

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LH059
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Name of Service:	Little Steps Creche & Pre-School
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Address of Service:	34 Oulster Lane, Drogheda, Co. Louth
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Name of Registered Provider:	Aoife Lennon Ne Roden
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	25/09/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	13	PM	12
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Hampton Court, Cootehill Road, Drumalee, Co Cavan. H12 YY84
Inspection undertaken by:	S Mc Kenna
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

Little Steps Creche and Preschool was established in 2014 and taken over by the current registered provider in February 2023. The service is registered to provide full time, part time and sessional care to a maximum of 19 children. While the service is registered to accommodate children aged 1-6 years it is currently accommodating children aged 2-6 years. The service participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme from 9am to 12 Midday and from 1pm to 4pm Monday to Friday. The service is located in a converted domestic dwelling and has 2 care rooms in operation. The Wobbler room is located on the ground floor, and the ECCE room is located on the first floor. Asleep room, storeroom, kitchen and office are located on the ground floor, and an enclosed outdoor area is located to the rear of the service.

Staffing

The service employs 4 staff members to work directly with the children attending the service, which includes the registered provider.

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 Regulation 9 Management & Recruitment, Regulation 11 Staffing Levels, Regulation 19 Health, Welfare & Development of Child, Regulation 23 Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of Child, Regulation 25 First Aid, Regulation 26 Fire Safety Measures and Regulation 28 Insurance.

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, deputy 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.

(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 service had a designated person in charge, who is the registered provider, and a named person to deputise in their absence.

(b) Following discussion with the registered provider and deputy person in charge, it was confirmed that when the preschool service was in operation the designated person in charge or the named person in charge were on the premises.

(2) The files for 4 staff were reviewed.

(a) (b)

Two written and validated references were on file for 2 adults, of which 2 were from a previous employer and 2 were from a reputable source.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for 4 staff. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years for all employed staff.

(d) A review of the employment history for 4 staff, demonstrated that 1 adult had lived outside the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months. The required police vetting for the 1 staff was available on file.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that 4 staff employed to work with children, held an appropriate childcare qualification at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Non-Compliance Information

(2) (a) (b)

There were no written validated references available on file for one adult.

The validation process had not been carried out on the two written references available for one staff member.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

When verifying references, we called all references provided, but we never signed the date to show completion.

In future, we will sign and date the forms with the name of the person who carries out the validation.

When verifying, all references must be signed

Supporting documentation submitted

Four validated references were submitted.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider and supporting documentation submitted has adequately addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 9 (2) (a) (b).

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) On the day of inspection there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) The adult to child ratios were correct in the service when the inspector arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection. The following adult to child ratios were observed.

One adult cared for 8 children aged 3 years 8 months to 4 years 7 months in the ECCE Room, of whom 1 child attended on a sessional basis and 7 children attended on a part time or full day care basis.

Two adults cared for 5 children aged 2 years 8 months to 3 years 6 months in the Wobbler Room, all of whom attended on part time or full day care basis.

In addition to the above, a staff member rostered to work 12 – 5.30pm on the day of inspection arrived at 12 midday and covered staff lunches.

(8) A review of the staff roster demonstrated that the registered provider ensured that 2 adults were present on the premises at all times.

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

The following examples demonstrate how children's learning, development and well-being was facilitated in the service:

Basic Needs

- The service provides breakfast, a hot meal and afternoon snack to the children. The snack during the sessional ECCE session is taken in from home by the children. The children's snacks contained variety of breads, fruit, yogurt and cheese. The hot meal served was potato cubes, fish fingers and tomato ketchup. The staff were observed to sit with the children at snack and mealtimes, engaging in conversations and providing supports where needed. The children's drink bottles were available on a trolley in each of the care rooms.
- The older children were observed to use the toilet independently. The younger children had their nappy changed in line with their routine, and staff were observed to use this one-to-one time to talk, sing and laugh with the children.
- The children in both care rooms experienced a change of environment to the outdoor area and were observed to be dressed appropriately for the weather on the day.
- Cosy areas where children could rest were provided in each of the care rooms, through the provision of soft floor mats and cushions.

Supporting Relationships

- The atmosphere upon the inspector's arrival to the care rooms was fun and inviting, the children showed the inspector their snack items and talked about a birthday celebration that was happening that day. The children appeared content in their learning environments and were familiar with the staff who cared for them.

- The staff used gentle encouragement for children to be mindful of other children’s feelings such as when minor disagreements occurred over the sharing and turn taking of particular toys. The staff were observed to promote positive behaviour, with praise given for positive behaviour interactions with their peers.
- The children in the ECCE room took part in a “bear hunt” activity and were observed to have fun and laugh and play with their peers throughout. A sensory activity to include items from nature such as conkers, leaves and acorns was also observed to be enjoyed. The children in the Wobbler room enjoyed a colouring activity and took pride in showing the inspector their hedgehog pictures. At circle time the staff and children talked about the shape of the week and then went in search of any triangle shaped items they could find in the care room.
- Communication books are in place which details the child’s arrival and collection time, what they have eaten, toilet/nappy times, and what activities they have done each day, these are sent home at the end of each day. This book is also used to send reminders to parents regarding items required e.g. family photos.

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

The registered provider ensured all reasonable measures were put in place to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of children attending such as:

General Safety:

- The premises were appropriately secured to prevent a child from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises. The garden area was observed to be secured, and no hazards were identified.
- Storage areas were inaccessible to the children.
- The window in the care room on the first floor was fitted with a restrictive device.
- Cleaning agents were stored out of reach of children.
- The children were observed to be appropriately supervised during the inspection.

Infection Control:

The inspector observed the following infection control measures in practice within the service:

- Thermostatically controlled warm running water, liquid soap and paper towels were provided for hand washing purposes. Hand washing was observed in practise after children used the toilet and before dinner time.
- Two nappy changing procedures were observed, where individual disposable gloves and aprons were used for each nappy change in line with the services policy. Staff were observed to wash their own hands following nappy changing procedures.
- Sanitary areas were ventilated through means of openable windows.
- External waste bins were stored in an area inaccessible to children.
- Toys and play equipment observed in use were maintained in a clean condition.

Safe Sleep:

- The inspector was advised that no children currently sleep while attending the service.
- Stackable beds and suitable bed linen is provided in a designated sleep room for children aged over 2 years to sleep if required.
- Sleeps logs available included information to be recorded such as child's name, position, breathing pattern and skin colour, along with time checked and staff signatures.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

The following infection control risks were identified.

1. A child's hands were not observed to be washed following nappy changing on one occasion, which is not in line with the service's policy which outlines children's hand are too be washed following nappy changing procedures.
2. The pedal on the pedal operated nappy bin in the downstairs sanitary area was observed to be broken, therefore requiring staff to lift the bin lid with their hands rather than use the pedal operation.

Fire Safety:

3. The most recent fire drill recorded in the service was dated January 2024. Through discussion with staff and the person in charge it was confirmed that no fire drills had been carried out since this date. Fire drills are required to be carried out on a monthly basis to familiarise both adults and children of the correct procedures to follow in the event of a fire

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Infection Control:

1. At the end of a nappy change, it has been verbally reinforced that all children must wash their hands. There are signs up in the changing area, and this should have been done on the day, as is common practice.
2. For the bin, the foot pedal was off the latch, and this has been fixed.

Fire Safety:

3. We have reviewed our fire drill policy, for once a month they are being carried out. The recording of this is stored in the fire safety manual.

Supporting documentation submitted

Infection Control:

Staff meeting agenda where discussions regarding handwashing and pedal bins are documented.

Fire Safety:

Fire drill record for September and October.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider and supporting documentation submitted has adequately addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 23.

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) Following review of the staff files, it was evident that the registered provider ensured that there was a member of staff trained in First Aid Response (FAR) on the premises at all times, this was evidenced by three staff FAR certificate all of whom were rostered on duty during service operating hours.

(2) (a) & (b) Suitably equipped first aid boxes were available on the premises, in each care room and the office, and were always available.

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) A record of the fire drills that take place was available. The most recent fire drill was recorded in January 2024.

(b) The annual maintenance certificate for the fire extinguishers and the smoke alarms was dated 11 March 2025.

(4) The fire evacuation procedures were displayed on walls throughout the building, which contained details in relation to the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider had insurance cover in place for 19 pre-school children attending the service on a Full Day Care basis. The policy showed that the service had insurance in place from 28 March 2025 to 27 March 2026.