

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015TY024
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Name of Service:	First Steps
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Address of Service:	Marian Hall, Borrisoleigh, Co Tipperary
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Eircode:	E41 WC78
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Name of Registered Provider:	Margo O'Shea
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	04/06/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	9	PM	-
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	North Tipperary Civic Offices, Limerick Road, Nenagh, Co Tipperary, E45A099
Inspection undertaken by:	L McGeeney
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	N/A
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Description of service

This sessional service was established to provide care and education to children aged between 2 and 6 years old. The service operates Tuesday to Friday, 9am – 12.30pm, for 38 weeks of the year. Places are funded under the early childhood care and education scheme (ECCE) for eligible children. The service is operated from a room at the back of the community hall in the town of Borrisoleigh in north Tipperary. The children have access to their room, the main hall, sanitary accommodation area, toy storage and play area off the main room and an outdoor play area.

Staffing

The registered provider works directly with the children each day, with a second member of staff. There are two additional staff who can be called on to provide relief cover when needed. All staff who work in the service hold recognised qualifications in early childhood care and education at levels 5, 6 or 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

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)(3)(8), (19)(1)(b), 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26 and 28.

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 the four members of staff were reviewed as part of the inspection process:

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

(b) Written, validated references from a source other than a past employer were available in respect of two members of staff.

(c) Garda vetting had been carried out in respect of each member of staff and relevant documents were kept on file. The service had a system in place to ensure that re-vetting of staff was carried out on a three-yearly basis.

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

(4) Staff held recognised qualifications in early childhood care and education at levels 5, 6 or 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

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.

(8) Without prejudice to paragraphs (2) to (7)-

(c) a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that, where the person in charge operates the service single-handedly, a second person familiar with the operation of the service and in a position to

provide assistance to the person in charge in operating the service is, at all times, within close distance of the service and available to attend the service to assist the person in charge in the event of an emergency.

Compliance Information

(1) There were two staff working directly with nine children aged between 3 and 5 years old on the day of the inspection.

(3) The adult to child ratio was maintained within the requirements throughout the period of the inspection.

(8)(c) There were usually two staff present in the service while it was in operation. In the event that one member of staff was absent from the service for part of the morning, a second member of staff was available to call on if needed in an emergency. In the event that a member of staff was absent for the entire session then a member of relief staff would be called on to ensure there was a second person present in the service.

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-

(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

The following practices were observed on the day of the inspection which supported the health, welfare and development of the children attending the service:

The staff were available to the children to provide support, reassurance, praise, comfort and assistance in response to the children's needs. The staff demonstrated care for the children, knowledge of their families and lives away from the service and interest in what the children were focused on at the moment. For example, during circle time each child was given a chance to share their stories about what they had done the previous evening.

The children were supported to be independent with self-care skills such as using the toilet, wiping their noses, washing their hands, unpacking their lunches and dressing for outdoors or home time. Staff supervised the children and gave prompts when required, such as reminding them to wash their hands after using the toilet or before eating. Children were also encouraged to care for the equipment and materials, to tidy up after themselves and to help reorganise the chairs for specific activities.

The children were preparing for their graduation from pre-school by learning new songs which they would sing for their families on the day. The children appeared to be excited and looked forward to this event.

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 three indoor play spaces: the main hall, the classroom and the small playroom/toy storage area. On the day of inspection all play and activities were carried out in the classroom, which was set up for self-directed play and exploration. There were defined interest areas which included the home corner/imaginative play area, cosy area and library, Montessori and practical life area, puzzle area, manipulative toys area and art/mark making area.
- (b) The children could rest and relax on the child sized recliner chairs beside the library when they wanted to. Sleep facilities were not required as all of the children were aged over 2 years old and stayed for a maximum of 3.5 hours each day.

(3)(a) The children had access to an enclosed outdoor play area with a grass surface located at the back of the premises.

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 service was suitably equipped with a range of toys, furniture and materials suitable to the age and stage of development of the children attending. Additional toys and materials for seasonal use, to provide progression and to cater for the variety of interests of the children were available and stored on the premises in the toy store or in a cupboard in the main hall.

The classroom was furnished with child height tables and chairs as well as chairs suitable for adults. The furniture was moved around during the morning according to the activities being engaged in such as free play, circle time, music and movement or lunchtime.

A range of toys, materials and furniture for use outdoors was also available.

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. Children brought a packed lunch from home that was eaten at snack time during the morning. Each child also brought their own drink bottle from which they could take a drink at any time they were thirsty. Drink bottles were refilled with water when they were empty. A 5-litre bottle of water was kept in the service for children to use when they wanted a drink.

Foods eaten on the day of the inspection included: sandwiches, crackers, cheese, rice cakes, fromage frais, yoghurt and fruit such as watermelon, mandarins, raisins and strawberries.

Foods available in the children's lunchboxes, which did not comply with the services healthy eating policy, such as high sugar foods like cereal bars, were not opened and sent home with the child.

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.

Compliance Information

(1) Staff were responsible for recording the arrival and departure times of the children on the weekly attendance sheet.

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) Both staff present in the service on the day of inspection held current certification as first aid responders (FAR), valid until 9 June 2025. Staff were enrolled to complete a refresher course in FAR at the weekend.

(2)(a) There was a suitably equipped first aid box available in the storage room off the classroom, where it could be easily accessed when required.

(b) The first aid box was available when required by a child attending the service.

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 firefighting 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 written record of the monthly fire drills that took place in the service.
- (b) There was a written record of the number type and annual maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms.
- (4) There was a notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire displayed in each room of the premises.

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 20 children attending on a sessional basis, valid until 27 November 2025.