

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

<b>TUSLA Identifier:</b>	TU2015OY053
--------------------------	-------------

<b>Name of Service:</b>	Stepping Stones Early Learning Centre
-------------------------	---------------------------------------

<b>Address of Service:</b>	Clonaderg, Ballinahown, Co. Offaly
----------------------------	------------------------------------

<b>Eircode:</b>	N37 AR00
-----------------	----------

<b>Name of Registered Provider:</b>	Michelle Grennan
-------------------------------------	------------------

<b>Service type:</b>	Sessional
----------------------	-----------

<b>Date of Inspection:</b>	11/06/2025
----------------------------	------------

<b>No of pre-school children:</b>	AM	25	PM	N/A
-----------------------------------	----	----	----	-----

<b>Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:</b>	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla, Child and Family Agency, SAP Office, St. Loman's Campus, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath.
<b>Inspection undertaken by:</b>	C.O' Connor Hughes
<b>Title:</b>	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).

<b>Conditions if applicable</b>	Not applicable.
---------------------------------	-----------------

### Description of service

The service provides an Early Childhood Care and Education programme to children aged between 2– 6 years from 09:15 to 12:15 on a Monday to Friday basis.

The premises is located at the back of a domestic dwelling and consists of three interconnecting playrooms named Room 1 and 2. There is an outdoor play area at the side of the premises and a sheltered outdoor section on site.

The service is located in a rural area in Ballinahown, Co. Offaly.

### Staffing

There are three adults employed in the service. The registered provider and two adults were working directly with the children on the 11 June 2025. The registered provider attended the closing meeting.

### 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- Management and recruitment - (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(c)(d) (4)

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

Regulation 15 – Record of a Pre-school child (1)(a) -(i)

Regulation 16 -Record in relation to a Pre-school service (1) (a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(h)(i).

Regulation 17 – Information for Parents

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

Regulation 20- Facilities for Rest and Play

Regulation 23- Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child

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.

### 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)

A person in charge was available in the service. A deputy person was available if required.

(b)

The registered provider facilitated the inspection.

Four staff files were reviewed including the registered provider. The following was noted:

(2)(a)(b)

Two written validated references were available from past employers in respect of the one staff member. Two written references were available in respect of the registered provider.

(c)

A Garda Vetting disclosure was available in respect of the four staff 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 available in respect of one staff member who had lived outside the state for a period of longer than six consecutive months.

(4)

Staff members working directly with children attending the service and held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Levels 5 to 7 on the National Framework of Qualifications or a letter of eligibility to practice.

### Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a)(b)

1. Three written references were not validated in respect of two staff members.
2. A second written reference was not available in respect of one staff member.

### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

#### Corrective and Preventive Action

(2)(a)(b)

All references are now validated.

Second written reference now located. It was on premises but not filed appropriately on day of inspection.

All staff files have now been audited.

Reference check template now in use to ensure future references are validated efficiently.

#### Supporting documentation submitted

References submitted.

### Summary Comment

Evidence submitted and reviewed by the Early Years Inspector addressed the non-compliance.

### 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 adequate during the inspection.
- (3)  
There were twenty-five children attending the service supervised directly by the registered provider and two staff members.

### 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 12 child records were reviewed. The registered provider ensured that a record in writing was kept of the details relating to (a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(g)(i) of the above regulation for the records reviewed.

(1)(h)  
Immunisation records were available in respect of three children enrolled in the service.

### Non-Compliance Information

(1)(h)  
Child enrolment records reviewed did not have details of immunisations in respect of nine children attending the service.

### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

#### Corrective and Preventive Action

(1)(h)  
Immunisation records have been updated on child enrolment forms.  
All children's files have been audited and updated.  
Service provider will ensure this information is provided with each future enrolment.

### Summary Comment

The non compliance has been addressed. The corrective action stated will be assessed on the next TUSLA inspection.

## Part IV – Information and Records

### Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of the following information in relation to the service:

- (a) the name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee, unpaid worker and contractor;
- (b) details of the class of service and the age profile of children for which the service is registered to provide services;
- (c) details of the adult:child ratios in the service;
- (d) the type of care or programme provided in the service;
- (e) the facilities available;

- (f) the opening hours and fees;*
- (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;*
- (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;*
- (j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent;*
- (k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.*

## Compliance Information

(1)

The service kept and maintained written records of information in relation to the service in accordance with Regulation 16 (1) (a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(h)(i)(j)).

(1)(k)

An accident and incident book was available for review in the service. Parents' signatures in respect of the accidents and incidents that had taken place in the service were noted with the exception of the non compliance outlined below.

## Non-Compliance Information

(1)(k)

Three accident and incident records reviewed were not signed by the children's parents or guardians.

## Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

### Corrective and Preventive Action

These accident report forms have since been signed by parents.

Service provider or person in charge will ensure all future accident report forms will be signed by parents/guardians.

### Supporting documentation submitted

Accident and incident forms signed by parents.

## Summary Comment

Evidence submitted and reviewed by the Early Years Inspector addressed the non-compliance.

## Part IV – Information and Records

### Regulation 17 – Information for parents

*A registered provider shall ensure that a parent or guardian of a child proposing to attend the service is provided with the information referred to in subparagraphs (a) to (g) of Regulation 16(1).*

#### Compliance Information

Information for parents was available in the parent statement and on the service website which indicated that all information required under 16(1)(a) to (g) was accessible to parents.

## 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)

Children were happily occupied in extended outdoor play time availing of the many play experiences and activities including creative, sensory, free play and manipulative play supported the staff members. Children enjoyed a song rhyme and action preparation for their upcoming graduation ceremony. Transitions were smooth as notice was given to children when moving from one activity to another.

Children enjoyed a healthy snack provided by their parents consisting of sandwiches, crackers, cheese and a selection of fruit with water to drink. Children enjoyed their snack and took their time conversing with their peers.

Staff members held children in positive regard using their individual names, interacting and conversing with children at eye level. Access and Inclusion plans were in place for children requiring extra support. Staff were positive and caring towards children requiring extra emotional support. Good teamwork was observed amongst staff.

The service worked in partnership with parents in the following ways: A short messaging system (SMS) is used to send information and updates to parents. Parent teacher meetings are held on an annual basis. The child's learning journal depicting the child's developmental observations, play and work activities are shared with parents at the end of the pre-school term. The registered provider stated there is an open-door policy for parents. A local community event was held recently and parents were invited to a coffee morning by the service. The registered provider stated that the local teacher was to visit the school to help smooth the transition to national school for the children.

The indoor environment in the pre-school rooms provided a range of developmentally appropriate, creative and enriching experiences for all children. Age and stage appropriate toys and materials were accessible to children on low level shelving. Areas of interest that included a home area, rest area, construction area and dolls houses. The interconnected playrooms allowed for freedom of movement for physical and active play activities. Children's artwork depicting "our self-portraits" and photographs "our family tree" were noted.

The outdoor environment allowed for multiple play experiences for children. Play opportunities included a football area, a mud kitchen, slides and climbing walls, playhouses, musical instruments, tractors and bicycles to ride on. An enchanted forest and sheltered sand play area was noted.

### 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 19 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)

Adequate and suitable play equipment and materials were provided in both the indoor and outdoor environments.

(b)

Rest areas were provided in the service for children to rest and relax.

(4)

The outdoor play area was safe surrounded by fencing and a gate leading into the early year's premises. A natural grass and tarmac area were noted.

### 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 early years service's building was safe and secure. Access was by means of a doorbell at the main door of the service. The inspector signed the visitors book on arrival. Safety checklists were available for the indoor and outdoor environments.

#### Infection Control:

Children were observed to wash their hands before snack and after using the toilet. Warm water, hand paper towels and liquid soap was available in the sanitary accommodation in the service. Mechanical ventilation was working in the sanitary accommodation. Windows were open to allow for natural ventilation in the playrooms. Foot operated pedal bins were available for the hygienic disposal of waste materials.

#### Administration of Medication:

Temperature reducing medication was available if a child presented with a high temperature. Medication was stored safely in room two.

#### Fire Safety:

The fire emergency exits were free from obstruction in the service. A fire assembly point was noted in the outdoor play area.

## Outing:

Procedures were in place for outings undertaken in the service. Risk assessments were available for review and the most recent risk assessment was dated the 23 May 2025.

## Non-Compliance Information

### General Safety:

1. Two children were observed to have whole grapes for their lunch. Upon the request of the inspector a corrective action was taken by the staff member who cut the grapes in half and returned them to the children
2. A hanging cable from a radio player was accessible to children in room 1 which posed a potential risk of injury to a child.
3. Visibility strips were not in place on the patio door in room two in order for children to recognise glass.

## Action submitted by the Registered Provider

### Corrective & Preventive Action

#### General Safety:

1. Parents have been reminded of the requirement to cut grapes in half. Staff will continue to monitor this during snack time.

Information update on healthy snacks and food safety requirements regarding the children's snacks has been issued to parents. New parents will be informed also regarding these requirements.

Healthy and safe eating is promoted daily in our service.

2. Radio with cable has been removed from learning environment.

The service will use Bluetooth speaker now for music and dance.

3. Visibility stickers now on patio doors.

### Supporting documentation submitted

#### General Safety:

Photographic and written evidence .

## Summary Comment

Evidence submitted and reviewed by the Early Years Inspector addressed the non-compliance.

## 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 and staff members were qualified in First Aid response (FAR) and available on the premises for the hours of operation.

(2)(a)  
A first aid box was located in Room two in the service.

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

### Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a)  
Bandages in the first aid box had expired in 2021 and 2022 and required replacement.

### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

#### Corrective and Preventive Action

Expired bandages have been replaced.

Entire new first aid box has been purchased.

#### Supporting documentation submitted

Photograph of first aid box.

### Summary Comment

Evidence submitted and reviewed by the Early Years Inspector addressed the non-compliance.

## 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)

There was a record of fire drills carried out in the service. The last fire drill was carried out on the 3 June 2025.

(b)

A record was available demonstrating the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises. The firefighting equipment and smoke alarms were serviced on the 5 June 2025 and 23 May 2025 respectively.

(4)

Fire evacuation procedures were noted in a conspicuous location in the premises.

## 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 was 27 March 2026.