

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015KK054
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Name of Service:	Little Steps Country Creche LTD
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Address of Service:	Unit 08A Cillin Hill, Leggettsrath, Dublin Road, Kilkenny, Co. Kilkenny
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Name of Registered Provider:	Aoife O'Brien, Tracey Brannigan.
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	07/11/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	28	PM	26
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla Child and Family Agency, Athy Road, Carlow.
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Inspection undertaken by:	Norma Thornton.
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Title:	Early Years Inspector.
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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

Little Steps Country Creche LTD is a registered full day childcare service, providing sessional, part-time and full day care services for children aged 1 to 6 years. The service operates from an industrial unit located in Cillin Hill Business Park off the Dublin Road, just outside Kilkenny city.

The service is open from 08:00 to 17:30 hours, Monday to Friday and contains four pre-school classrooms and an onsite outdoor play area at the back of the building.

Staffing

There are seven staff members employed in the service including the two registered providers. All seven staff who as part of their role in the service, work directly with the children in attendance, hold qualifications 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 9, 10, 11, 15, 20, 21, 22, 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 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) There was a designated person in charge in the service for the duration of the inspection.

(b) The staff roster demonstrated that the designated person in charge or a named deputy designated person in charge, was always onsite while the service was in operation.

(c) A clear outline of the management of the structure was displayed in the service, identifying the lines of authority, accountability, the roles, and responsibilities of individual staff members in the service.

(2) Staff files for seven staff members employed in the service were reviewed by the inspector.

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

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

(d) Not applicable as no staff member employed in the service had lived outside of the state for a period of longer than six months.

(4) Certificates of qualifications were available for inspection, for each staff member, who as part of their role were working directly with the children, demonstrating that each staff member held at least a minimum Level 5 to Level 8 qualification in early childhood care and education on the national 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 and staff files, the inspector was assured that the registered providers ensured that all required documents specified in Schedule 5, were available in the service and were communicated to the staff as part of their induction process on commencing employment in the service and revised annually.

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 always, during the inspection, an adequate number of staff members working directly with the children. An additional staff member was supernumerary and available to provide support in any of the four classrooms in operation and to provide relief for staff breaks.

(2) The following adult to child ratios were observed in each of the four classrooms on the morning and afternoon of the inspection.

In the Wobbler room there were 2 staff members directly caring for 6 children aged 1 to 2 years throughout the inspection.

In the Toddler room there was 1 staff member for 6 children aged 2 to 3 years in the morning and in the afternoon, 5 children were directly cared for by 1 staff member.

In the Junior Preschool room there was 1 staff member directly caring for 9 children aged 3 to 4 years between the hours of 09:00 to 12:00 and in the afternoon 8 children remained with 1 staff member.

In the Senior Preschool room there were 7 children aged 4 to 5 years directly cared for by 2 staff members, throughout the inspection.

(8)(a) On review of the staff roster and in discussion with the staff the inspector was assured that there were always at least 2 adults on the premises while children were in attendance in the service.

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 12 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 20 – Facilities for rest and play

(1) Subject to this regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) having regard to the number of pre-school children attending the service, their respective ages and the amount of time they spend on the premises, there are adequate and suitable facilities for each child to play indoors and, where required by these Regulations, outdoors, during the day, and

(b) there are adequate and suitable facilities for a pre-school child to rest during the day, and in the case of an overnight pre-school service, during the day and the night.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)(b) The inspector observed that each of the four classrooms had suitable and appropriate furniture and equipment available to the age group of the children in each classroom. Each classroom was furnished with suitable tables, seating, interest areas and low-level shelves that the children could easily access. Both preschool classrooms were directly opposite the toilet facilities so that children had ease of access to the toilets while still being supervised and supported by the relief staff. Between the wobbler and toddler room, a nappy changing room was provided, as well as a second nappy changing unit available in the main toilet facilities.

An outdoor play area was available at the back of the building, which was divided into two sections, one for the older children and one for the younger children.

A designated sleep room was located between the Wobbler and Toddler rooms and was equipped with five standard cot beds.

The outdoor area contained child sized picnic benches and equipment which included an outdoor kitchen, playhouse and chalk boards.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 21 – Equipment and materials

A registered provider shall ensure that there is adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment and materials available on the premises of the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

The inspector observed that each classroom had appropriate physical environments created to meet the needs of the children in attendance. In the wobbler room, soft textured materials such as soft mats and cushions provided rest and relaxation areas for the young children. Activity centres, pull toys and fixed furniture pieces encouraged the physical development of the children, as they were observed to pull up and walk around furniture pieces. The three other classrooms had clearly defined interest areas which included some of the following, rest areas reading areas, kitchen/ home areas, art, and creativity areas. Low level shelving in each of the classrooms provided resources of suitable play materials which included varieties of connective and manipulative blocks, jigsaws, and peg boards, reading materials, mobile toys such as cars and trucks and treasure baskets of small world figurines.

In the outdoor areas the various interest areas such as the outdoor kitchen, construction area, art area and growing areas were supplemented with appropriate equipment and materials.

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 inspector observed that a designated staff member prepared the main meals on site in the service kitchen. In the mornings, breakfast was provided to children on arrival to the service, who may not have had the opportunity to have breakfast at home. A choice of wheat-based cereals with warm or cold milk was offered. At snack time at 10:00 hours, the children bought their snacks from home or else the service provided a snack which was comprised of one food from the carbohydrate group and some fruit.

A two-week dinner plan was in place in the service and parents were informed of what meals were offered daily. Included in the mani hot meal dinner plan were vegetable pasta, spaghetti bolognese, roast chicken vegetables and potato, boiled ham, vegetables and potato, shepherds pie, fish and vegetables, chicken curry, fish and chips, pizza or nuggets and chips.

On the day of inspection, the mani meal was spaghetti bolognese which included ground beef steak mince, hidden vegetables and a homemade tomato sauce with garlic bread.

Options of mashed potato, vegetables and sweet potato were also available if children didn't want pasta.

Tea options included sausage rolls, ham and cheese sandwiches, beans or pasta hoops on toast, scrambled egg on brown bread, vegetable soup and brown bread, waffles and beans, toasted cheese and ham wraps, pancakes.

Additional snacks provided in the service consisted of crackers/ scones with butter and jam, homemade fairy cakes, banana bread, fruit and yogurts.

Drinking water was readily available in each classroom and milk or water was provided at meal and snack times.

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 to the service was secured with a keypad and call bell system. Internally another coded keypad system secured the classrooms. Only authorised staff working in the service had access to the code to enter the service, therefore minimising the risk of unauthorised persons entering the building and preventing children from exiting the service unsupervised. The outdoor play area was secured with a ten-foot rendered block wall and wooden gate, which also had a coded keypad.

A daily risk assessment of the outdoor play area was observed to be carried out and records demonstrated that this was recorded daily.

The service cleaning materials and equipment were stored appropriately in a secure storage area inaccessible to the children.

Infection Control:

The service had appropriate toilet and nappy changing facilities provided to meet the numbers and needs of the children in each classroom. All sanitary facilities contained handwash basins, supplied with liquid hand soap and paper towelling, which the children could easily access and use.

Children were observed to use the toilet and hand washing facilities with ease, while staff were observed to support and prompt the children to wash their hands correctly after using the toilet, after messy and outdoor play and before snack and mealtimes. Staff were observed to carry out nappy changing procedures in line with the service's nappy changing policy and in adherence with the service's hand washing and infection control policy.

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 if a child centred medication plan was required for the administration of a specific medication in the event of an emergency.

On review of past administration of medication forms, the inspector observed that procedures for administration of medications were carried out and recorded in line with the service's administration of medication policy.

Safe Sleep:

There was one sleep room available in the service containing five standard cots. Staff were observed to ensure that the temperature of the sleep room was maintained within the recommended range of 16 to 20 °C. Staff were observed to physically check and record the room temperature and sleeping children's physical checks, which included colour, breathing and sleep position every 10 minutes.

Outing:

The service had an adequate outings policy in place, to implement when taking children on an outing away from the service. The policy detailed the preparation, risk assessment and communication with parents/guardians prior to the outing, the precautions, and procedures to be taken prior to and during the outing and the procedures to be carried out in the event of an emergency.

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 attendance records the inspector was assured that the registered provider and staff recorded the checking in and out of each child attending the service daily, detailing each child's time of entry and exit daily.

(3)(a) The staff and registered provider assured the inspector that no other person apart from children attending the service, parents/guardians dropping or collecting children, staff members could enter the premises without being approved by a staff member.

(b) The inspector observed that a daily record was maintained of any authorised visitors permitted entry to the service. The inspector was requested to record their entry to the service, which included the date, name, contact number, reason for entry, who approved the access and time of entry and departure.

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 employed in the service with current certification in the required first aid responder (FAR) training for children. At all times while the service was operating, one or both staff members were in attendance. This was reflected in the staff roster reviewed by the inspector on the day of inspection.
- (2) (a)(b) A first aid box was available and easily accessed by staff on a shelf in the kitchen. A record demonstrated that its contents were checked monthly and replaced if necessary.

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.
- (3) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire shall be displayed in a conspicuous position in the premises.
- (4)

Compliance Information

- (1)(a) There was a written record of the monthly fire drills that took place in the service. The last fire drill was recorded as having taken place on the 17 October 2024.
- (b) The registered provider maintained a record of the number, type and maintenance of fire-fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the service. The last maintenance check of the fire-fighting equipment and smoke alarm system was recorded as having taken place on 03 September 2024.
- (4) The registered provider ensured that a fire procedure notice was clearly displayed in the main hall, for all authorised persons entering the building to see.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

There was a current insurance certificate for the service displayed on a notice board in the main hall. The insurance certificate detailed insurance cover for a full day care service provision for a maximum of 50 children and covered the period from 28 March 2024 to 27 March 2025.