- Staff communicated with each other throughout the morning and afternoon sessions in relation to the children's needs and activities.
- Communication with parents took place verbally at pick up and drop off times and a software application is used to send parents pictures and updates in relation to their child's day and development.
- The children in the service appeared happy with some telling the inspector of the friendships they had made in the service.
- The staff prepared the children for transitions within the service such as snack time, tidy up time, circle time and home time. In addition, staff made children aware of the activities that would be taking place the following day such as dinosaur painting.

Physical and Material environment

The preschool room is laid out to allow the children space to access the materials. A home corner with a kitchen and utensils, dolls and buggies was available to the children. A wooden play shop was stocked with real life condiment and food items. Sand and water trays for sensorial play were available in the room. For fine motor development, safety scissors, jigsaws, puzzles, mark making equipment and painting brushes and easels were available to the children. The room was decorated with educational posters in Irish and English with topics such as colours, the alphabet, and the human body. On the day of the inspection the children were learning about dinosaur species with each child taking a turn to compare their footprint with a large cardboard cutout of a dinosaur footprint.

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 main door to the service was secure on the inspector's arrival, preventing unauthorised access to the service by an adult or a child leaving the service unsupervised.
- Cleaning materials were stored out of children's reach.
- The equipment in the care rooms was in good condition with toys stored in an orderly fashion in boxes.
- Blind cords were secured to the wall.
- Emergency exit doors were unobstructed.
- Ventilation in the main playroom and sanitary accommodation was by means of openable windows.
- The temperature of the service on the day of inspection was 19.5°C which is within the required range.

Infection Control:

- Cleaning records were in place in each room which stated the areas to be cleaned each day.
- Staff supervised children's handwashing to ensure effective cleaning.
- Tables were wiped down after activities prior to snack time.

Administration of Medication:

- On the day of the inspection no medicine was administered. Records of previously administered medication were available for review by the inspector. On discussion, the staff demonstrated their knowledge and awareness of the safe administration of medication.
- Temperature reducing medication was stored in the kitchen out of the reach of children.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. Garda vetting was available for one staff member. However, this vetting disclosure was not dated within the previous three years in adherence to with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting'.
2. The plastic sink in the home corner was broken, revealing a sharp edge.
3. Aerosols were stored on a low window ledge in the children's sanitary accommodation, posing a risk to children's health.

Infection Control:

1. A mop and bucket were stored in the children's sanitary accommodation posing a risk of cross infection to children.
2. There was no soap available in the children's sanitary accommodation for effective handwashing.
3. The bin for the disposal of hand towels was an open topped pin, not the required foot operated pedal bin.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. Garda vetting has been obtained. All staff will be re vetted every three years.
2. Plastic sink was removed.
3. Aerosols were removed from children's sanitary accommodation.

Infection Control:

1. Mop and bucket have been removed.
2. Soap in the children's sanitary accommodation has been removed.
3. A pedal bin has been purchased for the children's sanitary accommodation.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

1. Documentary evidence submitted.
2. Photographic evidence submitted.
3. Photographic evidence submitted.

Infection Control:

1. Photographic evidence submitted.
2. Photographic evidence submitted.
3. Photographic evidence submitted.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection. This regulation is now compliant.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 25 - First aid

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a person trained in first aid for children is, at all times, immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that a suitably equipped first aid box for children-

(a) is safely stored in an easily accessible and conspicuous position on the premises, and

(b) is available to the children attending the pre-school service at all times.

Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider ensured that a person trained in First Aid was available to the children. Two staff members in the service are trained First Aid Responders.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a)(b) The contents of the first aid box were inadequate to meet the needs of the preschool children. The majority of the bandages were expired with dates ranging from 2007 to 2016.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The contents of the first aid box have been replaced with new items.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence submitted.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection. This regulation is now compliant.

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.

Compliance Information

(1)(a) The registered provider kept a record of fire drills carried out in the service with the most recent taking place on 10 November 2025.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)(b) A record was kept of the number, type and maintenance of firefighting equipment. Records showed the firefighting equipment was last serviced on 11 December 2024. However, there was no record of the smoke alarm maintenance. On discussion, the registered provider confirmed to the inspector that the smoke alarms had not been serviced in the previous 12 months.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

A service was carried out on the two fire alarms in the preschool. The registered provider will ensure that the smoke alarms are serviced annually.

Supporting documentation submitted

Documentary evidence submitted.

Summary Comment

A referral was made to the fire officer as the smoke alarms were battery operated alarms.

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 adequate insurance in place for 22 children attending a sessional service. The insurance policy commenced on 28 March 2025 and expires on 27 March 2026.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

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

- (c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated*
- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and*

Non-Compliance Information

- (c) There was a large accumulation of mould on the blinds and walls beside the window in the main playroom.
- (d) In the children's sanitary accommodation, the pipe underneath the sink was leaking, posing a risk of a trip or fall to the preschool child.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

1. The blind has been cleaned.
2. The leak has been fixed.

Supporting documentation submitted

1. Photographic evidence submitted.
2. Photographic evidence submitted.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection. This regulation is now compliant.