

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

<b>TUSLA Identifier:</b>	TU2015TY067
--------------------------	-------------

<b>Name of Service:</b>	Stepping Stones Montessori
-------------------------	----------------------------

<b>Address of Service:</b>	Boheravroon, Thurles, Co. Tipperary
----------------------------	-------------------------------------

<b>Eircode:</b>	E41 Y670
-----------------	----------

<b>Name of Registered Provider:</b>	Mary Callanan
-------------------------------------	---------------

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

<b>Date of Inspection:</b>	13/03/2025
----------------------------	------------

<b>No of pre-school children:</b>	AM	16	PM	-
-----------------------------------	----	----	----	---

<b>Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:</b>	North Tipperary Civic Offices, Limerick Road, Nenagh, Co Tipperary, E45 A099
<b>Inspection undertaken by:</b>	L McGeeney
<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>	N/A
---------------------------------	-----

### Description of service

This sessional service was established in 1994 to provide care and education to children aged between 2 and 6 years old. The service operates from 9am – 12.30pm, Monday – Friday for 38 weeks of the year. A daily three-hour session funded under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme for eligible children operates from 9.30am -12.30pm.

The service is operated from a purpose-built, single-storey, detached building beside the registered providers residence in the town of Thurles in north Tipperary. The children have access to a large activity room, sanitary accommodation area and an enclosed outdoor play area.

### Staffing

The registered provider works directly with the children in the service each day. There is a second member of staff employed to work with the children and a recently retired member of staff who is available to provide relief when required.

Staff hold recognised qualifications in early childhood care and education at level 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 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 three 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, references from a source other than a past employer were available in respect of the registered provider.

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

(d) Not applicable to this service 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 2 staff supervising 16 children aged between 3 and 5 years old on the day of the inspection.

(3) The adult to child ratio was maintained at 1 to 8 on the day of inspection, which was greater than the minimum requirements of 1 to 11.

(8)(c) There were two staff present while the service was in operation.

## 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

(1)(b) The following practices were observed on the day of inspection which supported the health, welfare and development of the children.

The inspection took place in the week before St Patrick's Day. As part of their preparations to celebrate the day, the children had been taught the story of St Patrick and were enthusiastic to share the story to an audience. Each child was given a chance to tell a part of the story, followed by singing a song in honour of St Patrick and being Irish.

Singing and music formed an important part of the daily routine in the service and was used to link themes and information the children were learning. For example, the children were currently learning about the artist Lowry and had learned the song about him 'matchstalk men and matchstalk cats and dogs', which they sang during the inspection.

The children were prepared for transitions during the day such as the movement from freeplay time to work time by the use of visual timers and verbal cues. The children were observed to manage transitions smoothly because of this preparation. When the timer alarm sounded the children alerted the staff by saying ‘timer’ and started tidying up without further prompting.

There was a drawer in a unit in the corner of the room where the children could store their unfinished work to be completed on another day.

On the day of inspection one child became upset as they were too tired to finish a large colouring project. The registered provider was observed to respond kindly to the child, reassured them and skilfully re-engaged their attention in another activity.

The staff were observed to support the children to be independent and to do as much for themselves as they could, with staff available to help them when needed. Self-care activities included washing their hands, tidying-up after themselves and dressing for outdoors.

One of the themes that underpinned activities and learning in the service was ‘Who are the people in the neighbourhood?’ As part of exploring this theme the children were taken on walks in the neighbourhood and had visited or planned to visit the dentist, park, shop, hairdressers, library, art class in secondary school, butcher and Hope box depot. They had also been visited recently by a parent who was a nurse. Photos of this experience were recorded in the photobooks.

### 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 daily access to a bright, rectangular, split-level activity room and to play in the outdoor play area.

The room was well resourced and laid out to support the children to learn through play, work and exploration. The children could move about freely to the areas and resources they wanted to engage in. The space was able to be changed quickly and easily to accommodate various activities by moving furniture, for example, the floor space could be cleared when needed for performance or circle-time.

(b) The children could rest and relax when they wanted to in the cosy area beside the library. This space was on the upper level, slightly above the rest of the room. Sleep facilities were not required as the children attended for no more than 3.5 hours each day and all children were aged over 3 years old.

(3)(a) There was an enclosed garden with a grass surface beside the premises which was available to the children for outdoor play on a daily basis. The children played outside on the day of inspection.

## 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 well equipped with furniture, toys, materials and resources. The main part of the room was furnished with four rectangular tables and chairs. The tables could be moved back when the centre of the room was needed for large group work such as circle time. During work time the tables were arranged as two squares at either end of the room. Chairs were available in a range of sizes to suit the children and the staff. Low level shelving units and wall-mounted shelves lined the walls on both sides of the room to display Montessori equipment, practical life materials, art materials and puzzles. The children could easily see what they wanted to work with, access it and put it back when they had finished.

The upper part of the room was set up as a cosy area and library with floor mats, cushions and wall mounted book shelves. Books available included photobooks of the children, one for every month of the year to date, recording the special events and activities they had been engaged in. Family photos were displayed on the family tree wall. Outdoor equipment and materials included a large climbing frame with bridge and slide, a play house, sand pit, wall-mounted blackboard, play kitchen, watering cans, planting areas and cable reels.

### 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. Foods eaten in the service were supplied by parents, with the exception of birthday cakes, which were supplied by the service for each child's birthday.

The children bought a packed lunch and a drink. Foods eaten on the day of inspection included: sandwiches, smoothies, bread sticks and dip, pretzels, sultanas, rice cakes, bread rolls, cheese and fruit (raspberries, apples, blueberries and bananas).

### 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 were responsible for recording the arrival and departure times of the children. The attendance register was available at the entrance door of the service for ease of use.

(3)(a) Staff met visitors to the service at the entrance gate outside the entrance door to the service before allowing them access, if appropriate.

## 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 held current certification in first aid response (FAR) valid until 6 June 2025.

(2)(a) A suitably equipped first aid box was available on a high shelf in the sanitary accommodation area.

(b) The first aid box was available if required by a child attending 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 22 children attending at any one time valid until 27 March 2025.