

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015KK029		
Name of Service:	Giant Steps Montessori		
Address of Service:	Ballagh, Kilmanagh, Co. Kilkenny		
Eircode:	R95 A2Y0		
Name of Registered Provider:	Marieann Cleere		
Service type:	Sessional		
Date of Inspection:	10/04/2024		
No of pre-school children:	AM	17	PM N/A
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla Child and 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		

Description of service

Giant Steps Montessori is a sessional early childhood care and education (ECCE) service located in the rural setting of Ballagh, Kilmanagh, in north county Kilkenny. The service operates from a purpose-built premises comprised of a spacious classroom, adjacent bathroom/ changing facilities and a large spacious natural outdoor play area, all onsite.

Staffing

There are five staff members employed in the service including the registered provider who manages the service. All staff working in the service hold at least a minimum Level 5 ranging to Level 8 qualification in early childhood care and education on the 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. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under the following regulations:

- 10 - Policies, Procedures etc.-of a preschool service,
- 19(1)(a)(b) -Health Welfare and Development Of Child,
- 23 - Safeguarding Health, Safety, and Welfare of child,

- 25 - First Aid,
- 26 - Fire Safety Measures,
- 28 - Insurance.

As a result, the scope of the inspection included the classroom and outdoor area.

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.

(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) The registered provider ensured that there was always a designated person in charge available in the service. A second named deputy designated person in charge was available to deputise as required.

(b) The designated person in charge was onsite during the inspection.

(c) A clear management structure was observed in the service. Each staff member had roles and responsibilities which the inspector observed in the staff's interactions with parents /guardians at drop off and collection times.

(2) The staff files of the five staff members employed in the service were reviewed by the inspector.

(a)(b) Two validated references were available on file for each staff member, from either a past employer or reputable source.

(c) Garda Vetting certificates were available on file, for each staff member, who as part of their role in the service worked directly with the children. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew vetting every three years.

(d) Police vetting disclosures were available for two staff members, working directly with the children in the service who had lived in a state outside of Ireland for a period of longer than six months.

(3) On inspection of each staff file, the inspector observed that the procedures specified in paragraph (2) were completed by the registered provider, prior to staff members commencing employment in the service.

(4) Copies of certificates of qualification were maintained on file for each staff member who as part of their role in the service worked directly with the children. This documentation demonstrated that staff members held at least a minimum Level 5 to Level 8 qualification in early childhood care and education on the QQI Framework.

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

On review of the service's policies, the registered provider assured the inspector that all the required documents specified in Schedule 5 were available and open for inspection. The service's policies were communicated to the staff, by the registered provider, as part of their induction process prior to commencing employment in the service.

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 at all times there was an adequate number of qualified staff members working with the children in the service.

(3) On the day of inspection there were 17 children aged 3 to 5 years, directly supervised by three staff members.

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) On arrival to the service the inspector observed that the children and staff were engaged in activities with the varied resources and play materials available in the service. Children played seated at the child sized tables, or on small floor mats where the children chose to place on the clear floor space provided.

The children were confidently engaged in building with wooden arches, polishing with some of the Montessori skill tasks available, making jigsaws and exploring the range of natural and man-made materials available. Staff were engaged in play with the children, seated at their level or on the floor supporting and empowering efforts being made with a challenging jigsaw.

One staff member was engaged in an imaginary phone conversation with a child. As the child's imagination brought the amusing conversation in different directions, the staff member responded on cue, prompting the conversation to continue, enhancing the child's language development and scaffolding learning.

The natural light that poured through the bi-folding doors that led into the outdoor play area, encouraged children to place their activity mats in the clear space and as one child completed a difficult jigsaw that they had not accomplished before, the inspector heard her key-worker acknowledging her achievement with words such as "you worked hard on that one" and "you did great work".

The inspector frequently overheard staff acknowledge children's work, their needs and their thoughts and input into their time at the service. Sentences such as "you were really concentrating on that" "you did that so well" and "good job" were used.

The children were confident in their physical environment, moving freely between areas of interest and demonstrating to the inspector that there was an individual sense of identity and belonging to the service. For example, each child had their own storage area for their belonging and an individual storage drawer for their artistic work that they created.

Children knew exactly where to get their art materials or writing skills materials from the art area and as transitions were supported by a timer, the children confidently moved with ease between activities.

At snack time at 10:30 hours the children went and washed their hands, each taking turns. While waiting for children to complete their handwashing, some of the children chose to sit and read a book. When everyone was ready, with hands washed, the daily helpers were announced, who proceeded to hand out the delph plates for snack time.

The inspector observed each of the children identified as helpers, move between the cupboard where the plates were stored, assess how many they could carry at a time and then carry and place them in front of their friends at the tables. Each time each child thanked their friend for giving them a plate. Children then took it in turns to go to the refrigerator and get their lunch items and drink bottles, before sitting and enjoying their snacks. The staff also sat with the children, enjoying a snack, and engaging in conversations.

Snacks were observed to be in line with the service's healthy eating policy and were observed to consist of yogurts, fruit, sandwiches, home baking and cheeses.

Areas of interest observed in the internal physical environment included an art and creativity area, writing skills area, and Montessori areas including a practical life skills area, incorporating threading, pouring, polishing and manipulative tasks. A variety of Montessori equipment was available to the children such as knobbed cylinders, brown stairs, primary, secondary and tertiary-coloured prisms, wooden peg puzzles, sensory bottles, sand timers, and small world animal figurines, all available on low level shelving accessible to the children

The children spent most of their time in the session outdoors in the spacious natural outdoor area which provided several interesting and stimulating natural interest areas which the children eagerly became immersed in once outside.

A covered veranda just outside the bi-folding doors of the classroom provided enough room for a comfortable changing area for the children to sit and change into their appropriate outdoor clothing and welly boots. The area also provided clear space for an outdoor classroom with a chalkboard, table and chairs also provided.

The outdoor area had a soft bark mulch surface in the upper area, where children were observed to engage in building imaginatively with the natural wood material and miniature wooden pallets provided. Soon the children had a pirate ship built and had a staff member engaged in imaginative play.

The inspector also observed that the children had built a natural outdoor shelter comprised of upright wooden tree branches, covered with more transitional ones for the roof, the children were observed to check how stable it was before entering and to reinforce any of the branches that may have moved a little.

Children confidently played in the willow teepee, painting with water on the cement wall of a storage shed and checked on the large variety of flowers and plants that they were growing as part of a bio-diversity project.

Children demonstrated to the inspector that they had strawberries, and herbs such as parsley and thyme growing and confidently picked some parsley to give to the inspector to try.

The outdoor area had a variety of nature projects in place, which the children were involved in, such as an insect house with a natural succulent roof, a hedgehog conservation area and flowers such as primroses, daffodils, tulips, irises and narcissus brightly decorating the outdoor area, which the children had been involved in the sowing and nurturing of.

Other areas of interest that were available in the outdoor area included a large secured polytunnel which held a large sandpit in the inside half and an outdoor kitchen/home area resourced with numerous pots, pans and utensils for play. A water area and mud area were also available for messy and sensory play.

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 was secured with a call bell system and staff could visualise who was calling to the service through the windows and door. This prevented any persons, other than children, parents, and staff, from entering the premises unauthorised and prevented children from exiting the service unsupervised.

The natural outdoor play area was secured by a five-foot wooden fence and heavy wooden secured gate.

The staff conducted a daily risk assessment of the outdoor area, prior to children going out to play in the area.

Records of this daily assessment were maintained.

There was evidence on review of documentation that cleaning schedules were conducted and recorded daily. All cleaning materials and equipment were stored in designated storage areas away from and out of reach of the children.

Infection Control:

An adequate infection control policy was in place in the service, including detailed hand washing, nappy changing and toileting policies. Children and staff were observed to wash their hands prior to snack and mealtimes and post messy play, outdoor play, and toileting. No children in attendance on the day of inspection required nappy changing.

Administration of Medication:

There was an administration of medication policy in place in the service. In discussion with staff, staff confidently informed the inspector of the procedure that is followed should a child require administration of prescribed or non-prescribed medication while attending the service. On review of service's administration of medication records reflected that staff administered medication in line with the service's policy.

Outing:

While the service did not tend to operate outings away from the service due to the facilities available to them onsite, there was an adequate outings policy available specific 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) There were two staff members qualified in First Aid Responder (FAR) training present on the day of inspection. On review of staff files, two staff members employed in the service were currently qualified in FAR, as is required by Regulation 25.

It is acknowledged that the three other staff members had basic paediatric first aid qualifications.

The registered provider assured the inspector that there was always a staff member trained in FAR onsite, while children were in attendance, by demonstrating that the daily staff roster reflected this requirement.

(2)(a) A first aid box was observed on a shelf in the classroom. On inspection of its contents, the first aid box was adequately resourced with records of the contents maintained.

(b)The inspector observed that staff could easily access the first aid box if required by any child, while in attendance at 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 fire fighting 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) The registered provider demonstrated that a record of any fire drills carried out in the service was maintained. The last fire drill was recorded as having taken place on the 20 March 2024.
- (b) Records of the maintenance of fire-fighting equipment and smoke alarms were maintained in the service. The last date of the annual service for the firefighting equipment was recorded as having taken place in January August 2024 and for the smoke alarms was recorded as having taken place on the 29 September 2023.
- (4) A notice of the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed in the entrance hall. A fire assembly point was clearly signposted in a safe area of the carpark.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

An insurance certificate was displayed on a notice board in the reception area of the service, which provided details that insurance for a sessional service for up to 22 preschool children had been obtained by the registered provider. The expiry date on the insurance certificate was 27 March 2025.