

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015KK100
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Name of Service:	Step By Step Crèche
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Address of Service:	60 Oaklawns, Paulstown, Co. Kilkenny
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Eircode:	R95 AY02
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Name of Registered Provider:	Helen Mallon
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Service type:	Full Day, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	26/11/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	34	PM	23
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla Child & 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

Step By Step Crèche is a registered full day childcare service located in the village of Paulstown in county Kilkenny. The service caters for early years children aged 2 to 6 years between the hours of 08:00 to 18:00, Monday to Friday for 51 weeks of the year. The service operates from a building at the entrance of the Oaklawns residential estate which provided three classrooms, a designated kitchen and dining area and has a play area onsite.

Staffing

There were eight staff employed in the service. Seven of the staff, including the registered provider are employed to work directly with the preschool children, while one staff member is employed as an onsite chef.

All staff who as part of their role in the service, work directly with the children in attendance held qualifications ranging from Level 5 to Level 8 qualifications in early childhood care and education 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, 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 demonstrated in the service, staff were aware of the lines of authority, accountability, their roles and responsibilities in the service.

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

(a)(b) Two validated references were available on file for each of the eight 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) Police vetting was available for one 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 provider 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 at staff team meetings.

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) The inspector observed throughout the inspection that there were 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 three 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 Toddler room there was 1 staff member caring 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 Preschool room 1, there was 1 staff member directly caring for 10 children aged 2 ½ to 3 years between the hours of 09:30 to 12:30 and in the afternoon 6 children remained with 1 staff member.
- In Preschool room 2, there were 18 children aged 3 to 5 years directly cared for by 3 staff members, throughout the ECCE sessional service from 09:30 to 12:30 hours and in the afternoon, there were 12 children directly cared for by 2 staff members.
- (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) There was a registration form available in respect of each child enrolled in the service. A sample of 12 forms completed by the parents were reviewed as part of the inspection process and were found to contain all the information required under parts (a) – (i) of this regulation.

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

In each of the three classrooms, adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment was provided. The inspector observed that each classroom contained age-appropriate equipment and staff and children had developed identifiable areas of interest, which included kitchen/home areas, construction areas, creativity areas and rest and reading areas, which had been well resourced with appropriate equipment and play materials to create inviting physical environments for the children in attendance.

The outdoor play area provided an all-weather surface and contained well-maintained equipment for children to climb on, crawl through, swing, slide and ride on.

An outdoor kitchen, shop stall, sand table and gardening area provided children with opportunities for messy play and imaginary play.

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 registered provider and chef demonstrated to the inspector that they had recently revised the service's menu plans implementing the most current nutrition standards for early years services.

The inspector observed that each classroom was provided with a refrigerator where children were observed to confidently and familiarly place their lunch boxes. A drinking station was provided in each room where children could access their own individual drink bottles or be provided with a fresh glass of drinking water.

At mealtimes appropriate eating and drinking equipment was provided which children were observed to be familiar with the use of.

Morning snacks were observed to consist of yogurts, fruit, crackers, and cheese. The inspector observed that a staff member quickly ascertained that one child had forgotten their lunch box and provided the child with a plate of sliced banana and apple. Cups of milk or water were provided according to individual children's choices or dietary needs.

The staff had determined that a light lunch served at 12:30 with dinner served later at 16:00 hours was more beneficial for the children, with a scheduled snack in between or as required by the children. This review had been decided in consultation with the children, parents and staff in consideration that many children attending a sessional or part-time service would have dinner in the evenings with their families.

Lunch on the day of inspection consisted of cheese on toast with dinner being chicken tikka masala. The service chef informed the inspector that the menu was continuously reviewed and decided upon, on reflection of the children's likes and dislikes.

The sample lunch menu provided options of pasta and ham with homemade vegetable ketchup, French toast, tortilla wraps with a variety of fillings, home-made chicken fingers and beans, homemade pizza, open brown bread sandwiches, fish goujons and beans, pancakes and homemade jambons and beans.

Samples of afternoon snack included egg custard, fruit, yogurts, cheese and crackers and fruit salads.

Dinner options included spaghetti bolognese, chicken curry and rice, beef casserole, tuna pasta bake, chicken korma, shepherd's pie, fish goujons with pureed carrot and parsnip, beef lasagne or vegetable curry and rice. The chef explained how she would try to ensure that the children obtained their daily vegetable and fruit requirements often hidden in sauces and purees, if they were inclined to not eat vegetables.

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 keypad call system at the main entrance door. The outdoor play area in the service was surrounded with an eight-foot-high wooden fence.

This prevented any unauthorised person from entering the premises and prevented any child from exiting the service unsupervised.

All cleaning equipment and materials were safely secured in designated storage units, away from the children. The kitchen area was in accessible to the children while they used the adjacent dining area.

Infection Control:

The service had an adequate infection control policy in place. A separate handwashing, nappy changing policy and toileting policy were attached as part of the service's Infection Control policy.

Hand washing was observed to be carried out by both staff and the children, prior to snack and mealtimes, after assisting with wiping noses, after toileting and nappy changes and after messy or outdoor play.

Toileting and nappy changing were supported according to individual children's needs.

Cleaning schedules were displayed in each classroom and indicated that these were recorded daily by the staff present, as tasks were completed.

Administration of Medication:

Staff assured the inspector that they were informed of procedures and on how to administer any medication, in line with the service's policy on administration of medication. On review of a sample of four administration of medication records, the procedure details had been recorded specifically in line with the administration of medication policy in the service.

Safe Sleep:

Five appropriate sleep mats and appropriate bed linen were provided for children who wished to take a nap while in the service. The inspector observed that children who wanted a nap were placed to sleep in the toddler room after dinner at 12:30 hours, while any child who wished to continue playing was moved to the Preschool 1 room for the duration of nap time. A staff member remained with the sleeping children and was observed to carry out physical checks on the sleeping children, every 10 minutes in line with safe sleep guidelines.

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) Children's daily attendance records were available for the inspector to review. It was observed that the staff recorded the checking in and out of each child attending the service daily, detailing each child's time of entry and exit to the service.

(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

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 four 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, there were three staff members with FAR training in attendance. On review of the staff roster the inspector was assured that there was always at least one staff member with FAR training onsite while children attended the service.

(2) (a)(b) A new first aid box had been purchased by the registered provider on the 04 January 2024. This was available to all staff and accessible in the upstairs office. A small first aid bag was available in each of the classrooms. Records demonstrated that the 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 fire fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises.
- (2) The record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection by-
- (a) a parent or guardian of a pre-school child attending or proposing to attend the pre-school service,
 - (b) an employee, and
 - (c) an authorised person.
- (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) A record of monthly fire drills carried out in the service was maintained by the registered provider. The last fire drill was recorded as having taken place on the 21 October 2024.
- (b) Records of the annual maintenance checks of the service's firefighting equipment and fire alarm system were maintained. The last maintenance check for the firefighting equipment was recorded as having taken place in January 2024. A new fire alarm system was installed on the 02 February 2023 and was recorded as having a maintenance check on the 10 March 2024.
- (2) All records relating to fire safety in the service were maintained onsite and open for inspection
- (4) A notice of the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed inside the entrance door. A fire assembly point was clearly signed in the outdoor play area.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

An insurance certificate displaying adequate insurance for a full day childcare service for up to 44 preschool children was displayed on the notice board in the entrance hall.

The insurance certificate provided cover from 28 March 2024 to the 27 March 2025.