

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015TY018
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Name of Service:	Step Ahead Creche
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Address of Service:	Clonbealy Business Park, Newport, Co. Tipperary
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Eircode:	V94 PC43
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Name of Registered Provider:	Muneeza Sanawar
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	30/04/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	25	PM	20
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Civic Offices, Limerick Road, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary
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Inspection undertaken by:	L McGeeney
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Title:	Early Years Inspector
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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

This full day care service was established to provide care and education to children aged 1 – 6 years old. A registered school aged care service was also provided for children aged 5 – 12 years old. The service operates Monday – Friday, 7.30am – 6pm for 48 weeks of the year. This includes a three-hour sessional service that is funded under the early childhood care and education scheme (ECCE) for eligible children and is operated Monday – Friday, 9.30am – 12.30pm for 38 weeks of the year.

The service is operated from a single-storey, detached premises in a business park in the town of Newport in north Tipperary. There are four activity rooms: three used by the early years children and one by the school aged children; an office, kitchen, staff room, sanitary accommodation areas and outdoor play area.

Staffing

The registered provider works in the service on a daily basis. There are eight other staff employed in the service including staff who work directly with the early years children, staff who work with the school aged children, catering staff and relief staff.

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(2)(4), 11(1)(2)(4)(8), 15(1), 16, 20(1)(3), 21, 22, 24(1)(3) and 28.

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

(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

The staff files of all staff were reviewed as part of the inspection process:

(2)(a) Written, validated references from past employers were available in respect of the nine members of staff.

(b) Not applicable to this service as all of the available references were from past employers.

(c) Garda vetting had been carried out in respect of each member of staff, with re-vetting carried out on a three yearly basis in line with best practice. Relevant records were maintained on file.

(d) Not applicable as none of the staff had lived outside the state as adults for a period exceeding six consecutive months.

(4) All staff who worked directly with the early years children held recognised qualifications in early childhood care and education at levels 5, 6 or 8 on the national qualifications framework.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(b) A second reference was not available in respect of one member of staff. The registered provider stated that a written reference had been requested from a source other than a past employer but had not yet been acquired.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

A second reference has been obtained for staff member mentioned in non-compliance and has been shared with Tusla.

Management will ensure in future that 2 employee references are on file before employees commence work in the setting.

Supporting documentation submitted

A copy of the second reference in respect of one member of staff was received by the early years inspectorate on 16 May 2025.

Summary Comment

All evidence submitted meets the requirements Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016.

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.

(4) Subject to paragraph (5), where a registered provider contemporaneously provides-

(a) a sessional pre-school service, and

(b) a full day care service or a part-time day care service, or both, the minimum ratio of adults to children applicable for the duration of the sessional pre-school service in respect of the children attending that service shall be the ratio specified in paragraph (3).

(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) There were 4 staff, including the registered provider, working directly with 25 children aged between 19 months and 6 years old across 3 rooms on the morning of the inspection. There were 2 staff with 7 children aged 19 months to 3 years old in the Toddler room, 1 staff with 10 children aged 2.5 – 5 years old in the Preschool room and 1 staff with 8 children aged 4 – 6 years old in the Montessori room. There was also a school aged child present. By 11am another member of staff was present in the Montessori room following which the registered provider was available to relieve staff for their breaks. The cook arrived at 12pm and was present until 4pm but was not included in the adult to child ratios.

There were 20 children aged 2 – 6 years being supervised by 4 staff across 3 activity rooms in the afternoon. The registered provider was also present.

(2)(4) The adult to child ratio was maintained within the required ratios throughout the day.

(8)(a) There were at least 2 staff present while the service was in operation.

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) Completed registration forms were available in respect of the children who attended the service. Twelve forms were reviewed as part of the inspection process and were found to contain all of the information required under parts (a) – (j) of this regulation.

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;*
- (g) the policies, procedures and statements the service is required to maintain in accordance with Regulation 10;*
- (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 information required under parts (a) – (k) of this regulation were available in the service. The information was recorded in the following manner.

- (a) Staff records were maintained in individual staff files.
- (b) – (g) This information was contained in the Parents Handbook which was emailed to the parents of children when they enrolled in the service.
- (h) The daily attendance of the children was recorded in one of the three attendance registers in use in the service.
- (i) Staff rosters were printed and available on the wall in the staff room.

- (j) Parental consent was sought prior to the administration of any medication was given to a child attending the service. A written record was maintained of any medications administered to children while attending the service.
- (k) Accidents and Incidents were recorded in a triplicate record book designed for this purpose.

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.
- (3) A registered provider of a full day care service, a part-time day care service or a childminding service, other than such a service to which paragraph (2) applies, shall ensure that-
- (a) a suitable, safe and secure outdoor space to which the pre-school children attending the service have access on a daily basis is provided on the premises.

Compliance Information

- (1)(a) The children had access to both indoor and outdoor play on a daily basis. There were three activity rooms used by the early years children: Toddler room for children aged 1 – 3 years, Preschool room for children aged 2.5 – 5 years and Montessori room for children aged 3 – 6 years. In the mornings the children had access to their dedicated room. In the afternoon there was more movement of the children between the rooms which provided the children who attended for longer hours with a change of environment during the day. The back room was used by the school aged children in the afternoon and was available to the early years children in the morning if required for small group or one to one activities.
- (b) There were cosy areas in each room where the children could rest and relax during the day on sofas, cushions and padded vinyl floor mats. There were two standard cots available in the Toddler room as well as camp beds which were stored in the back room until needed. The Toddler room was darkened and set up as a sleep room between midday and dinnertime at 1.30pm.

Children who required a sleep at this time were able to sleep in a restful environment supervised by staff. Children who required sleep outside of the scheduled daily sleep time were facilitated to sleep when required.

(3)(a) The space at one side and back of the premises was enclosed with fencing and gates and developed for outdoor play. The area at the back of the premises had been covered with a roof to provide sheltered outdoor play space that could be used in all weathers. The ground surfaces were tarmacadam with soft fall surfaces under equipment with a fall height greater than 60cm.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 21 – Equipment and materials

A registered provider shall ensure that there is adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment and materials available on the premises of the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

The rooms were well equipped and laid out with furniture, toys and materials suitable to the age and stage of development of the children using the room. Tables in the Toddler room were at two heights: one which was suitable for use with the low-level toddler chairs with splayed legs and solid sides while a slightly taller table was available for use with the child sized chairs. Larger chairs were available for the staff and the sofas in each room were standard sized 2-seater units. Tables and chairs in the Pre-school and Montessori rooms were the correct heights for the children who used them.

Each room had open shelving units with toys and materials organised into interest areas so that the children could see and independently access what they wanted to engage with. There were imaginative play areas such as the home corner. In the Preschool room the imaginative play area changed constantly in line with the children's current area of interest: it had recently been a shop and a post office. There were family photo areas on the walls of each room, photo albums of activities the children had engaged in and the children's learning journals. Staff said that the children enjoyed looking at the photos and journals and often chose to sit with them and explore them. There was a sink unit in each room where the children could wash their hands as well as access water for art activities and cleaning up after activities. Cleaning equipment such as mini dustpans and brushes were available for the children to use when helping with tidy up, for example, the children in the Preschool room took turns to sweep up the glitter on and under their part of the table after the craft activity.

Other resources included sensory materials, musical instruments, art supplies, construction materials, puzzles, manipulative play materials and books.

Outdoor play equipment included fixed units such as the swings, slide and climbing frame; dolls houses, wall mounted mirrors, planting areas, ride on toys and seating areas.

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 service had a healthy eating policy and a three-week rolling menu plan. The menu for that week was displayed beside the entrance door and in each activity room. Breakfast, dinner and afternoon snacks were provided by the service while the morning snack was supplied by the children's parents and brought in with them each morning. Children also brought drink bottles filled with water that were stored on low level tables in each room where the children's could access them as required during the day. Staff refilled the bottles with water when they were empty.

On the day of inspection the children ate their morning snack at 10.30am. Food eaten included sandwiches, bread rolls, crackers, cheese, ham slices, carrot and celery sticks, yoghurt, fromage frais, strawberries and blueberries.

Dinner of leek and potato soup with bread rolls was served at 1.30pm.

Birthdays were celebrated with a cake, supplied by the child's parents, which the children ate after their morning snack. If additional treats were supplied these were divided out and sent home with the children rather than eaten in the service.

Staff were aware of children with food allergies or intolerances and were vigilant to ensure that food was not swapped between the children at snack time to prevent the potential for a child to ingest a food they had a reaction to.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that each pre-school child attending the service is checked in and out of the service by an employee or an unpaid worker.

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) no person other than-

(i) pre-school child attending the service,

(ii) a person dropping or collecting such a child,

(iii) an employee, or

(iv) an unpaid worker, can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee, and

Compliance Information

(1) The staff recorded the arrival and departure times of the children in their room in a record book designed for that purpose.

(3)(a) The registered provider met all visitors to the service at the entrance door before permitting them to enter the entrance hall of the service.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service had current insurance cover for up to 35 children attending at any one time valid until 27 March 2025.