

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015KK027
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Name of Service:	First Steps Montessori
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Address of Service:	5 Springmount, Waterford Road, Kilkenny, Co. Kilkenny
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Eircode:	R95 N6YC
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Name of Registered Provider:	Mary Verling
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	07/10/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	15	PM	N/A
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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

First Steps Montessori is a registered pre-school service providing an early childhood care and education (ECCE) sessional service to children aged 2 to 6 years. The service is in a residential estate, on the Waterford Road in Kilkenny city and is comprised of three classrooms and a large natural outdoor play area. The service operates from 09:00 to 12:30 hours Monday to Thursday.

Staffing

There were four qualified staff members employed in the service which included the registered provider, who all work directly with the children. A student in early childhood care and education was also on placement in the service. All staff members who as part of their role in the service, work directly with the children held qualification in early childhood care and education ranging from Level 5 to Level 8 on the national Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) framework.

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 assessment of compliance under regulations 10, 15,19, 23, 24, 25, 26 and 28.

A sampling process was used under regulations 10, 15 and 24. The scope of the inspection included the outdoor area and two of the classrooms in use on the day of inspection.

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, 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.

Compliance Information

- (1)(a) The registered provider was the designated person in charge on the day of inspection. A second named person was able to deputise as required.
- (b) Both the registered provider and deputy designated person in charge were onsite on the day of inspection.
- (c) There was a clear management structure in place which was observed by the inspector, of the staff in practice.
- (2) Staff files for four staff members employed to work directly with the children, and one student on placement in the service were reviewed by the inspector and the following observations found.

(a)(b) There were two validated references available in each staff member's file from either a past employer or reputable source in the case of a person who had no past employers. There were two validated references also on file for the student on placement.

(c) Garda Vetting certificates were available on file for each staff member working directly with the children, and for the student on placement. The registered provider demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) There was a police vetting certificate available for one staff member who had lived outside of the State for a period of six months or longer.

(4) Certificates of accredited qualifications were available in each of the four staff members' files demonstrating that each staff member employed to work directly with the children, held a qualification at the minimum level 5 and above on the national framework of QQI.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 10 - Policies, procedures etc. of pre-school service

A registered provider of a pre-school service shall ensure that the written policies, procedures and statements specified in Schedule 5 are in place for the service.

Compliance Information

The inspector observed that all the written policies, procedures and statements required under schedule 5 of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016, were available in the service for inspection. On review of these policies, the inspector observed that they were specific to the service and that their contents were adequate.

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 inspector observed that there was an adequate number of qualified staff members directly caring for the children throughout the inspection.
- (3) There were 15 preschool children aged 3 to 6 years of age, present with 4 qualified staff members and 1 student directly supervising them and engaged in play with the children.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child

- (1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a pre-school service in a drop-in centre or a temporary pre-school service shall ensure that a record in writing is kept in respect of each pre-school child attending the service containing the following particulars:*
- (a) the name and date of birth of the child;*
 - (b) the date on which the child first attended the service;*
 - (c) the date on which the child ceased to attend the service;*
 - (d) the name and address of a parent or guardian of the child and a telephone number where that parent or guardian or a relative or friend of the child can be contacted during the hours of operation of the service;*
 - (e) authorisation for the collection of the child;*
 - (f) details of any illness, disability, allergy or special need of the child, together with all the information relevant to the provision of special care or attention;*

- (g) the name and telephone number of the child's registered medical practitioner;*
- (h) record of immunisations, if any, received by the child;*
- (i) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.*

Compliance Information

(1)(a) to (i) On review of a sample of nine records of pre-school children, the inspector observed that records of the particulars (a) to (i) were maintained for each preschool child.

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) The inspector observed throughout the inspection that the staff and children were engaged with each other through activities, conversations and extension of the children's emergent interests. While the inspector did a walk-through of the outdoor play area with the registered provider, a child joined, and the registered provider encouraged the child to facilitate the walk-through. The child and their friends showed the inspector the various areas of interest that had been developed in the outdoor play area and their favourite areas to play in. These included a "Wood" area which was located at the back of the outdoor play area and contained Canadian maple, and horse chestnut trees, a canopy covered outdoor classroom which the children showed the inspector contained a robin's nest in one of the roof corners. Other outdoor areas of interest included a home/ mud kitchen area, colouring and chalk area, sand tables, a raised playhouse, crawling "caterpillar" tunnel, planting area, construction/vehicle area and a round circle of log seats for group time. There was a specific designated parking area for the children to park their ride on toys and a designated wooden shed called the "welly shed" for storage of the children's wellies and outdoor clothing.

Throughout the inspection the inspector observed the opportunities that the outdoor play environment provided for the children to explore nature, living objects and the space and opportunities for physical exercise and physical challenge, whether it was exploring the wood area looking for worms and insects, climbing trees or the raised playhouse. Throughout these activities the children were engrossed in conversations with their friends or concentrating on the activities that they were participating in, all the while supported by the presence of the staff close by monitoring abilities and supporting the children with words of encouragement, praise or suggestions to re-assess the risk of planned activities.

The children appeared to thrive being outdoors and only went inside on two occasions, once to sit as a group to discuss and spend time with the new kitten and on a second occasion to have their snack break.

There were three children's toilets and hand wash basins positioned in the corridor that ran between the classrooms and outdoor play area, providing the children with ease of access to the toilet facilities while outside and inside.

The three Montessori classrooms, each had clearly defined areas of interest such as nature tables, reading areas, constructions areas, art areas and low-level shelving that provided a variety of Montessori equipment, sensory play materials, manipulative and connective play resources including jigsaws, peg boards and matching games. Children were afforded opportunities to bring play equipment outdoors if they wished to work on specific tasks or Play equipment while outside.

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 entrance to the service was appropriately secured with a call bell system, at the main entrance door, which staff attended to, therefore ensuring that no person could enter the service without staff authorisation and helping to prevent any child exiting the service unsupervised. A side entrance gate to the outdoor play area located at the back and side of the premises was also secured internally with a high lock mechanism. Cleaning materials and equipment were stored appropriately in a secure storage area inaccessible to the children.

Infection Control:

The inspector observed that the staff and children adhered to the service's infection control policy with handwashing observed after toileting, messy play and outdoor play and prior to snack time. Cleaning schedules demonstrated that staff carried out regular cleaning and maintenance of the physical environment and play equipment.

Administration of Medication:

There was an adequate administration of medication policy in place in the service if a child required administration of an anti-febrile medication or the administration of a specific medication in the event of an emergency.

Outing:

The service had a policy on not operating outings away from the service. Instead, the registered provider encouraged or arranged parents or authorised professionals to visit the preschool to give talks, play music or do art with the staff and children. On the day of inspection, a parent of a child was visiting with a new kitten to show the children.

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) On review of records maintained, the registered provider assured the inspector that each pre-school child's daily attendance to the service was recorded by a staff member.

(3)(a) The inspector observed on the day of inspection that no person other than persons named (i) to (iv) could enter the service without authorisation by the registered provider or employed staff member which was in line with the service's policy on authorisation to collect children.

(b) The inspector reviewed records that demonstrated the entry of any authorised persons to the service.

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) On review of staff files the inspector observed that there were two staff members employed in the service with current first aid responder (FAR) training. These two staff members were rostered to be present daily with the children in attendance in the service.

(2)(a)(b) A suitably equipped first aid box was available stored on a shelf in the kitchen area and was always available to the children in attendance in the service.

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)(a) On review of fire drill records maintained the inspector observed that prior to summer closure fire drills were carried out monthly in the service. The registered provider confirmed that a fire drill had taken place on the week ending 4 October 2024.

(b) Records were also available demonstrating that the firefighting equipment and the smoke alarms in the service were last serviced in September 2024.

(4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed in the front entrance hall and at the back exit door of the service and a fire assembly point was clearly signposted at the end of the garden.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

A registered provider shall ensure that the pre-school service is adequately insured.

Compliance Information

On review of the service's current insurance certificate, the inspector observed that the insurance certificate detailed cover for a sessional childcare service, Montessori school for 30 children.