

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LS047
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Name of Service:	Stepping Stones Early Years Service
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Address of Service:	Old Boy's School, Gash, Castletown, Co. Laois
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Eircode:	R32 F859
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Name of Registered Provider:	Leslie Hogan
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	29/04/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	23	PM	N/A
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla, Child and Family Agency, Primary Care Centre, Church Avenue, Tullamore, Co. Offaly.
Inspection undertaken by:	K. Murphy
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).

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Description of service

The age range of children that the service is registered to accommodate is 2 to 6 years of age. The service is open between the hours of 08:45 and 12:15 operating an ECCE session from 09:00 to 12:00 on a Monday to Friday basis. The service is operated by an independent provider. The Early Years' Service is located in an adapted single storey premises. Two pre-school rooms and an office/ kitchenette are provided. An additional indoor/ outdoor sheltered area, "the rainbow room" can be accessed directly from within the entrance hall. The community playground is situated on the grounds of the service and is available for use by the children. The service is situated in the village of Castletown, County Laois.

Staffing

The registered provider employs three staff members and a relief staff member. The registered provider and three adults were present and working with the children on 29 April 2026.

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.

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

Regulation 11 -Staffing levels - (1)(3)

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

Regulation 20 – Facilities for Rest and Play - (1)(a)(b) (4)

Regulation 22- Food and Drink

Regulation 23- Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child

Regulation 24- Checking In and Out and Record of Attendance (1)(3)(4)

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

Regulation 26 -Fire safety measures - (1)(a)(b) (4)

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, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

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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*

(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 registered provider was present and available in the service throughout the inspection.

(b)

The registered provider and a deputy were on site for the duration of the inspection.

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Five files including the file of the registered provider were reviewed and the following was noted:

(2)(a)(b)

The required number of written validated references were available in respect of four files reviewed from past employers or from a source other than a past employer. Two written references were available for the registered provider from a past employer and a source other than a past employer.

(c)

A Garda Vetting disclosure was available in respect of the five files reviewed. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d)

Police vetting was not required as no adults had lived outside the state for a period of longer than six consecutive months.

(3)

The registered provider carried out the required vetting procedures prior to any new staff being employed in the service.

(4)

Staff working directly with children attending the service held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at levels 5 to 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

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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.

(3) Subject to paragraph (5), a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 2 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) therefore at that reference number is satisfied.

Compliance Information

(1)

The ratio of adults to children was maintained during the inspection.

(3)

There were twenty-three children attending the session supervised directly by four adults.

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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

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

During the inspection the children were engaged and enjoyed play activities that included free play, story time, music and movement and circle time supported by the staff members. A key person system was in operation in the service. The staff were positive towards the children and were familiar with each child, their personalities and their routines. Children were happy and content with their carers. Seamless transitions were noted as the children were given a five-minute lead in time to change from one activity to another. Children were encouraged to be independent, washing their hands on return from playing outdoors before the mid-morning snack, putting on and taking off coats for outdoor play.

The pre-school rooms were bright and colourful with children's artwork displayed. Arts and crafts displayed were representative of a recent visit to the local library where the children learned about the life cycle of the butterfly. A range of developmentally appropriate experiences to meet children's learning needs was available. Age and stage appropriate toys and equipment were accessible to children on low level shelving.

The service works in partnership with parents and guardians. Parents were observed to collect their children from the entrance door after the ECCE session. A verbal handover was provided to parents at this time. A parent notice board was displayed in the entrance area of the service. Each pre-school room had their own learning journal which depicting the play and work activities since the new term had commenced. Individual scrap books recorded in pictures and narrative the individual learning experience of each child.

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Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 20 – Facilities for rest and play

(1) Subject to this regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) having regard to the number of pre-school children attending the service, their respective ages and the amount of time they spend on the premises, there are adequate and suitable facilities for each child to play indoors and, where required by these Regulations, outdoors, during the day, and

(b) there are adequate and suitable facilities for a pre-school child to rest during the day, and in the case of an overnight pre-school service, during the day and the night.

(4) Where outdoor space to which the pre-school children attending the service have access is provided on the premises of a sessional pre-school service other than such a service to which paragraph (2) applies, a temporary pre-school service or a pre-school service in a drop-in centre, the registered provider shall ensure that such outdoor space is suitable, safe and secure.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

Suitable play equipment was provided indoors and outdoors which included toys and equipment for construction, tabletop activities, arts and crafts, sand play, water play and home corners.

(b)

Soft furnishings were available in both pre-school rooms for children to rest and relax.

(4)

A small sheltered secure outdoor play area with an artificial grass surface area can be accessed directly from the entrance hall. This area was equipped with a variety of sensorial play equipment, a home corner area and various building and construction activities. The children also have daily access to the community playground which is co-located within the grounds of the premises and secure with perimeter walls and fencing.

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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

Parents and guardians provided the mid-morning snack for their child. A refrigerator was available in the kitchen for the storage of perishable food products. The children drank water from their individually identifiable water containers which were accessible to the children throughout the morning. The children were observed to eat a variety of sandwiches, wraps and crackers with fillings as well as a selection of fruit, vegetable and dairy products.

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 entrance to the service was secure. The service met the necessary safety requirements in respect of the indoor environment, toys and equipment and the safe storage of cleaning agents.

Infection Control:

Supplies of paper hand towel and liquid soap were available in the sanitary accommodation. The water temperature at the wash hand basins in the sanitary accommodation was recorded at 33°C. The sanitary accommodation was ventilated by natural ventilation.

Administration of Medication:

No medication was administered during the inspection. Temperature reducing medication was available in a secure location in the service if a child presented with a high temperature.

Fire Safety:

The emergency exit routes were unobstructed from the premises. A fire assembly point was noted to the front of the premises.

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Outing:

Risk assessments in respect of the daily visits to the community playground were available for review. The registered provider stated that regular outings in the local community take place and that parental consent was in place as well as checklists for the outings.

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.

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (3)(b) is retained for a period of one year from the date to which it relates.

Compliance Information

(1)
Each child's arrival and departure time was noted on the attendance log in the entrance hall by a staff member.

(3)(a)
All entry to the service with the exception of (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) must be approved by a staff member.

(b)
A visitor log was in place to record the details and purpose of all visitors to the service.

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(4)

The visitor log is retained throughout the annual operation of the service.

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)

The registered provider was qualified in First Aid Response (FAR) and available on the premises during the hours of operation.

(2)(a)

A first aid box was identifiable and readily available in each of the pre-school rooms.

(b)

A first aid box was accessible to the adults caring for the children in the pre-school service.

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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)

Written records for completed fire drills were available on the premises. The last fire drill was recorded as taking place on 27 March 2026.

(b)

A record was available demonstrating the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms on the premises. The firefighting equipment in the premises were serviced in January 2026. The smoke alarms in the premises were serviced in April 2026.

(4)

A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed in the entrance hall.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

There was evidence of current insurance cover for the number of children attending the service and the expiry date noted as 27 March 2027.