

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| TUSLA Identifier: | TU2015LK164 |
|--------------------------|-------------|

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Name of Service: | Stepping Stones Montessori |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Address of Service: | Shanagolden National School Shanagolden Co. Limerick |
|----------------------------|--|

| | |
|-----------------|----------|
| Eircode: | V94 XAK6 |
|-----------------|----------|

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| Name of Registered Provider: | Hazel Sillery |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|

| | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| Service type: | Part Time, Sessional |
|----------------------|----------------------|

| | |
|----------------------------|------------|
| Date of Inspection: | 13/10/2025 |
|----------------------------|------------|

| | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----|----|----|---|
| No of pre-school children: | AM | 16 | PM | 4 |
|-----------------------------------|----|----|----|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| Address of the Early Years Inspectorate: | Tusla Early Years Inspectorate 2 nd floor Estuary House Henry Street Limerick |
|---|---|

| | |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| Inspection undertaken by: | J Ryan |
|----------------------------------|--------|

| | |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| 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

This privately owned and operated sessional and part time service was established in September 2012 and provides care for pre-school children aged 2 – 6 years from 9.00hrs – 14.00hrs Monday – Friday for 38 weeks of the year. The service is based in the national school and can cater for up to 22 pre-school children at any one time. It is located in a rural area and comprises of one playroom, a sanitary accommodation area and an outdoor play area. A registered school aged service operates in the afternoon in the playroom also.

Staffing

The registered provider and three additional staff members work in the service each day and all staff have childcare qualifications.

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 the child and safety. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9,11,19,25,26 and 28.

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*

(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) The registered provider was the person in charge and a named person to deputise as required was available.

(b) The designated person in charge was on the premises when the inspector arrived.

(2)(a) Seven written references from past employers were available for staff members. The manager of the service had validated all references that were on file.

(b) One written and verified reference from sources other than a past employer was available where required.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were received from the National Vetting Bureau of the Garda Síochána in accordance with the Act of 2012 in respect of all four staff. All garda vetting documentations were 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) Police vetting was not required as no staff member had lived in another state for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months.

(4) The four staff working directly with the children attending the service held awards in Early Childhood Care and Education at Levels 5, 6 and 7 on the National Qualifications Framework.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 11 - Staffing levels

(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

(2) There were 16 pre-school children aged 3 – 4 years being supervised by 4 staff during the morning sessional service.

There were 4 pre-school children aged 3 – 4 years being supervised by 2 staff for the part time service until 14.00hrs.

The adult/child ratio on the day of the inspection was greater than the minimum requirements.

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 detailed the requirement for parents to supply healthy snacks for their children. Parents whose children attended the service on a part time basis supplied two snacks for their child as they attended the service for 5 hours each day. Snacks observed on the day of the inspection included sandwiches, crackers, fruit and yogurts. Staff sat at the tables with the children while they ate their food and the occasion was sociable for both children and staff as staff also had their snack at this time. Drinking water was available throughout the session if a child needed a drink or was thirsty.

The children who were toilet trained toileted independently with assistance given to those who needed it. They were encouraged to wash their hands at appropriate times such as after toileting and before eating. Hand washing was facilitated in the sanitary accommodation with a supply of hot and cold running water, liquid antibacterial soap and paper hand towels.

Children were allowed to move freely indoors from one activity to the next for specific periods of time. A rest area was developed in the room where children could sit and relax in. There was a plentiful supply of play props available to support sensorial play. The children were supported and encouraged to behave appropriately for their age and stage of development through having simple rules to follow and a good level of choice of activities. The adults modelled positive behaviour for the children and the children were praised for their good behaviour.

Interactions with the children were positive and caring. Children were praised, encouraged and listened to. Staff operated in partnership with parents by sharing individual records for each child which detailed their progress.

Staff and children were observed to sit in the rest area and read the child's 'family book' which contained pictures of the child's family, pets and friends and it supported each child's sense of identity and belonging and helped them transition into the service. Children were observed making jigsaws on the table and on the floor. At circle time staff read stories and sang nursery rhymes with the group which children participated in and enjoyed.

Children played outdoors on the day of the inspection which supported their gross motor development and allowed greater social interaction as a group. Self-care skills were supported by staff as children were observed to put on their coats independently at going home time.

The key worker system was evident as the group of 16 children were divided into a smaller group of 10 children who played in the sports hall and a group of 6 children remained in the playroom to choose activities to complete.

PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT:

The service provided a range of developmentally appropriate experiences for the children attending. The range of toys offered stimulation to all the senses. Materials used included sensory, cause and effect, symbolic and imaginative play which supported all areas of development. Children were observed making jigsaws and playing with playdough. Materials and equipment were freely accessible to the children when needed, for example crayons, paper and paint were available throughout the session, artwork was displayed, and items of interest were at the child's eye level on low level shelving. There were areas of interest such as home corner, library/rest area, sand play, musical instruments, jigsaws shelf, montessori materials and construction areas evident in the service.

A sensory garden and a secure outdoor play area were available for the group to play outdoors on a daily basis.

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) All four staff which included the registered provider had up to date training in first aid responder for children.

(2) (a) The first aid box was safely stored in an easily accessible position in the playroom.

(b) The first aid box was available to the children attending the pre-school service at all times.

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 fire drills were practiced on a monthly basis. The last recorded fire drill took place in September 2025.
- (b) The number, type and maintenance record of the firefighting equipment serviced on an annual basis and most recently in November 2024 was available.
- The smoke alarm system was serviced on an annual basis and most recently in November 2024,
- (4)A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed in the playroom.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

Adequate insurance was available for the sessional and part time service to operate.