

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier: TU2015KE153

Name of Service: Stepping Stones Montessori School

Address of Service: Ballymany Road, Newbridge, Co. Kildare

Eircode: W12 W310

Name of Registered Provider: Sharon O'Carroll

Service type: Full Day, Part Time, Sessional

Date of Inspection: 16/07/2025

No of pre-school children:	AM	31	PM	29

Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate Child & Family Agency Suite 7, Vista Primary Care Ballymore Eustace Road Naas, Co. Kildare W91 X38W
Inspection undertaken by:	F. Maher
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

This private service provides full day care, part-time and sessional education and care to pre-school children aged 0-6 years and opens from 7:00am – 7:00pm, Monday to Friday. The service is registered to provide school aged care. The service operates from an adapted bungalow on the outskirts of Newbridge, Co. Kildare.

Three pre-school rooms, one of which is located in a single storey building at the rear of the premises, a sleep room, sanitary with nappy change facilities and a kitchen are provided. There are play areas located to the front and rear of the premises.

Staffing

There are 17 adults employed in the service including the registered provider. On the day of inspection there were 9 adults working directly with the children, the registered provider and person in charge were available to assist in the rooms as necessary. Two staff responsible for the care of school aged children, the office administrator and two kitchen staff were also present 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 and safety. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

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

- Regulation 9 (1)(a)(b), (2)(a)(b)(c)(d), (4) - Management and Recruitment
- Regulation 11(1)(2), (8)(a) - Staffing Levels
- Regulation 16(1)(h)(i)(j)(k) - Record in Relation to Pre-school Child
- Regulation 17 - Information for Parents
- Regulation 22 – Food and Drink
- Regulation 23 – Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of child
- Regulation 27 – Supervision.

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, 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

(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)

There was a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise as required, both remained on the premises for the duration of the inspection.

The files of seventeen staff, including the registered provider, were assessed.

(2)(a)(b)

Two written and verified past employer references or references from a reputable source other than a past employer, were available in respect of seventeen adults employed whose records were reviewed.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for seventeen adults working in the service.

The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Police vetting was available for eight adults who had resided outside the state for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months whose records were reviewed.

(4) Fifteen adults employed and working directly with children attending the service held at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or higher or a recognised equivalent qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Non-Compliance Information

(d)

Police vetting was unavailable for one adult who had resided outside the state for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months whose record was reviewed.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

Police vetting has been applied for one adult. Correct Police vetting will be obtained for all adults prior to employment in the future.

Supporting documentation submitted

Processed police vetting document.

Summary Comment

The processed police vetting has been submitted for one staff member, the requirement for Regulation 9(2)(d) has been met.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 11 - Staffing levels

(1) Subject to this Regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that there is at all times an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) Subject to paragraphs (4) and (5), a registered provider of a full day care service or a part-time day care service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 1 of Schedule 6 opposite a particular reference number specified in column (1) of that Part in respect of the age range of the children specified in column (2) thereof at that reference number is satisfied.

(8) Without prejudice to paragraphs (2) to (7)-

(a) a registered provider of a pre-school service other than a child-minding service or a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that there are at least 2 adults on the premises at all times,

Compliance Information

- (1)
There were 31 children attending the service being supervised directly by 9 staff members during the inspection, the registered provider and person in charge were available to provide support and assistance to the rooms if required throughout the day.
- (2)
The minimum ratio of adults to children was adhered to during the day as specified in column (3) of Part 1 of Schedule 6.
- (8)(a)
There were at least two adults on the premises at all times for the duration of the inspection, this was verified by the up-to-date staff roster.

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:*
- (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.*
- in a drop-in centre or of a temporary pre-school service, for a period of 2 years from the date on which the child attends the service.*
- (3) A record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection on the premises, and the documents and records referred to in paragraph (2)(a) shall be open to inspection whether on the premises or elsewhere, by an authorised person.*

Compliance Information

(1)(h)

The daily attendance records for the children were reviewed and completed in real time in each pre-school room.

(i) A weekly staff roster was in place outlining the allocated times and rooms for each staff member; the person's trained in first aid response (FAR) training were also identified on the roster.

(j) A sample size of ten administration of medication forms were reviewed and contained the necessary information to authorise and administer medication to a child should it be required.

(k) A sample size of ten accident and incident forms were reviewed; the necessary information and details were recorded and complete.

(3)

The records as outlined above were open to inspection by the authorised person.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 17 – Information for parents

A registered provider shall ensure that a parent or guardian of a child proposing to attend the service is provided with the information referred to in subparagraphs (a) to (g) of Regulation 16(1).

Compliance Information

A parent handbook was in place outlining the details of the service as required and included sample policies and information a prospective parent(s)/guardian(s) may require. This is provided to parents before a child commences in the service and is also available on request.

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 healthy eating policy in place and provided the meals and snacks to the children attending the full day and part-time services, parents provided the snacks for their child attending the sessional only service. Meals and snacks were freshly prepared daily by the onsite cooks employed and a three-week menu was in place. The menu was observed to provide varied and nutritious meals/snacks which included a variety of casseroles and various pasta/curry dishes with meat and vegetables, roast meat and fish dinners with vegetables, potatoes and/or rice/pasta. Fruit was available throughout the day in addition to the main meals and snacks served. Drinking water was freely available throughout the day in each pre-school room and milk was also available and served with meals.

The food was prepared with respect to cultural preferences and any allergies children may have. Children were not rushed when eating and extra food was available should a child request same or if a staff member observed a child was still hungry.

During conversations with staff members, they advised they were very observant of any food provided that had the potential risk of choking and immediately removed or cut the food into smaller pieces.

The staff members advised they encouraged healthy eating practices with the children and had discussions about healthy foods and food choices on a daily basis particularly during snack and mealtimes. Staff also advised they introduced differed foods and textures for the children to try throughout the year and often had fun art activities using fruit/vegetable pieces dipped in paint to create pictures with the foods as the children gained further food knowledge.

The staff members assigned to food preparation were trained in food safety and the kitchen was registered with the relevant health authority.

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 entrance door to the service was secure and controlled by staff to prevent children from exiting the service unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the pre-school service.

Daily indoor room and outdoor risk assessments were completed and maintained to ensure a safe play and work environment for the children and staff.

Staff members in each room advised the inspector they would remove any beaded necklace if observed that a child may be wearing them.

The service met the necessary safety requirements in respect of the toys and equipment and safe storage of cleaning agents which were out of reach of the children in locked cupboards.

Infection Control:

Thermostatically controlled hot water, liquid hand soap and paper hand towel, hygienically dispensed from wall mounted units, were readily available for hygienic hand washing and drying and handwashing routines were well established and observed.

Foot pedal operated bins were provided for the disposal of used nappies, tissues, paper towel and waste. Plastic aprons, disposable gloves and nappy sacks were available for hygienic nappy change practices.

Written cleaning schedules were maintained for the room environments which were observed to be maintained in a clean and hygienic condition.

Administration of Medication:

Medicine was not given at the time of the inspection; written parental consent was available should medication be required to be administered to a child. The staff members were familiar with required practices when administering medication in the service. Temperature reducing medication was available in the service if required.

Safe Sleep:

Staff members carried out 10-minute sleep check observations on all sleeping children and documented the colour, position and breathing pattern of sleeping children in their care.

Fire Safety:

Monthly fire drills had been carried out and staff members were familiar with fire safety evacuation procedures from the service. The internal fire exits were not obstructed and the assembly point was easily recognisable in the outdoor area.

Non-Compliance Information

Safe Sleep:

1. One child, aged 14 months, had not adjusted to sleeping in a cot and was observed to settle to sleep in the arms of a staff member in the Ladybird (baby) room. The staff member advised the inspector that the child would then be placed to sleep on the sleep mat observed on the floor in the baby room. It is acknowledged the staff member immediately placed the child to sleep in a cot in the sleep room when asked to do so by the inspector for the comfort and safety of the child.
2. A sleep plan had not been completed for the child being placed to sleep on the floor mat in collaboration with and agreed with the parents, this would have involved an assessment of the child's sleep routines and sleep requirements as required.

It was noted that enough cots were available to cater for the sleep needs of children less than 2 years of age currently attending the service.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

Safe Sleep:

1 and 2. The 14-month-old child who was sleeping on a sleep mat, has being sleeping in a cot from the day of inspection.

Preventive Action

1 and 2. Our Safe Sleep Policy now states that no child under 15 months old will be allowed sleep on a sleep mat under any circumstances.

Supporting documentation submitted

Safe Sleep:

Document x 1

Summary Comment

The requirement for Regulation 23, Safe Sleep, has been met; this area of the regulation will be reviewed at the time of the next inspection.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

A registered provider shall ensure that pre-school children attending the service are supervised at all times.

Compliance Information

The children were observed being supervised at all times throughout the inspection by the adults caring for them including, indoors in their care rooms, during transitions going to and coming from the outdoor play area, while in the outdoor play areas, when using the sanitary facilities and during sleep times.