

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015MH122
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Name of Service:	Little Steps Preschool
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Address of Service:	Greenpark, Dunshaughlin, Co. Meath
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Eircode:	A85 Y940
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Name of Registered Provider:	Emily Dennehy
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Service type:	Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	11/11/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	22	PM	10
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, 181-189 Lakeshore Drive, Airside Business Park, Swords, Co. Dublin K67 Y5C6.
Inspection undertaken by:	AM Coyle
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 Preschool is a part-time early years service located in a rural location in Co Meath. The service operates from 9.00am to 2.00pm each weekday, accommodating a maximum of 22 pre-school children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme from 9.30am to 12.30pm. The service is conducted from a purpose-built 2 storey premises located in the grounds of the registered providers family home with 2 care rooms in operation, the Busy Bees room is located on the ground floor with the ladybugs room on the first floor. An enclosed outdoor area located adjacent to the service is available to the children.

Staffing

There were 3 adults working directly with the children on the day of inspection including the registered provider. One staff member is employed in the service to reduce the adult to child ratio and if necessary to work with a child with additional needs, a post which is funded by the Minister as part of the Access and Inclusion Model scheme.

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 regulations 9, 11, 15,19, 23,25 and 26; These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 15 – record of pre-school child.

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,
- (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 designated person in charge of the service, and a named staff member was appointed to deputise when required.

(b) The registered provider was present and in charge of the service when the inspector arrived unannounced at the service and was present for the duration of the inspection.

All staff files were reviewed. A total of 3 files were maintained in respect of the registered provider and 2 staff members in the service.

(2)(a) The following references were available from a previous employer:

Two written references were available for the registered provider, and two validated written references were available for 2 staff members employed in the service.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for the registered provider and for the 2 staff members. Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all staff. The Garda vetting records reviewed demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Not applicable as a review of the staff members curriculum vitae indicated that no staff member had resided outside of the Irish jurisdiction for longer than 6 months as an adult.

(4) Three staff members whose files were reviewed and who work directly with children in the service each held appropriate childcare qualifications on the National Framework of Qualifications, or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

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 staff members working directly with the children attending the service.

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

The following adult to child ratios were observed during the inspection:

- In the Busy Bees room there was 11 children aged 3 years 2 months to 4 years 10 months being cared for by 2 staff members.
- In the Ladybugs room there was 11 children aged 3 years 1 month to 4 years 10 months being cared for by 1 staff member.

(8)(a) The registered provider ensured that 2 adults were present on the premises at all times, verified by staff rosters and staff attendance records maintained at the service.

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) Eleven children's records were reviewed. The registration forms were completed with the required information as specified in subsections (a) to (i) of this regulation.

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) The following observations were made on how each child's learning, development and well-being was facilitated within the daily life in the service:

Basic needs:

- When the inspector arrived unannounced the children were happily engaged in a range of child-led activities and play. Throughout the inspection the early years practitioners were observed warmly engaging with the children. The practitioners were very familiar with the children and their individual needs and used warm vocal tones, positive language and positioned themselves at the children's level when engaging with them. The children were observed to be very comfortable in their environment and sought out the practitioners for support and guidance as they required it.
- The service operates a rolling snack time which provides the children with the autonomy to decide when they want to have their morning snack. The children were observed to wash their hands and take their snack from the fridge enjoying their snacks in pairs or small groups, one of the practitioners was present with the children during snack time chatting with the children and extending conversations.
- The children's self-care skills were encouraged and supported, the children accessed the toilet independently and they were gently reminded to wash their hands afterwards. The children placed their lunch boxes in their bags following morning snack and were encouraged to be independent in putting on and off their rainwear and boots when going outside and returning indoors.
- The service has a particular emphasis on outdoor play and the children spend time outside regardless of the weather. All of the children have rain wear and wellington boots available to wear outdoors, the children were afforded choice as to whether they wished to play outside or remain indoors with the majority of children choosing to go outside, the door of the service remained open to facilitate the children to play outside or return indoors as they chose.

- The children’s achievements were positively reinforced with recognition, praise and encouragement by the practitioners. There was an emphasis on praise and encouragement to support the children’s behaviour.

Supporting relationships around children:

- The early years practitioners were observed interacting with the children in a warm and caring manner. Informal conversation was used as a means of engaging children with an activity with practitioners using open ended questioning techniques. The practitioners praised children for their behaviours especially when they were helpful to others, took turns and shared resources.
- The children appeared confident and relaxed in their environment and were observed naturally forming small groups and engaging in a range of activities in both the indoor and the outdoor environment during the inspection. The children called the practitioners by name and sought them out for support and guidance as required throughout the morning. The practitioners were heard chatting to the children about their parents, siblings, pets and extended family, this practice nurtures links between the service and home.
- Parents and guardians were observed being warmly welcomed by the practitioners at the children’s departure from the service and the opportunity for updating parents and guardians regarding their children’s day in the service was taken at this time. The service uses a mobile application that parents can access at any time which keeps them informed of the activities their children have undertaken in the service and their progress.

Physical and material environment:

- The care rooms were bright and welcoming with play materials and equipment positioned on low level shelving to enable the children to take and return materials as they chose, and the children demonstrated familiarity with navigating their environments to access the materials and play resources they wanted to play with. The children’s artwork was displayed on the walls of both care rooms which supports the children’s wellbeing by feeling valued and appreciated along with family wall’s positioned at the children’s eye level which enabled the children to bridge the connection between the service and home.
- Both care rooms were well resourced with a wide range of interest areas in addition to play and learning materials to support the children’s play experiences. Interest areas included well-resourced home corner’s which supported the children’s imaginary play and included a well-resourced kitchen with a sink, cooker,

crockery and cooking utensils for the children to extend their play, along with dolls, cradles and an extensive variety of dolls clothes. A wide range of construction materials were available in both care rooms including a variety of construction blocks in addition to a broad selection of transport toys in addition to an extensive choice of tabletop materials and jigsaws in both care rooms.

- Sensory play was valued in the service and this was demonstrated through the provision of both water and dried materials in the care rooms which were provided in large trays as well as a variety of paints and crafts materials in addition to a wide range of materials in the outdoor play area.
- The theme of the week was 'nursery rhymes, and this was reflected in the Ladybugs room where a tuff tray with water and a teapot with cups and saucers was set up for the children to use to enact 'I'm a little teapot'. In the Busy bee's room, the children had an interest in the 'Gruffalo' and a forest display with a representation of the Gruffalo was available for the children to play with along with books and games.
- The service has a strong emphasis on outdoor play with the children spending extended periods of time in the outdoor area and the area provided a wide range of play opportunities for the children. A construction area with gravel along with diggers, wheelbarrows, a variety of digging equipment and 'hard hats' allowed the children to maximise their enjoyment of the area. A shallow 'river' with a pretend bridge positioned over the water provided the children with the opportunity to enjoy water play. A planting area provided the children with the opportunity to participate in gardening activities where recently the children had planted apple seeds. A well-resourced kitchen enhanced the children's imaginary play as it was well equipped with pots, pans, cooking & baking utensils for the children to use and the children's imaginary play experiences were further enhanced through the provision of a raised fairy garden. Wall mounted blackboards located throughout the outdoor play area supported the children's drawing and writing skills. A climbing frame with steps and a slide provided the children with the opportunity for gross motor play and a range of ride on toys along with push along toys were provided for the children to use along with a variety of tyres for the children to balance on. Recycled wooden cable reel drums were located throughout the area which provided surfaces for the children to play with tabletop and transport toys. A wooden shed provided the children with an indoor play area and was also used for toy storage.

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 premises and outdoor play area were appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the service.
- The water temperature in the sanitary accommodation in the service did not exceed the recommended maximum water temperature of 43°C. This reduced the risk of scalding for the children in attendance.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely out of the reach of children.

Infection Control:

- Children's snacks, when supplied from home, were refrigerated on arrival to the service which reduced the risk of bacteria growth in perishable food items.
- Tables were observed to be appropriately cleaned before and following meals and snacks.
- The children in the service were facilitated to wash their hands before eating and following outdoor and messy play. Children who were toilet trained were gently reminded, and assisted when necessary, to wash their hands after using the toilet.

Administration of Medication:

- Medications were stored out of the reach of children. No children were observed having medication administered on the day of inspection.

Fire Safety:

- The fire exits were clearly signposted and were unobstructed.

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 held in-date First Aid Response (FAR) training which easily ensured that a person with FAR training was at all times immediately available to the children attending the service.
- (2)(a)(b) The first aid boxes available in the service were suitably equipped and stored in conspicuous locations on the premises and were available for the children in attendance, in the event of an emergency.

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) A record was maintained of all fire drills which had been completed in the service. The records indicated and staff members reported that fire drills were carried out monthly. The last fire drill took place on the 7/11/25.
- (b) A record was kept of the number, type and maintenance of the fire fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises. Both the Fire extinguishers and smoke detection system were certified as having been serviced on the 10/10/2025.
- (4) Notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were on display in the care rooms and hallway of the service.