

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015SO059
--------------------------	-------------

Name of Service:	Stepping Stones Childcare
-------------------------	---------------------------

Address of Service:	Easkey, Easkey, Co. Sligo
----------------------------	---------------------------

Eircode:	F26 C959
-----------------	----------

Name of Registered Provider:	Ashling Connor Munnelly
-------------------------------------	-------------------------

Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
----------------------	--------------------------------

Date of Inspection:	23/01/2026
----------------------------	------------

No of pre-school children:	AM	50	PM	10
-----------------------------------	----	----	----	----

Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, TUSLA Child & Family Agency, Markievicz House, Barrack St, Sligo, F91 XC84
Inspection undertaken by:	S Killeen
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.
---------------------------------	-----------------

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 operate from a converted primary school building which contains three 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 nine adults employed within the service. There are six staff members, including the registered provider, working directly with the children. Two staff members work in the afterschool service. One staff member works in the kitchen and in the afterschool 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 9,11,15,20,23,27,28, and 29 however, on inspection additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 25. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under Regulation 15-Record of a Preschool Child. A sample of 12 records were reviewed to evaluate compliance with Regulation 15.

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 deputy 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,
- (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)

The registered provider ensured that:

- (a) There was a designated person in charge and a named adult to deputise in their absence.
- (b) The designated deputy person in charge was available on the premises throughout the period of inspection.

(2)

On the day of inspection, eight adults were present, the deputy person in charge, five adults who were employed to work directly with the children, one adult who worked in the kitchen. One adult who was on a student on placement.

It was determined that five new staff members had been employed since the previous inspection. Following a review at the previous inspection and current information available, along with discussion with the deputy person in charge.

Garda vetting for two staff members whose disclosures were identified as due for renewal were requested for review. The following vetting information was available for five adults:

- (a) Five written validated references from past employers for five of the adults.
- (b) Two written validated references from reputable sources for two of the adults.

Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for nine staff and one student, However, the service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes for two staff as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.

- (c) Police vetting from the police authorities in another state was available for one adult who had lived outside the state for a period of six consecutive months or more.

(4)

Two of the adult files reviewed, evidenced they held a major award at level 5 or above in early childhood care and education on the national qualification framework, or qualifications deemed by the Department of Children Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) to meet the regulatory requirement.

Non-Compliance Information

(2) The following vetting information was not available:

- (a) Three written validated references from past employers for two adults.
- (b) A record of validation was not available in respect of one written reference on file for one staff member.
- (c) It was not possible to determine if a Police Clearance Certificate from another jurisdiction was required for one adult, as their curriculum vitae was not available for review.

(4)

Two staff members working directly with the preschool children did not hold a major award at level 5 or above in early childhood care and education on the national qualification framework, or qualifications deemed by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) to meet the regulatory requirement.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(2) (a) (b) (c)

All references are now fully validated and retained on file in accordance with regulatory requirements. The previously identified gap, relating to the absence of a recorded validation for one written reference, has now been rectified. The reference has been formally validated, and a clear record of this validation has been added to the staff member's personnel file. Safer recruitment checklist has been introduced and must be fully completed prior to finalising any appointment. Quarterly internal audits of personnel files will be conducted to ensure continued compliance with Regulation 9 requirements. We acknowledge the importance of maintaining complete and up-to-date staff files. All staff files will be reviewed regularly to ensure full compliance with documentation requirements. We also confirm that new staff members will not commence employment until their personnel file is complete and contains all required and sufficient documentation, including vetting and verification checks, in line with regulatory requirements.

(4) On the morning of the unannounced inspection, the staffing shortfall occurred due to unforeseen circumstances. One staff member was delayed in arriving to work as a scheduled appointment ran significantly longer than anticipated. In addition, two other staff members were absent due to illness.

Supporting documentation submitted

(2) a. b. Validated references submitted.

c. Curriculum Vitae submitted.

(4) The service has submitted a staffing contingency risk assessment. This document details the specific protocols and mitigation strategies to be implemented should illness result in a shortage of qualified staff on any given day.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under regulation 9 has been adequately addressed.

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.*
- (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

- (8)
- (a) There were at least two adults present in the service during the inspection.

Non-Compliance Information

- (1) The registered provider did not ensure that the minimum adult to child ratios were provided in the service as follows:
- (a) In the Red Room on the morning of the unannounced inspection, one adult was observed caring for sixteen children aged three to four years. The minimum adult-to-child ratio for this age range is one adult to eleven children.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

On the morning of the unannounced inspection, the staffing shortfall in the Red Room occurred due to unforeseen circumstances. One staff member was delayed in arriving to work as a scheduled appointment ran significantly longer than anticipated. In addition, two other staff members were absent due to illness. These unexpected absences resulted in a temporary period where the required adult-to-child ratio was not met. As soon as management became aware of the situation, steps were taken to rectify the staffing levels. The staff member who was late was contacted to get there as soon as possible. The service acknowledges the importance of maintaining the prescribed adult-to-child ratios at all times and is reviewing contingency arrangements to ensure appropriate cover is available in the event of unexpected absences in the future. Risk management policy has been developed to include this and if appropriate staff levels cannot be maintained the room will be closed / children sent home.

Supporting documentation submitted

Staff absence risk assessment submitted.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under regulation 11 has been adequately addressed.

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.*

(2) *A registered provider of a pre-school service in a drop-in centre or of 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 particulars specified in subparagraphs (a), (d), (e) and (f) of paragraph (1).*

(3) *A record in writing referred to in paragraph (1) or (2) shall be open to inspection on the premises by-*
(c) *an authorised person.*

Compliance Information

On the day of inspection, a sample of 12 children's files were reviewed, a record in writing was held on file for the following.

- (a) the name and date of birth of the child was available from 12 records.

- (b) the date on which the child first attended the service was available from 12 records reviewed.
 - (c) 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 was available from 12 records.
 - (d) authorisation for the collection of the child was available for all 10 records.
 - (e) 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 was available from 12 records.
 - (f) the name and telephone number of the child’s registered medical practitioner was available from all 11 records.
 - (g) record of immunisations, if any, received by the child was available from 12 records.
 - (h) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency was available for all 12 records.
- (3) On the day of inspection, a record in writing in respect of each pre-school child was available and open to inspection on the premises by-
- (c) an authorised person.

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.
- (2) A registered provider-
- (a) of a full day care service, a part-time day care service, a sessional preschool service or a childminding service that is registered for the first time on or after 30 June 2016, or
 - (b) of a full day care service, a part-time day care service, a sessional preschool service or a childminding service that moves premises on or after 30 June 2016,
- shall ensure that a suitable, safe and secure outdoor space to which the preschool children attending the service have access on a daily basis is provided on the premises.

Compliance Information

(1) (a)

The service consists of three playrooms, each assigned for use by different age groups. The rooms were brightly decorated and equipped with an extensive range of age-appropriate play facilities. The Pink Room, catering for children aged 2 years and up, is configured for sensory exploration and safe movement. The room contains high-density foam soft-play blocks, tactile activity wall panels, and low-level baskets of sensory materials.

The Red Room, for the 2-3-year age group, features clearly defined interest areas including a "Home Corner" with wooden kitchen units, a multi-level toy garage, and large hollow blocks.

The Blue Room, assigned to children aged 3–5 years, is designed for complex social and cognitive play. It features tiered library displays, small-world environments, and a dedicated construction area with building materials and puzzles. Across all rooms, materials are stored on open, low-level shelving to ensure they are readily accessible.

Each of the three preschool rooms have a dedicated rest areas, including "cozy corners" with soft seating, strategically positioned away from designated play areas.

(1) (b)

Stackable floor beds are available and equipped with appropriate bedding. Rest areas in each room are well-resourced with soft floor mats, cushions, and small tent canopies. These spaces facilitate rest throughout the day, and children were observed using them at different intervals.

(2) (a) (b)

The outdoor play area is fully enclosed with metal-based grid fencing and offers ample space for energetic play. Ground coverings consist of impact-resistant surfacing, tarmac, and natural grass. Facilities include a climbing frame with a slide and a storage shed containing ride-on toys, balls, hoops, and seesaws. Resources supporting imaginative and messy play are also provided, including a play shop, plastic playhouses, sand trays, and a mud kitchen with real pots and pans

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 to the service was secure upon the inspector's unannounced arrival, preventing unauthorized access and unsupervised exits.
- The perimeter of outdoor area of the service was secured with high-level fencing.
- Materials and resources were visually clean and in good repair.
- Tables were cleaned before and after mealtimes.
- All electrical leads, flexes, and blind cords were securely fastened.
- Adequate handwashing facilities were provided, liquid soap was readily available for children to wash hands before eating and after toileting.
- The kitchen was inaccessible to the children.
- The adult toilets were not accessible to the children.
- Storage was inaccessible and out of reach of the children throughout the building.
- No hot drinks were observed to be consumed by the staff near the children.

Infection Control:

- The service was cleaned daily and weekly up to date cleaning rosters were available on the premises for review.
- The materials and resources throughout the service were visually clean.
- Tables and were observed to be cleaned prior to and after mealtimes in the pre-school room.
- There was adequate handwashing facilities provided throughout the service, liquid soap and paper towels
- The sanitary facilities were observed to be ventilated by openable windows.
- Sanitary facilities were observed to be kept maintained and clean.
- Child friendly handwashing posters were placed beside the sinks.
- There were pedal operated bins available throughout the service.
- All coats and bags were stored off the ground on allocated hooks minimising contact and cross infection.

Administration of Medication:

- When interviewed, staff were aware of their responsibilities for the safe administration of medication. No medication was administered on the day of inspection. Medication plans were in place for children who needed the administration of emergency medications.

Fire Safety:

- Fire doors were observed to be unobstructed throughout the service.
- Fire evacuation procedures were clearly displayed in the care rooms.
- Fire extinguishers were on the premises and easily accessible.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

- (1) Garda vetting was available for 10 staff adults. However, 2 vetting disclosures were not dated within the previous three years in adherence to with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting'.
- (2) On the day of inspection, it was observed that rodent control boxes were positioned in areas accessible to children in the preschool room. This presents a safety risk due to the potential for accidental ingestion or physical injury.

Infection Control:

- (3) On the day of inspection, it was noted that the water temperature at the wash hand basins was not sufficiently warm for effective hand hygiene. The temperature was reading at 14.1°. This presents a potential risk of cross-contamination.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

- (1) Renewed garda vetting have now been submitted for the two staff members concerned, and confirmation will be retained on file. A tracking checklist has now been implemented to monitor Garda vetting expiry dates to ensure renewals are completed within the required timeframe going forward.
- (2) The rodent control boxes were immediately relocated to areas inaccessible to children. All bait stations are now secured in tamper-resistant containers and placed in approved locations in accordance with safety regulations. A full inspection of the facility was conducted to ensure no additional pest control devices are accessible to children. Proper placement and monitoring of pest control equipment has been discussed with

staff. Our pest control company has been notified and instructed to coordinate with administration prior to placing any future devices.

Infection Control:

(3) A new water heater has been installed in the room to ensure an adequate supply of suitably warm running water at the wash hand basins. Water temperature has been tested following installation and is now compliant with hand hygiene requirements.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

- (1) Renewed garda vetting submitted for two staff members.
- (2) Photographic evidence of bait boxes removed from areas accessible to the preschool children.

Infection Control:

(3) Photographic evidence of newly installed boiler.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under regulation 23 has been adequately addressed.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

A registered provider shall ensure that pre-school children attending the service are supervised at all times.

Compliance Information

On the day of inspection, children were observed to be appropriately supervised at all times. Staff were strategically positioned across both indoor and outdoor environments, ensuring that all children remained within sight and hearing. Staff were seen to sit in close proximity to the children during mealtimes and maintained direct involvement in their play activities. Transitions between the indoor and outdoor areas were managed effectively through constant staff communication, ensuring the outdoor space was secure prior to use and performing regular headcounts as children moved between the two environments.

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 the preschool service for 68 children up until 27th March 2026.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

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

- (a) of sound and stable structure,*
- (b) safe and secure,*
- (c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated*
- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and*
- (e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.*

Compliance Information

- (a) The premises appeared to be sound and stable structure. There were no observable indications of defects in the structure of the premises.
- (b) The premises was safe and secure. All exit doors were secured to prevent children leaving the facility unsupervised. All fire exits were unobstructed allowing for safe evacuation of the premises if needed.
- (c) There were adequate lighting and ventilation in all areas of the premises.
- (d) All areas were clean, well maintained and all play materials and equipment were in a proper state of repair. Detailed cleaning schedules for the premises were displayed on the walls of the rooms.
- (e) There were adequate sanitary facilities provided suitable for the needs of the children attending.

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.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider did not ensure that a person trained in first aid for children was, at all times, immediately available to the children attending the service. It is acknowledged that there was two staff members with paediatric first aid working in the service on the day of inspection.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

On the day of inspection was the only occasion since 2019 where two staff members were absent simultaneously. Both staff members who were out sick on that day are certified First Aid Responders, which resulted in an unforeseen gap in immediate first aid availability.

We currently have 4 additional staff members scheduled to complete First Aid Responder (FAR) training. In the interim, we are reviewing our staffing and contingency arrangements to ensure first aid cover is prioritised and that similar circumstances do not arise again.

Supporting documentation submitted

Confirmation from register provider of 4 additional staff to complete FAR training on the 20th and 27th March.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under regulation 25 has been adequately addressed.