

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LK165
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Name of Service:	Stepping Stones Preschool
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Address of Service:	Bruree Rockhill Community Childcare Ltd., Main Street, Bruree, Co Limerick
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Eircode:	V35 E928
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Name of Registered Provider:	Bernie O'Keeffe
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Service type:	Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	4 th April 2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	17	PM	5
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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).

Conditions if applicable	Not applicable
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Description of service

This community service was first established in 2010. It operates a sessional and a part time service from 09:00 am to 15:00 hrs, Monday to Friday, and from the childcare centre of the sports complex which opened in 2017. The service can cater for up to 22 pre-school children, aged from 2 to 6 years of age, at any one time. The children have access to a large, designated playroom, sanitary accommodation for the adults and children, an office, a kitchen area and an enclosed outdoor play area to the rear of the premises. A school aged service is available to the children from the local primary school.

Staffing

There were three adults and the person in charge present on the day of inspection. These staff have an appropriate childcare qualification. The registered provider does not work in the service.

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 an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 15, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 28; however, on inspection additional non-compliance was identified under Regulation 8. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

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 II - Registration and Register

Regulation 8 - Notification of change in circumstances

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a temporary pre-school service shall, subject to paragraph (3), notify the Agency in writing of any proposed change in the details in relation to the pre-school service contained in the register pursuant to section 58C(2) of the Act or Regulation 7(2) at least 60 days before it is proposed that the change would take effect.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider did not notify Tusla, Early Years Registration Office in writing that there had been a change in circumstances in relation to the registered provider and the person in charge in the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action:

Following submission of Corrective and Preventive Action (CAPA) 1 and CAPA 2 documents the person in charge submitted a copy of a change of circumstances application dated the 1st of July 2024 and a letter dated the 3rd of June 2025 detailing the required changes.

Supporting documentation submitted

A change of circumstances application dated the 1st of July 2024, and a letter dated the 3rd of June 2025 were submitted to the early year's inspectorate.

Summary Comment

This non-compliance remains outstanding as evidence that a change in circumstances application has been completed and approved by the early years inspectorate has not been achieved.

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.

(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.

(7) A registered provider shall ensure that all employees, unpaid workers and contractors are appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training, including in relation to the following:

- (a) the policies, procedures and statements of the service specified in Schedule 5;
- (b) Part VIIA (inserted by section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (No. 40 of 2013)) of the Act, and
- (c) these Regulations.

Compliance Information

- (1)
- (a) The registered provider had a designated person in charge and a named person who could deputise as required.
- (b) The person in charge and the deputy were present in the service on the day of the inspection.
- (c) There was a clear management structure in the service that identified the lines of authority and roles and responsibilities of each employee.
- (2) All staff files were viewed on the day of inspection, and the following information was in place:
- (a) There were written, past employer's references available in respect of the adults working in the service, with recorded validations where required.
- (b) There were references available from sources other than past employers on file where required.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures were available in respect of all the adults in the service. The vetting 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 1 st of January 2024.
- (d) Police vetting was not required as none of the adults that had lived outside the jurisdiction for more than six months.
- (3) The vetting procedures were carried out prior to any person being appointed, assigned or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the pre-school service.
- (4) The adults working directly with the children in the service all held an award in Early Childhood Care & Education ranging from Level 5 to 8.
- (7) All staff had induction training and were briefed on:
- (a) the updated policies, procedures, and statements of the service.
- (b) Part VIIA (inserted by section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (No. 40 of 2013)) of the Act, and
- (c) Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services Regulations 2016)

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 3 staff working directly with 17 pre-school children in the morning, and 3 staff working with 5 pre-school children in the afternoon.

The person in charge was available to cover meal breaks if required and other additional activities identified by the staff working in the playroom.

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 sample of 10 children's registration forms was viewed. The service had a record in writing containing the following particulars for each of these children.
- (a) The name and date of birth of the child.
 - (b) The date on which the child first attended the service.
 - (c) Provision was made to record 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 of the child could 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, received by the child.
 - (i) Written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.

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

BASIC NEEDS: The service had a healthy eating policy, encouraging parents to provide nutritious snacks, such as sandwiches, fruit, crackers, and cheese, for break time. Healthy drinks were available throughout the day on an accessible low-level shelf.

Children had easy access to toilets with hot water, soap, and paper towels for handwashing, as well as spare clothes and protective clothing for messy play. Tissues and wipes were always within reach, and waste was disposed of in foot pedal operated lidded bins. Outdoors each morning on arrival, children had access to a large playground for outdoor play time.

The staff interacted with the children in a caring and respectful manner. Staff were observed conversing with the children at their level, using a soft tone of voice, and staff responded promptly to their cues for assistance. The staff demonstrated a good knowledge of the children's personal interests and capabilities. Staff supported the children to be independent in their chosen play-based activities both individually and as part of a group.

PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT: The service operates from a large playroom within the local sports complex, featuring developmentally appropriate interest areas such as a construction zone, home corner, messy area, small world and reading corner. The room layout and equipment are adjusted based on the children's interests and developmental stages. Play materials were organised on accessible, low-level shelving. Child-sized furniture was used for activities and meals. A picture timetable helps children transition smoothly between activities. Language, literacy, and vocabulary development were supported through stories, songs, and conversations. The facility had a well-resourced outdoor play area where children had an opportunity to play in most weather conditions. The outdoor area provided opportunities for fresh air, discovery, movement, exploration and activities exclusive to the outdoors. Children were observed in the outdoor area directing their own play, working in small groups and staff were observed joining with them when invited.

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: All external doors at the service were appropriately secured to prevent children from exiting unsupervised. All emergency fire exit doors were unobstructed.

All storage facilities were inaccessible to children, and all the waste was stored appropriately within the service.

All outdoor play areas were well secured in the service to prevent children gaining unsupervised exit from this space and to prevent any unauthorized access to the service.

Fire Safety: Fire drills were carried out by the setting every month. Fire exits were clearly identifiable and were not obstructed or propped open.

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) The pre-school children who attended the service on the day were recorded on the attendance register by a named member of staff, and it included their time of arrival and their time of departure.

(3) (a) No persons could enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee other than the following:

- (i) A pre-school child.
 - (ii) A person dropping or collecting a child.
 - (iii) An employee.
 - (iv) An unpaid worker.
- (b) A daily record in writing was kept of the entry on the premises of any such person on the visitors' book.

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 four staff present on the day of the inspection who had completed first aid responder training, and the certificates were in date.
- (2)(a) There was a well-stocked first aid box located on the premises.
- (b) The first aid box was readily available and easily accessible if required.

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 last recorded fire drill took place on the 27 March 2025, and the records demonstrated that fire drills took place monthly.

(b) The firefighting equipment was serviced on an annual basis, most recently on 25 September 2024, and a record was maintained of the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment.

(4) A fire action notice of the procedure to follow in the event of a fire was clearly displayed in the service.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)(b) There was no maintenance record to indicate when the smoke alarm system was last serviced. This posed a potential risk to the children and staff in the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action: The person in charge stated in CAPA 1 document that:

(1)(b) The smoke alarm was serviced on the 17th of April 2025. Annual testing and review will be carried out by a designated electrical contractor.

Supporting documentation submitted:

A copy of the servicing record for the smoke alarm for the service was submitted.

Summary Comment

The evidence submitted was assessed and deemed to meet the regulatory requirement of Regulation 26 (1)(b)

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.