

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015TY148
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Name of Service:	Stepping Stones Creche & Montessori
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Address of Service:	Crann Ard, Fethard Road, Clonmel, Co Tipperary
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Name of Registered Provider:	Miranda O'Shea
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	02/07/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	37	PM	36
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	13 Market Place, Mallow, Co Cork P51DD5Y
Inspection undertaken by:	B Fraher & S O'Brien
Title:	Early Years Inspectors

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 full day care service is located in a residential area in the town of Clonmel. A service is provided to children aged between 1 and 6 years. The service also offers the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme to children, 38 weeks of the year. The service operates from 8:00 to 17:45 Monday to Thursday and from 8:00 to 17:30 on Fridays, 51 weeks of the year. The premises is a purpose built, detached, single storey building with four early years rooms, an atrium, sleep room, kitchen, office, sanitary accommodation and outdoor play areas.

Staffing

There are currently 13 adults employed in the service. The registered provider was the person in charge and works directly with the children. Eleven adults working directly with the children held qualifications in Early Childhood Education and care from level 5 to level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications. On the day of inspection, nine adults were present.

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.

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 children, registered provider and staff 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
- (c) there is a clear management structure in the service that identifies the lines of authority and accountability in the service and the specific roles and responsibilities of each employee and unpaid worker.

(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 registered provider was the designated person in charge and a named deputy was available to deputise as required.
 - (b) The registered provider and the named person were on the premises for the duration of the inspection and while the service was in operation. This was clearly outlined in the staff roster that was reviewed by the inspectors.
 - (c) There was a clear management structure in the service and all adults were aware of their roles and responsibilities.

- (2) Thirteen recruitment files were reviewed including the file of the registered provider.
- (a) Eighteen of the 26 references available were from a past employer and were validated.
- (b) Eight of the 26 references available were from a source other than a previous employer and were validated.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all 13 adults. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
- (d) Police vetting had been obtained for three staff members who had lived outside of the state for longer than six consecutive months.
- (4) Eleven adults worked directly with the children and held a relevant qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education from level 5 to level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed equivalent by the Minister. One staff member who carried out maintenance duties in the service did not require a qualification.

Non-Compliance Information

(4)

One adult working directly with the children did not hold a relevant qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education or a qualification deemed equivalent by the Minister. This posed a possible risk to the children's wellbeing.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The following statement was made by the registered provider:

Corrective and Preventive Action

The adult has completed level 5 and is awaiting her statement of results which is not due until the 29th of July.

The adult is currently on work experience duties and is not counted in the ratio and is supervised by a qualified member of staff at all times.

The service will ensure that all staff members have submitted a statement of results or Certification in the future and will follow the services recruitment policy.

Supporting documentation submitted

A letter from the college and a copy of the recruitment policy.

Summary Comment

The action taken by the registered provider has addressed the non-compliances identified under Regulation 9. This will be reviewed on next inspection.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 10 - Policies, procedures etc. of pre-school service

A registered provider of a pre-school service shall ensure that the written policies, procedures and statements specified in Schedule 5 are in place for the service.

Compliance Information

The following policies were reviewed on inspection:

- Policy on Administration of medication.
- Policy on Safe sleep.
- Policy on Authorisation to collect children.

The policies contained the information required to guide the staff in their care practices for children.

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.

(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) At the time of inspection, there was an adequate number of adults responsible for the direct care and supervision of the children in attendance at all times.
- (2) The adult to child ratios were observed to meet the minimum requirements in the care rooms over the duration of the inspection:

The ratio for the morning was as follows:

- Wobbler room, there were two adults caring for ten children.
- Toddler room, there were two adults caring for five children.
- Junior Montessori room, there was one adult caring for nine children.
- Senior Montessori room, there were 2 adults caring for 13 children.

The ratio for the afternoon was as follows:

- Wobbler room, there were two adults caring for ten children.
- Toddler room, there were two adults caring for six children.
- Junior Montessori room, there was one adult caring for six children.
- Senior Montessori room, there were 2 adults caring for 14 children.

- (8)
- (a) The service operated with at least two adults present at all times. This was observed on the day of inspection and was evidenced through examination of the staff roster.

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) A sample of 12 children's records were assessed and reviewed.
- (a) All records assessed contained the name and date of birth of each child.
 - (b) All records assessed contained the date on which each child first attended the service.
 - (c) All records assessed had the capacity to record the date on which each child will cease attending the service.
 - (d) All records assessed had a record of the names and contact numbers of parents and guardians if required.
 - (e) All records assessed had a record of those authorised to collect each child.
 - (f) All records assessed contained details of any illness, disability or allergy each child may have.
 - (g) All records assessed had a record of the name and telephone number of each child's medical practitioner.
 - (h) All records assessed had a record of immunisations, if any, received by each child.
 - (i) Eleven of the 12 records had a record of written parental consent for the service to provide emergency medical treatment if required in the event of a medical emergency.

Non-Compliance Information

- (1)
- (i) One of the 12 records did not have a record of written parental consent for the service to provide emergency medical treatment if required.
- Not having children's records complete may hinder the care and safety of the children in the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The following statement was made by the registered provider:

Corrective and Preventive Action

The service reviewed all application forms to ensure that the parent had completed the forms correctly. All incorrect completed forms were returned to the parent to complete. The current form has been altered to make

it easier for the parents to complete. All forms returned by the parent on enrolment will be checked by Management to ensure correct completion.

Supporting documentation submitted

A copy of the new form received in the office of the inspectorate.

Summary Comment

The actions taken by the registered provider have addressed the non-compliances identified under Regulation 15.

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:

- (f) the opening hours and fees;*
- (g) the policies, procedures and statements the service is required to maintain in accordance with Regulation 10;*
- (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 following records in writing were reviewed on inspection:

- (f) The opening hours and fees were displayed in reception.
- (g) The services policies and procedures were displayed in a book in the reception area.
- (i) The staff roster was available and clearly outlined the hours of work for each staff member.
- (j) Twelve medication records in the Wobbler and Senior Montessori room were reviewed and contained all relevant information for children who attended the service.
- (k) A sample of 10 accident and incident reports for children who attended the service were reviewed and contained all the relevant information in relation to the accidents and incident that has occurred since January 2025.

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

Compliance Information

On the day of inspection, the following information was obtained through direct observation and discussion with the adults present and examination of the relevant documents.

Basic needs:

- The layout of the care rooms supported the children to move freely within their environments and engage in their chosen tasks. Children in the wobbler room were observed to move freely in a safe place.
- Meals and snacks were prepared by the parents or guardians and were observed to be healthy and nutritious. Examples of food served during the day were fruit, yogurt, spaghetti bolognese, pasta, vegetables, potatoes and meat. The service kept an alternative food option if needed for a child.
- Drinking water was accessible to the children in each care room for the duration of the inspection and the children in the Montessori rooms were encouraged to self-serve drinks which promoted independence. The water station was moved to the outdoor area in the Senior Montessori room during outdoor play time.
- The adults were observed to assist the children in highchairs with feeding and communicated to the children in soft tones.
- Spare clothing was available for children and an adult in the wobbler room was observed changing a child in a sensitive and caring manner.
- Children had unrestricted access to the toilet and were seen accessing the sanitary facilities independently with the supervision of the adults present.
- The individual sleep needs of the younger children were met, and this was observed on the day with children sleeping at various intervals in the wobbler room. Older children were observed to have a planned sleep time in the Toddler room which staff informed the inspector was facilitated to meet the needs of the children.
- Outdoor play was promoted and observed at the time of inspection with the adults observing and assisting children during play. Children dressed appropriately outdoors with a sun hat.

- Regular nappy changing was observed in the wobbler room and staff were noted to interact sensitively with the children at the time.
- Appropriate seating was used in the form of low-level tables and chairs.
- The children in the wobbler room were seen to wear bibs at mealtimes on the day of inspection.
- Adults were observed supporting children in the Senior Montessori room with washing hands and during toileting as needed while also encouraging independence.
- Individual care plans were available for children who needed additional support during their time in the service. On discussion with the adults in the Senior Montessori room, the adults were attuned to the needs of the children and adapted activities and resources to promote an inclusive environment.

Supporting relationships:

- All children were observed to be encouraged by the adults to participate in activities. Material and resources were available which accommodated each child's individual needs such as puzzles, plastic bricks, books, dress up costumes, cars, plastic animals and dolls. Outdoor toys were also available.
- Children in the Senior Montessori room were observed creating sunshine art and crafts. Adults were observed sitting and communicating with the children in a respectful manner and supporting each child as required.
- During drop off in the Senior Montessori room, the adults were observed to show affection towards the children who displayed signs of emotion.
- During mealtimes, the adults remained with the children in a relaxed environment, affording sufficient time for children to enjoy their food.
- An adult in the Wobbler room informed the inspector that they work in partnership with the parents and altered children's sleep in conjunction with the needs of each child.
- Photos were displayed on the walls of the Wobbler room and Toddler room which promoted a sense of family for the children.
- The adults were seen to promote positive behaviour in the Wobbler room and Junior Montessori room when observed they advised a child about the importance of taking turns when both children wanted the same toy or to go on the slide first.
- Adults in the Wobbler room and Toddler room were seen to sit at floor level with the children and played imaginative games, read or looked at words in groups which supported positive relationships with the children and language development.

- The children were encouraged to tidy up after play and meals in the Junior Montessori Room, which promoted a sense of responsibility.
- The adults were observed to be kind and caring towards the needs of the children in their care. An example of this was when a child was crying in the Wobbler room, the staff immediately offered comfort.
- The service used a software technology application, parent's handbook, a notice board in reception, email and texts to inform parents about the service and any updates that needed to be relayed. The adults in the service outlined the importance of partnership with child's parents and guardians.
- It was noted that the children in the service had completed the Wibbly Wobbly bike programme encouraging cycling and safety.

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 entrance door was secured. This restricted unauthorised access to the building and reduced the risk of children exiting unsupervised.
- The windows in the care rooms were adequately secured to ensure the safety of the children.
- Cleaning agents were stored out of reach of the children.
- The toys and play equipment assessed indoors and outdoors were in good condition.
- The outdoor areas were safe and secure spaces for children with concrete walls, a metal gate and railings.
- Children were observed to be safely secured in the highchairs in the Wobbler room.
- The windows contained in built blinds with no cords evident.

Infection control:

- Hand washing facilities were accessible to the children with warm running water, liquid soap and paper towels.
- The temperature of the warm water in the sanitary accommodations were recorded between 31.6°C and 39.6°C.
- Children were observed to wash their hand before meals and after outdoor play.
- Lidded pedal operated bins were in use for the disposal of waste in the sanitary areas and care rooms.
- Children's personal belongings were stored in lockers or on hooks.

- Children’s soothers were stored in individual containers in the refrigerator.
- Waterproof protective covers were fitted to the six mattresses in the sleep room.
- A refrigerator was available in each room for the storage of perishable foods.
- Staff in the Wobbler room informed the inspector that mouthed toys were removed from circulation and cleaned daily.

Administration of medication:

- Medication was not observed to be administered on the day of inspection.
- The staff informed the inspector that no child currently in the service was on regular medication.
- Temperature reducing medication was stored in original boxes out of reach of the children. The medication inspected was in date.

Safe sleep:

- The air temperature in the designated sleep room in the wobbler room was at the appropriate temperature of 21 °C while a child was sleeping. The temperature recorded was within the acceptable range for children aged over 12 months.
- Staff members used a digital device to record children’s breathing, colour and position while they slept. The inspector was advised that these checks were undertaken at eight-to-ten-minute intervals, and this was confirmed through a review of the previous day’s sleep logs.
- There was a couch area with a mat and cushions available in the care rooms for rest.

Fire safety:

- On the day of inspection, fire exits were noted to be free from obstruction.
- All fire extinguishers seen were wall mounted.

Non-Compliance Information

Safe sleep:

1. The air temperature of the Toddler room which was used for sleep was recorded at 24.5°C while six children aged between 21 months and 2 years 6 months were sleeping. This exceeds the recommended temperature range of 18°C to 22°C for children of this age. It is acknowledged that staff had opened the windows and double doors, and an air purifier fan was in use but temperatures were unable to be reduced to below 23.3°C.
2. One child under the age of two was observed to be sleeping on a stackable bed in the Toddler room. The services sleep policy states all children under two years have access to a cot. Tusla Guidance for the Early Learning and care sector on sleep position for children under 24 months states that the use of floor mats or

stackable beds for children aged under 24 months are not sufficiently conducive to sleep for children in this age range.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Safe sleep:

1. The service purchased a portable air conditioner unit to lower the room temperature in warm weather. The service will monitor room temperatures at sleep times and during hot weather to ensure they are at a safe level for all children.
2. A floor bed has been provided. The service purchased an appropriate bed for children under the age of 2 years for use in the future and plan to use the Tusla care plan template in partnership with the parent.

Supporting documentation submitted

1. Receipt received for purchase of portable air conditioner unit.
2. Receipt for the purchase of the bed.

Summary Comment

The action taken by the registered provider have addressed the non-compliances identified under Regulation 23.

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-

(b) a daily record in writing is kept of the entry on the premises of any such person.

Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider ensured that each child was checked in and out on the electronic application used in the service.

(3)

(b) A daily record of visitors to the premises was kept in a notebook in the reception area. The inspectors were requested to signed in and out from the service.

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) Evidence was available to demonstrate that two of the adults employed in the service held a current first aid responder (FAR) certificate and at least one of these was rostered to work at the service during the hours of operation.

(2)

(a) There were two sufficiently stocked first aid boxes available in the service, which was safely stored out of reach of children.

(b) The first aid supplies were always accessible, should they be required.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The insurance certificate indicated that sufficient cover was in place for the provision of a full day care service and the policy commenced on 28 March 2025 and expired on 27 March 2026.