

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LK163
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Name of Service:	Step by Step Montessori and Afterschool
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Address of Service:	Newboro, Ballyloughnan, Patrickswell, Co. Limerick
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Eircode:	V94 C92V
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Name of Registered Provider:	Catriona Fitzgerald
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Service type:	Full Day, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	28/04/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	13	PM	14
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla, Early years inspectorate, Estuary House, Henry St, Limerick
Inspection undertaken by:	E Browne
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).

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Description of service

This preschool service is located in a rural setting close to the village of Patrickswell and Adare. It provides full day care for children aged 2– 6 years between the hours of 09.15 to 18.00 pm, Monday to Friday

The premise is a detached dwelling house with two designated playrooms, a sensory room, storage area, bathroom facilities for the children and an enclosed outdoor play area to the rear of the service.

Staffing

There were 2 staff members present in the service on the day of the service.

The registered provider was not present.

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. Regulation 9

Regulation 9 - Management and recruitment (1)(a)(b)(2)(a)(b)(c)(d) (3)(4).

Regulation 11 - Staffing levels (1) (2).

Regulation 15 - Record of pre-school child (1)(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f) (g) (h) and (i).

Regulation 19 - Health, welfare and development of child (1)(a).

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance (1), (2) (a), (b).

Regulation 25 - First aid (1)(2)(a)(b)

Regulation 28 - Insurance

Regulation 29 - Premises

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 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,*

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

(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 and a named person who was able to deputise as required.

(b) The designated person in charge and the deputy person were available on the premises on the day of inspection.

(2) Staff files for the 3 staff members employed in the service and the registered provider were reviewed on the day of the inspection.

(a) There were 7 written and verified references available from the past employers and in particular the most recent employer.

(b) There was 1 written and verified reference available from sources other than past employers in the case of a person who had no past employers.

(c) Vetting disclosures were received from the National Vetting Bureau of the Garda Síochána in accordance with the Act of 2012 in respect of all staff. All Garda Vetting documentation was dated within the last three years as per the regulatory notice EYI-RN12.3 renewal of Garda vetting published by the Inspectorate in September 2023 and effective from 01 January 2024.

(d) No staff member had lived outside the jurisdiction for a period of longer than six consecutive months; therefore, international police vetting documentation was not required.

(4) All staff had childcare qualifications ranging from Level 6 to Level 8 on the national qualifications framework.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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.

Compliance Information

(1) At all times during the period of the inspection the registered provider ensured that an adequate number of staff members were working directly with the children.

(2) On the day of the inspection there were 2 staff members caring for 13 preschool children present in the morning and 2 staff members caring for 14 preschool children present in the afternoon.

During the period of inspection, the minimum ratio of staff to children was maintained and an adequate number of staff were working directly 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;*

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

(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 sample of 10 records for preschool children were reviewed and all contained the following details i.e. (a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f) (g) (h) and (i).

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) BASIC NEEDS:

The healthy eating policy of the service was available, which supported children and parents to choose healthy foods. Drinking water was available throughout the day if a child was thirsty and needed a drink. The children's main meal was provided by an outside catering company which the service ensured supported healthy food choices

The children toileted independently, with assistance given to those who needed it. Children were encouraged to wash their hands at appropriate times during the day, such as after toileting and before eating. Hand washing was facilitated in the sanitary accommodation area with a supply of hot and cold running water, paper towels and liquid antibacterial soap available. To support personal cleanliness and prevent cross infection, signs were on display to demonstrate the correct coughing technique to be used by the children.

The children could rest and relax as desired in the designated sensory/ library/quiet room in the service.

The children enjoyed freedom of movement within each room, and play activities were child lead for the most part. Outdoor play was supported and encouraged, and suitable clothing was available for children to play outdoors in poor weather conditions.

The adults modelled positive behaviour for the children and the children were praised for their good behaviour.

Sensory play materials such as sand, paint, water and rice were in use on the day.

SUPPORTING RELATIONSHIPS AROUND CHILDREN:

Staff were observed to be kind, caring and patient in all their interactions with the children. Each child was treated as an individual and had their likes, abilities and natural tendencies understood and respected.

Children could form and maintain secure relationships with the adults through the use of the key person system.

Staff were observed to be interested in the children, listened to them and spoke to them using soft tones of voice and positive language, engaging them in conversation and gave each child the opportunity to express themselves.

Children's opinions were sought, and their decisions respected which reflected that they were valued.

Photographic evidence of activities undertaken, and art portfolios were available to share with parents and helped support a sense of working in partnership with parents.

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) Each pre-school child attending the service was checked in and out of the service by staff. This record was available on the attendance register.

(3)(a) The person in charge ensured that no person other than the following were allowed enter the service.

(i) Pre-school child attending the service.

(ii) A person dropping or collecting such a child.

(iii) An employee.

(iv) An unpaid worker can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee.

(b) A daily record in writing was kept of persons who entered the preschool.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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) Two staff members held current certification in first aid responder for children and were available while the service operated.

(2)(a) A first aid box was easily accessible and in a conspicuous position in the service.

(b) The first aid box was available if required by a child.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The insurance certificate for the service was available and adequate and had an expiry date of March 2027.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-

- (a) of sound and stable structure,*
- (b) safe and secure,*
- (c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated*
- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and*
- (e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.*

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured the following:

- (a) The premises was of sound and stable structure and there were no visible defects.
 - (b) The entrance and exit doors were secure to prevent children from exiting and to prevent unauthorised access. The front of the premises was gated and secure with a key pad system. The outdoor area was fenced and walled.
 - (c) Heating, ventilation and lighting were adequate in each area of the service.
 - (d) Each room and each sanitary area was clean and well maintained.
 - (e) Suitable sanitary facilities were available for both staff and children.
- All waste was managed appropriately.
- Hygienic hand washing, drying and nappy changing facilities were available.