

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015SO059
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Name of Service:	Stepping Stones Childcare
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Address of Service:	Easkey, Co. Sligo
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Eircode:	F26 C959
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Name of Registered Provider:	Ashling Connor Munnelly
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	14/01/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	35	PM	17
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla Child and Family Agency Early Years Inspectorate Markievicz House Barrack Street Sligo F91 XC84
Inspection undertaken by:	K Folan & Y Coyne
Title:	Early years inspector & Inspection and regulation manager

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

Stepping Stones Childcare is a privately owned early years' service located in the village of Easkey in Co. Sligo. The service provides sessional, part time and full-time care to children aged 2-6 years. The services operates from a converted primary school building which contains 3 playrooms, a kitchen and an office. An outdoor play area is available to the front and side of the building. The service opens from 08:00-18:00, from Monday to Friday for 38 weeks of the year. A school age service is also registered.

Staffing

There are six adults employed within the service who work directly with the children, including the registered provider.

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 9,11,19,22,23,25,26 and 28. However, on inspection additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 29. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 19 Health, welfare and development of the child. As a result, the scope of the inspection included rooms for the children aged between 2-3 years (the “2-3” room) and the “red room” for children aged 3-4 years.

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 inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the person in charge, 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,

(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 service has a designated person in charge and a named person who is able to deputise as required.

(2) Six files were reviewed including the registered provider.

(a) Nine of the twelve references were available from a past employer and were validated.

(b) Three of the twelve references were available from a reputable source.

(c) Six adults including the registered provider had Garda vetting disclosures available for review. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early years inspectorate regulatory notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Documentary evidence suggested that none of the six adults had lived outside of the state for longer than six months therefore no police vetting was required.

(4) Six adults working directly with children had evidence of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 5 to Level 8, in Early Childhood Care and Education.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(b) One of the twelve references from a reputable source was not validated.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The registered provider submitted a written response on 25 February 2025 to the office of the early years inspectorate to advise the following actions had been taken to address the non-compliance:

1. A reference validation form has been added to the file. In future all telephone reference validations will be added to each file.

Supporting documentation submitted

1. Photographic evidence submitted

Summary Comment

The actions taken and evidence submitted by the service has been reviewed by the Inspectorate and deemed to have addressed the regulatory non-compliances.

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.

Compliance Information

- (1) The registered provider had ensured that there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the children. The minimum ratio of adults to children was adhered to during the inspection.

(2) On the morning of the inspection there were five adults caring for 35 children aged between 2-5 years old. Twelve children were attending on a full time basis, 17 children were attending on a sessional basis and 6 children were attending on a part time basis.

On the afternoon of the inspection there were 5 adults caring for 17 children aged 2-5 years old.

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

(b) appropriate and suitable care practices are in place in the pre-school service, having regard to the number of children attending the service and the nature of their needs.

Compliance Information

1 (a) (b)

Basic needs:

Healthy eating is promoted in the service. Children bring their own food and drinks from home which are stored in the refrigerator in each of the care rooms. Lunches were observed to be healthy with a variety of items such as sandwiches, fruit, yogurt, cheese and scones. The children were encouraged to be independent at mealtimes and adults provided support when required. Mealtime was a relaxed time, with adults and children in conversation about upcoming events in the children's lives, such as holidays.

Children went to the toilet by themselves and did not have to wait to use the toilet.

The children had appropriate outdoor clothing such as coats, hats and gloves and on the day of the inspection each group spent time outdoors.

Supporting relationships:

The children were familiar with the routine of the preschool and appeared happy and content for the duration of the inspection. When minor disagreements occurred between children, the adults offered support and comfort.

For children in full day care, communication with parents was facilitated by means of a written communication book which detailed the children's eating, sleeping and toileting patterns with verbal feedback was given to parents at drop off and collection times. The adults in the service worked well together and communicated effectively to ensure the children's needs were being met.

Physical and Material Environment:

There are four rooms with the service. Three rooms facilitate preschool sessions, and one room is used as an indoor play area and a dining area for the full day care children who require a hot meal.

The indoor care rooms are laid out with various interest areas for the children. Items are displayed at child's height and there is appropriate child sized furniture.

Children's art work was displayed on the wall as well as educational posters to support children's literacy skills.

Each of the care rooms contained a fabric armchair should the children require a rest throughout the day.

The children had access to a large variety of resources and materials suitable for their age and stage of development for example, there was a sensory rice tray with kitchen utensils for open ended play. There was a home corner area with dolls, a puppet theatre and a kitchen for children's imaginative play. A library area for language development and jigsaws and puzzles for fine motor development. Baskets containing items such as toy animals and construction toys were stored on low level shelving and accessible to children.

The outdoor area contained a section of impact resistant surfacing, tarmac and grass. A wooden play kitchen with some real-life materials including pots and pans, a play shop, child sized benches, sand trays, balls, a tunnel, a slide, seesaws, playhouses and a climbing frame were available to the children in the outdoor play area.

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

The registered provider ensured that adequate and nutritious food was available to the preschool children. The service had a healthy eating policy in place. All snacks were provided from home and included a variety of fruits, yoghurts and sandwiches. The main meal was provided by the service, and a three-week menu plan was in place. Water and milk were provided by the service at meals and water was available throughout the day in all care rooms. The Registered Provider informed inspectors at the closing meeting that the Environmental Health Officer assessed their kitchen and food preparation area following the change to full day care.

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 main entrance door to the service was secure on the inspector’s arrival and remained locked throughout the inspection, ensuring no child could leave the premises unsupervised and no unauthorised adult could gain entry to the service.
- Cleaning products were stored out of reach of the children.
- Toys and equipment were in good condition.
- Fire doors throughout the premises were unobstructed

Infection Control:

- Liquid hand soap, warm water and disposable paper towels were provided for handwashing.
- A refrigerator was provided in each room for the storage of perishable items.
- Ventilation of the service was provided for by means of openable windows.
- The service was clean with cleaning schedules and records for the materials, equipment and care rooms in place.

Administration of Medication:

- No medicine was administered on the day of the inspection. However, the adults detailed the procedures to be followed in the event of a child requiring medication. Records of previously administered medication were kept and made available to the inspector.

Safe Sleep:

- Children who required sleep during the day slept on stackable beds with clean laundry.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

Nappy changing was observed from 11:05, the following posed a risk for infection control :

- Children’s hands were not washed after each nappy change
- Adult’s hands were not routinely washed between nappy changes.
- Changing mats were not routinely wiped down before and after each use.

This is at variance with the services own policy on nappy changing which outlines the correct procedures to control infection during nappy changing.

Safe Sleep:

Sleep checks are not being carried out on sleeping children. This poses a risk to the safety of children. Physical sleep checks need to be carried out every 10 minutes and recorded and signed by an adult.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Infection Control:

1. Correct infection control steps were discussed with staff at a recent staff meeting. All correct steps will be taken in the future.

Safe Sleep:

1. A sleep check book has been purchased which records the room temperature, child's name, date, time of check, the breathing pattern, skin colour and position of the sleeping child. Sleep checks are carried out daily on sleeping children

Summary Comment

The actions taken and evidence submitted by the service has been reviewed by the Inspectorate and deemed to have addressed the regulatory non-compliances.

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 two adults with up to date first aid training in the service. On the day on the inspection, one adult with first aid training was available to the children.

(2) (a)(b) There were three suitably stocked first aid boxes on site, one in each care room. Each first aid box was accessible.

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.
- (2) The record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection by-
- (a) a parent or guardian of a pre-school child attending or proposing to attend the pre-school service,
 - (b) an employee, and
 - (c) an authorised person.
- (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) (b)

Documentary evidence sent to the inspectorate on the day confirmed that the registered provider kept a record of all monthly fire drills carried out on the premises with the most recent fire drill recorded on the 09/12/2024. A maintenance record of the smoke alarms was kept with the most recent service date of 16/09/2024.

(2) (c) These records were made available to the authorised person.

(4) Fire evacuation procedures detailing steps to be followed in the event of a fire, were displayed in each care room.

Part VI – Safety

Regulation 28 – Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured adequate insurance was in place for 44 children in full day care up to the 27 March 2025.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 – Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-

(c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated

Non-Compliance Information

(c) On the morning of the inspection the temperature was recorded as follows:

- 16.9°C in the red room at 10:47a.m.
- 16.1°C in the 2–3-year-old room at 11:17a.m.
- 17.7°C in the blue room at 11:33a.m.

These temperatures were below the requirement for room temperature of 18-22°C

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The heating is now on a timer.

The timer is left on instead of the heat being switched on and off.

Supporting documentation submitted

No evidence submitted

Summary Comment

The non-compliances identified under Regulation 2 have been adequately addressed and will be reviewed on the next inspection