

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DY127
Name of Service:	Little Steps
Address of Service:	Artane Castle Shopping Centre, Artane, Dublin 5
Eircode:	D05 X4A8
Name of Registered Provider:	Paula Harrison
Service type:	Sessional
Date of Inspection:	11/11/2024

No of pre-school children:	AM	32
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Floor 7 Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, St. John's Road West, Kilmainham, Dublin 8.	
Inspection undertaken by:	E. Finnegan Hayes	
Title:	Early Years Inspector	

Authority to Inspect

The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate carries out inspections of Early Years Services under Section 58(J) of the Child Care Act 1991 (as inserted by Section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013).

Conditions if applicable	Not applicable.
---------------------------------	-----------------

Description of service

Little Steps Pre-school is a privately operated sessional preschool service located in Artane Castle Shopping Centre in Dublin 5. The service caters for children aged 2 years 8 months – 5 years old. The service participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme and operates two sessions daily; the morning session runs from 9am-12pm followed by an afternoon session which runs from 12:30pm-3:30pm. The service is comprised of one large care room which is divided into 2 separate rooms namely Room 1 and Room 2; Room 1 is sub divided into two separate care groups, an entrance hall area which is also used as a sensory room, sanitary facilities, and a kitchen. The service has a small outdoor area to the rear.

Staffing

The registered provider employs four adults to work in the service and also works in the service herself. An adult from a local preschool support service is also employed to work in the service with a named child.

Methodology

Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate is the independent statutory regulator of early years services in Ireland. The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 define the duty of a registered provider to ensure the safety and well-being of children and to comply with these regulations. This Act also gives Tusla the authority to assess compliance with the regulations. The purpose of regulation in relation to early years services is to ensure that the care, safety, and well-being of children attending such services is upheld. Inspections of early years services are planned based on the following:

- Previous inspection history
- Any information received in relation to the service

The findings on inspection are based on:

- Information obtained through examination of documentation
- Direct observation
- Discussion with relevant staff

This inspection was unannounced and focused on the area of governance, health, welfare and development of child and safety. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations;

Regulation 9; Management and Recruitment,

Regulation 11; Staffing Levels,

Regulation 19(1)(a); Health, Welfare and Development of child,

Regulation 23; Safeguarding the 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,

However, on inspection additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 8

Notification of change in circumstance. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulation 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.

Additional Information

An immediate action notice was issued to the registered provider on 12th November 2024 in relation to concerns under Regulation 23 Safeguarding the Health, Safety and Welfare of Child. A response which adequately addressed the concerns was received on 13th November 2024. Further details are available under regulation 23 below.

An internal Tusla referral was made in relation to the service operating outside of its registered status. Further information is available under Regulation 8.

A regulatory compliance meeting was held with the registered provider on 21 January 2025 to discuss a non-compliance under regulation 26 which had not been adequately addressed through the CAPA process. A response which addressed the non-compliance was received on 30 January 2025.

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 II - Registration and Register

Regulation 8 - Notification of change in circumstances

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a temporary pre-school service shall, subject to paragraph (3), notify the Agency in writing of any proposed change in the details in relation to the pre-school service contained in the register pursuant to section 58C(2) of the Act or Regulation 7(2) at least 60 days before it is proposed that the change would take effect.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider did not notify the agency of two changes in relation to the preschool service which were observed to be present on inspection;

- The service is registered as a sessional service for up to 3.5 hours per day however two children were observed to attend on a part-time basis for more than 4 hours on the day of inspection. The RP advised that the children have been allowed stay late on a number of occasions.
- The service is registered to provide care for children aged 3-6 years however seven of the thirty-two children present were aged 2 years old.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(1) A response regarding both issues was filed with SOORS. Parents have been advised that the maximum extra time a child can stay is 30 minutes. A change in circumstance form has been submitted to change the age profile of attending children to 2yrs 8 months – 5yrs. The age profile has been changed to the correct age. A late fee will be applied to deter parents who are persistently late on pick up.

Supporting documentation submitted

Evidence of a CIC submission was reviewed.

Summary Comment

The registered provider has addressed the non-compliance under Regulation 8 and a change in circumstance relating to the age group of children to be catered to in the service has been approved for implementation.

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) (a)(b) The service had a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise in their absence. The deputy person in charge was present in the service when the inspectors arrived.

(2) A review of paperwork and conversation with the registered provider showed that six adults are employed to work in the service including the registered provider and an adult who is employed by a local preschool support service. The files of all six adults were reviewed.

(a) (b) Ten written and validated references were available in relation to five adults.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for six adults employed in the service. The service has also adhered to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the 'Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years'.

(d) There was no evidence to suggest any of the six staff required police vetting.

(4) Evidence was available to show that six adults who worked directly with children attending the service held at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed eligible by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Non-Compliance Information

(2) (a)(b) There was no evidence available to show that two written references which were available for one adult had been verified. Reference must be verified to allow the registered provider to adequately assess the suitability of candidates before they commence employment.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(1) (a)(b) References for said worker have since been verified and filed. Going forward, any new employee references will be verified by manager, and this will be cross checked by assistant manager to ensure all is compliant.

Supporting documentation submitted

No documentation submitted.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions proposed by the registered provider are sufficient to address the non-compliance identified under Regulation 9.

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) The registered provider ensured that an adequate number of adults were working directly with the children on the day of inspection. Four staff were caring for 31 children when the inspector arrived in the service.
- (3) Ratios were maintained on the day of inspection. The following was observed;
- In Room 1 two adults were caring for twenty-two children aged 2-5 years old.
 - In Room 2 two adults were caring for ten children aged 2 years 7 months-3 years old.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 19 - Health, welfare and development of child

- (1) A registered provider shall, in providing a pre-school service, ensure that-*
- (a) each child's learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the pre-school service through the provision of the appropriate activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child, and*

Compliance Information

(1) (a)

Basic Needs:

- The service has a healthy eating policy and lunches which are brought from home were observed to contain a selection of healthy food in line with the policy.
- Room 1 and Room 2 join together for circle time each day which allows the children to spend time with friends and siblings in the other room.
- Children engaged in singing and a discussion around feelings which supported language development. Staff encouraged engagement throughout the activity.

Physical and Material environment:

- The service had a variety of Montessori and play equipment. Low-level shelving was used to display materials and ensures the children have access to a variety of materials encouraging independence.
- Books were available for the children in Room 1 to access independently which supported language development.
- Low level tables and chairs were available in each room for mealtimes and tabletop activities.
- There was evidence of children's artwork displayed in the service.
- The outdoor area provided opportunity for sensory and imaginative play.

Supporting Relationships around Children:

- The service had a very calm welcoming atmosphere.
- Staff engaged well with the children and were kind, caring and playful in their approach.
- Staff and children sat together at lunchtime and were observed chatting with each other.

Non-Compliance Information

1. There is no cosy/ rest area in room 2 that children can access independently. A cosy/rest area is important for children who may need a break from the activities or a quiet area to relax in. This was a non-compliance on the last inspection in September 2022. The preventive action proposed by the registered provider has not been sufficient to prevent recurrence.
2. In room 2 books were stored on two display units which were mounted to the wall at adult height, making them inaccessible to the children. Children should be able to access books independently. This was a non-compliance on the last inspection in September 2022. The preventive action proposed by the registered provider has not been sufficient to prevent recurrence.
3. Access to a range of toys and equipment was not observed for all children due to the structure of room 1 for example the children are split into two separate groups within the room.

4. One group is based in the narrower section of the room by the entrance door while the other group occupies the wider section to the rear of the room. Staff advised that they groups stay in their designated areas except for circle time which is done in a large group. Children in the narrower section of the room were observed to have access to a limited selection of toys and materials to support a range of play experiences and primarily had access to tabletop activities. Children require a variety of toys and materials to support a range of play experiences to test and extend their learning.
5. A varied programme of activities was not observed to be provided for one group of children in room 1 who were observed to spend a lot of the day sitting, for example the children were observed sitting at tables in their section of the room when the inspector arrived in the service at 9:40am, at 10:09am they were observed to sit for circle time, at 10:20am they returned to their section of the room and sat at the tables for lunch, at 10:42am children who were finished eating sat on their chairs and read books, from 10:46am to 11:40am the children sat at the tables for tabletop activities before putting on their coats and returning to the table for home time. Children require a variety of child and adult initiated play experiences and opportunities for movement to enhance their learning experience.
6. Children in room 1 did not access the outdoor area on the day of the inspection. At 11am a child was heard to ask if they could go to the garden, and they were told they could go another day. Outdoor play supports children to regulate and provides an opportunity for larger movements which are not appropriate for the indoor environment.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

1. A cosy area of mattress, cushions quilt and books has been created. A permanent structure is planned in refurbishments as a dedicated cosy corner.
2. Books have been placed in the cosy corner. A bookshelf will constitute part of the new cosy corner structure during refurbishments.
3. Staff have reviewed and revised the use of the room space – We have also agreed increased outdoor space/reception space time to maximise physical movement / imaginative play of the children through the day. The plan going forward is to increase the size of room 1 and reduce the size of reception during refurbishments. This is to improve how we use space so as to enhance the children’s experiences and their learning.
4. A staff meeting explored activities undertaken with the children by each teacher. Related to 19.3 above, it was agreed that activities should minimise sitting for the children and outdoor space should be capitalised upon daily.

5. The two teachers in room 1 will join their two groups so that the space is used as one large space rather than 2 separate ones. This ensures all children use all of the space throughout all of the session.
6. At our staff meeting it was reiterated to staff that, weather permitting, all groups must have daily garden time. Teachers have agreed to rotate garden time to ensure that each group has garden play daily. Which group goes and at what time, will be determined on the day and dependant on what activities are happening in the various groups.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photo of the cosy area with books available was reviewed.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions proposed by the registered provider are sufficient to address the non-compliances identified under Regulation 19.

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 service entrance was secured to prevent unauthorised persons entering the service. A second door providing a containment area for visitors and prevented access to the care rooms without the knowledge of staff.
- The service entrance was secured with a key lock which prevented children leaving the service unsupervised.
- Toys and equipment were well maintained and free from hazards.
- The service was maintained in a clean and hygienic manner throughout.
- Cleaning products were stored on a high shelf out of reach of the children.
- Cleaning checklists were complete to date.
- The kitchen door was secured with a bolt to prevent children accessing the area.
- The gate in the outdoor area was secured with a bolt to prevent children leaving the service.

Infection Control:

- Children's lunches which were provided by parents were stored correctly in the fridge.
- Warm water, liquid hand soap and dispensed hand towels were available in the children's sanitary area to support adequate hand hygiene.

Fire Safety:

- Staff were knowledgeable of procedure to be followed in the event of a fire emergency.
- Notices detailing the steps to take in the event of a fire were displayed in the service.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

1. Handwashing was not completed routinely throughout the day. Hand sanitiser was observed to be used in place of handwashing for example before eating. Hand sanitiser should not be used in place of adequate handwashing.
2. A bin which was in the sanitary area was not pedal operated and posed a risk of cross infection from frequent touching. Pedal operated bins are required for disposal of contaminated items such as used tissues.
3. A pedal operated bin in the care room was observed to have a broken foot pedal and staff were observed to open the bin using their hands which presented an infection control risk.

Fire Safety:

4. A designated emergency exit in Room 1 which staff advised is used in the event of a fire evacuation was observed to be blocked by a bin at various times throughout the day. This could impede the safe evacuation of the children in the event of a fire emergency. An immediate action notice was issued to the registered provider.
5. An up-to-date risk assessment was not available in relation to the designated fire assembly point used by the service which is located behind the outdoor area adjacent to a loading bay. Staff advised that they have recently started using this area for evacuation however the risk assessment reviewed was from 2017 and did not assess the risks in this area. On the day of inspection trucks were observed in the area and children may have access to large storage shed type buildings. An up-to-date risk assessment is required to identify hazards in the assembly area and mitigate risks.
6. The time of arrival and departure of the children was not recorded in a timely manner to ensure the safe evacuation of children in the event of an emergency.

7. The following was observed;

- The times of arrival of the children were complete at 9:56am on the day of inspection. Children had been present in the service since 9am.
- Two children were not recorded on the roll books. It is acknowledged that they were present on a secondary roll book in which ticks are used to record the children presence however their times of arrival and departure have not been recorded since they commenced in September 2024.
- Two children were observed to be present in the service at 12:08pm; a departure time of 11:50am was recorded for one of these children.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Infection Control:

1. Staff were advised of inspection findings re: handwashing. It was agreed that each teacher will ensure that hands are also washed with soap and warm water before lunch. The children's daily routine now includes a set hand washing time after circle time, prior to lunch.
2. A pedal bin has been bought for the bathroom and children have been taught how to operate it.
3. The pedal bin mechanism is repaired on existing bin. Teachers were instructed that they must use the pedal mechanism and advised of cross contamination implications of using hands. Staff meeting advising staff of above plus an undertaking from teachers to ensure compliance.

Fire Safety:

4. The bin is now kept outside the exit door to the right rather than in the room. Staff undertook a review of fire safety. This included a revision of strict requirements around fire exits being clear at all times.
5. A risk assessment of the area is currently being written up and will follow this report. As a staff, we reviewed the fire meeting point, and each staff member contributed to identifying possible risks and control measure to minimise said risk. We have also requested high vis jackets for staff from RSA. This risk assessment will be reviewed annually at first staff meeting of the year which takes place before the children return. Revision will also take place if there are any material changes to the yard.
6. Arrival and departure times of each child to be kept in 'master' roll book. Teachers can keep a secondary copy in their smaller roll books. Each child's times noted should accurately reflect same. Going forward, the 'master' roll book will document times to facilitate inspectors. Each teacher will log her own group and ensure times are accurate.

Supporting documentation submitted

A photo of the bin and a fire assembly point risk assessment were reviewed.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions proposed by the registered provider are sufficient to address the non-compliances identified under 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.

Compliance Information

(1) A roll book was available to record the attendance of children on a daily basis.

Non-Compliance Information

(3) The registered provider did not ensure a record of visitors to the service was maintained although did recognise that they do have professionals who attend the service to conduct assessments. An accurate record of visitors is required to be maintained by the service to ensure the safety of the children.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(3) A visitor sign in sheet is now kept. All visitors are required to sign in. The visitor sheet will be kept in reception and must be signed before entry to school proper is permitted.

Supporting documentation submitted

Visitor log reviewed

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions taken by the registered provider are sufficient to address the non-compliance identified under Regulation 24.

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

(2) (a)(b) The registered provider ensured that a suitably equipped first aid box was available in the care room accessible to staff and out of reach of the children.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider did not ensure that an adequate number of staff trained in First Aid Response (FAR) were present in the service during the opening hours for example one staff member holds FAR certification however this person was not present in the service when the inspector arrived but did attend later that morning.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(1) A second staff member (deputy manager) will undertake FAR training in the new year. Going forward there will always be 2 FAR trained staff.

Supporting documentation submitted

No documentation submitted.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions proposed by the registered provider are sufficient to address the non-compliance identified under Regulation 25.

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 firefighting 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) The registered provider ensured that the following records were maintained;
- (a) A record of monthly fire drills showed that the last fire drill had taken place on 2nd October 2024.
 - (b) A record of the maintenance of the fire extinguishers showed that they had been service in March 2024.
- (4) A notice detailing the steps to take in the event of a fire were displayed in the care room.

Non-Compliance Information

- (1) (b) A record of the maintenance of the smoke alarms was not available for review. The registered provider stated that this is conducted by the building owners. A sprinkler system was observed in the service however a smoke alarm system was not. A smoke alarm system which is adequately maintained is required as an early warning system in the event of a fire.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

- (1) (b) A record of the maintenance of the fire detection system was sought from the building management.
- Going forward this will be requested annually and kept it in our Fire Safety File.

Supporting documentation submitted

A copy of the servicing certificate for the fire alarm system was reviewed.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions taken by the registered provider are sufficient to address the non-compliance identified under Regulation 26.