

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015WH041
--------------------------	-------------

Name of Service:	Step by Step
-------------------------	--------------

Address of Service:	29 College Vale, Irishtown, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath
----------------------------	--

Eircode:	N91 Y363
-----------------	----------

Name of Registered Provider:	Monica Cronin
-------------------------------------	---------------

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

Date of Inspection:	26/03/2026
----------------------------	------------

No of pre-school children:	AM	25	PM	17
-----------------------------------	----	----	----	----

Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla, Child and Family Agency, SAP Office, St. Loman's Campus, Mullingar, Co Westmeath
Inspection undertaken by:	C.O' Connor Hughes
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.
---------------------------------	-----------------

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Description of service

The service is registered as a full day care service and operates between the hours of 08:15 and 17:45 on a Monday to Friday basis. The Early Years' Service is located in an adapted two storey domestic dwelling. Three playrooms namely the toddler room and the pre-school room are provided on the ground floor, the Montessori room is located on the first floor. Two sleep rooms, a breakout room, a kitchen and an office are also provided. An outdoor play area is attached to the rear of the service. The service is situated in a residential area on the outskirts of the town of Mullingar, County Westmeath.

Staffing

The registered provider employs six staff members. The registered provider and five staff members were working directly with the children on the 25 March 2026. The deputy person in charge also cooks the meals in the 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.

Regulation 9- Management and recruitment - (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(c)(d) (3)(4)(6)(6A)

Regulation 11 -Staffing levels - (1)(2)(4)(8)(a)

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Regulation 19- Health, welfare and development of child - (1)(b)

Regulation 20 – Facilities for Rest and play (1)(a)(b) (3)(a)

Regulation 21- Equipment and Materials

Regulation 22- Food and Drink

Regulation 23- Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child

Regulation 24 Checking in and Out and Record of Attendance (1)(3)(4)

Regulation 25- First aid - (1) (2)(a)(b)

Regulation 26- Fire Safety Measures (1)(a)(b)(2)(3)(4)

Regulation 28 – Insurance

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, deputy person in charge, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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.*

(3) The procedures specified in paragraph (2) shall be carried out prior to any person being appointed, assigned or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the pre-school service.

(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 person in charge was available in the service.

(b)

The registered provider and deputy designated person in charge were present for the duration of the inspection.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Following a review of previous inspection information, information available on inspection and discussion with the person in charge it was determined that two new staff members had commenced in the service since the last inspection on the 24 July 2024. The staff files were reviewed and the following was noted.

(2)(a)(b)

Two written validated references were available from past employers in respect of the new staff members.

(c)

A Garda Vetting disclosure was available in respect of the new staff members.

The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. An in date garda vetting disclosure was available for the registered provider and three staff members which required renewal since the last inspection on the 24 July 2024.

(d)

Police vetting was available in respect of one new staff member who had lived outside the state for a period of longer than six consecutive months.

(3)

The registered provider ensured that employees were vetted prior to commencement of employment in the service.

(4)

The new staff members working directly with children attending the service held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at levels 5 to 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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)**
- The minimum ratio of adults to children was maintained during the inspection.
- (2)**
- There were twenty-five children attending the service supervised directly by six adults in the morning.
- There were seventeen children present in the afternoon supervised by five adults.
- (4)(a)(b)**
- The adult: child ratio was maintained for children attending on a sessional and full day care basis in the service.
- (8)(a)**
- The staff roster reviewed indicated that two adults are on the premises during the hours of operation.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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 care practices observed met the needs of the children attending the service. Regular nappy changes were carried out for children attending the toddler room. Good communication was observed between the staff member and child during nappy changing. Older children were observed to use the toilet independently and wash their hands. The younger children slept in a restful atmosphere in the sleep room monitored by a staff member. Snacks and meals were planned at regular intervals for children attending on a full day care basis. Younger children wore bibs to protect their clothes during mealtimes.

Children were engaged in and enjoyed play activities in the indoor and outdoor environments that included free play, story time, creative play and physical play supported by staff members. Children in the toddler room enjoyed freedom of movement as they explored their environment and enjoyed playing with toys on the comfortable mats provided.

The staff were positive towards children and were familiar with each child, their personalities and their daily routines. Children were happy and content with their carers in the pre-school rooms. Children received hugs and cuddles in the toddler room. Seamless transitions were noted in the pre-school room as the children were given a five-minute lead in time to change from one activity to another. Staff sat and ate their meal with the children. Staff used children's individual names, maintained eye contact and conversed with the children during play activities and at mealtimes. Children were encouraged to be independent as they tidied their lunch away after snack time. An access and inclusion plan was available for children requiring extra support from staff members.

The service works in partnership with parents and guardians. Parents were observed to collect their children from the pre-school service after the ECCE session concluded. A verbal handover was provided to parents at this time. The registered provider stated information updates and events are shared with parents electronically. One to one

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

phone calls are arranged as required. The child's artwork and learning journal depicting the child's play and work activities are shared with the parents on a regular basis.

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)

Suitable play equipment was provided indoors which included toys and equipment for construction, tabletop activities, arts and crafts and home corners.

(b)

The toddler sleep room only was in use on the 26 March 2026. The sleep room provided four cots for younger children to sleep and rest. Low level beds were available for rest or sleep.

(3)(a)

The outdoor play area was safe and secure. An absorbent surface was noted. Toys and equipment included two playhouses, a small slide, small benches and chairs, toy cars, bikes and trikes.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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

There was a variety of suitable and sufficient play materials and equipment to support children for various forms of creative, manipulative, imaginary and free play in the indoor and outdoor play environments in the service. The tables and chairs were child sized suitable to each child's age and development. Equipment was well maintained, durable and easy to clean. Materials were accessible to children on low level open shelving and drawer units. Personal belongings and bags were stored individually for each child.

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

A three-week menu plan was in place depicting the main meals provided to children each day. The service provides the breakfast, morning snack and main meal to children attending on a full day care basis. Parents provide the morning snack for children attending the ECCE session. Children enjoyed mashed potato, vegetables and mince meat for the main meal.

A refrigerator was available for the storage of perishable foods in the main kitchen.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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:

Access to the service is through the main door which is locked and secure and a doorbell is used for entry. The service met the necessary safety requirements in respect of the indoor environment, toys and equipment and the safe storage of cleaning agents. The inspector signed the visitors book on arrival.

Infection Control:

Children were observed to wash their hands before snacks. Staff were observed to wash their hands during the inspection. The premises were visually clean. All toys and materials were easily cleanable. Cleaning schedules were available. Warm water, paper hand towel and liquid soap was available in the sanitary accommodation. Natural ventilation was available through openable windows in the pre-school rooms. Mechanical ventilation was in operation in the sanitary accommodation. Foot operated pedal bins were available in the sanitary accommodation and in the pre-school rooms for the hygienic disposal of waste.

Administration of Medication:

Temperature reducing medication was available if a child presented with a high temperature. Medication was stored safely in the staff room inaccessible to children.

Safe Sleep:

A sleep log noting the colour, breathing and position of sleeping children indicating children were checked every 10 minutes while sleeping was available for review. The environmental temperature recorded was 16.8 degrees Celsius in the toddler sleep room. Upon discussion with the Inspector the staff member demonstrated knowledge of safe sleep guidelines.

Fire Safety:

The fire emergency exits were free from obstruction in the premises. A fire assembly point was noted to the front of the premises.

Outing:

The registered provider stated outings are undertaken by the service on an annual basis. A risk assessment was reviewed for the service's annual outing to the local play centre.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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

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

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (3)(b) is retained for a period of one year from the date to which it relates.

Compliance Information

(1)

The records of arrival and departure reviewed verified that each child attending the service was checked in and out of the service by a staff member.

(3)(a)(b)

All entry to the service with the exception of (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) was approved by a staff member.

(4)

A record in writing referred to in paragraph (3)(b) is retained for a period of one year by the service.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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 and three adults were qualified in First Aid response (FAR) and available on the premises during the hours of operation.
- (2)(a)
A first aid box was located in the office of the service.
- (b)
A first aid box was accessible to adults caring for children in 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 fire fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises.
- (2) The record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection by-
- (a) a parent or guardian of a pre-school child attending or proposing to attend the pre-school service,
 - (b) an employee, and
 - (c) an authorised person.
- (3) A registered provider shall ensure that a record referred to in paragraph (2) is retained for a period of 5 years after its creation
- (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)
- A written record for the completed monthly fire drills was available on the premises. The last fire drill was recorded as taking place on the 12 March 2026.
- (b)
- A record was available demonstrating the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms on the premises. The firefighting equipment and the smoke alarms in the premises were serviced in November 2025.
- (2)
- Records were open to inspection to (a)(b)(c).
- (3)
- The registered provider ensured the records were held for a five-year period.
- (4)
- A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed in a conspicuous position in the service.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

There was evidence of current insurance cover for the number of children attending the service. The expiry date noted was the 27 March 2026.