

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2016LH006
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Name of Service:	Stepping Stones
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Address of Service:	45 Anne Street, Dundalk, Co. Louth
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Eircode:	A91 H678
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Name of Registered Provider:	Aisling McElroy
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	03/07/2023
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No of pre-school children:	AM	5	PM	3
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Child Wellbeing Centre, Castleblayney, Co. Monaghan
Inspection undertaken by:	M. Flood
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
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Description of service

Stepping Stones has been Registered as an Early Years' service under the management of the current Registered provider since June 2016. The service provides sessional, part-time and full day care and education to pre-school children and operates from 08:00-17:30hrs each weekday and caters for the care needs of a maximum of 31 pre-school children aged 2-6 years.

This service is located in the centre of Dundalk town in Co. Louth. It is comprised of a converted domestic building. There are 3 care rooms in operation namely, The Playroom, The Preschool Room and Preschool Room 2. There is a small, enclosed play area to the rear of the premises which the children have access to. Ancillary accommodation consists of sanitary areas and a kitchen.

Staffing

On the day of the inspection there were 2 adults working directly with the 5 pre-children present. The registered provider arrived on the premises at 12.40pm and was present for the remainder of the inspection.

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 *announced/unannounced* and focused on the area of *governance/ health, welfare and development of child and safety*. The inspections may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 19,23, 25 and 26. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

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 would like to acknowledge the cooperation of the *registered provider, person in charge, staff and children* 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)&(b) The service had a designated person in charge and named deputy person to deputise as required. The deputy person in charge was on the premises when the inspector arrived on the premises and was present throughout the inspection. The registered provider arrived on the premises after 12.40pm and was present in the service for the remainder of the inspection.

(2)(a) & (b) There were 2 written and validated references from a past employer or an alternative source available for each of the 5 members of staff which included the registered provider.

(c) Documentary evidence of a processed Garda vetting disclosure was available for each member of staff in the service.

(d) Following a review of the staff files presented on the day of inspection, international police vetting was not required at this time.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to demonstrate that each member of staff, who works directly with the pre-school children held at least the minimum required level 5 on the National Framework of Childcare 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.

(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) During the inspection there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the service.

(2) On the day of inspection when the inspector arrived unannounced to the service at 11.00am there was one room in operation:

The Preschool Room: There were 5 preschool children aged between 2-4 years present with 2 staff members. There were also 3 children present attending the school aged service.

The registered provider arrived on the premises after 12.40pm and was present in the service for the remainder of the inspection.

(8)(a) Following a discussion with the person in charge and a review of the available documentation e.g., staff rotas and children's attendance records, this information demonstrated that there were at least 2 adults on the premises at all times.

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

(1)(a) The following examples demonstrate how the registered provider ensured that children's learning, development, and well-being was facilitated in the service:

Basic Needs

- Healthy eating was promoted in the service as was evident by the snacks which were provided by the parents. On the day of the inspection the dinner was provided by the service and was reported to consist of pasta and sauce. All other snacks were supplied by the parents.
- The children's drinks cups and bottles were stored on a low-level table in the care room, and they were accessible as required by the children. Staff were observed to sit with the children at snack times and this time was also used to encourage conversations between the children. Assistance was given to the younger children who required help with opening lunches and certain foods.
- The children were observed to move freely in the care room.
- The toilet trained children were encouraged to be independent with toileting and discreet supervision was also provided by staff as required. Gentle handwashing reminders were also given to the children after toileting.
- Aprons were used appropriately to protect clothes prior to a painting activity and hands and faces were cleaned appropriately afterwards.

Supporting Relationships

- The staff reported that most communication with parents and guardians was verbally at collection and drop off. During a discussion with the registered provider, it was stated that a phone messaging service and written letters are also used to communicate with parents if required.

- The adults throughout the service were observed to interact with the children in a warm and supportive manner. Soft tones, positive and respectful language were observed in interactions between the children and the staff in the service for example “what story would you like to read...? ““well done ...look what you did...your mammy will love that picture..”

Physical and Material Environment

- Child sized furniture and equipment was in use throughout the service.
- A variety of age-appropriate materials and equipment were available in each of the care rooms that support many areas of development such as fine and gross motor skills, role play, speech and language and sensory development.
- Toys and equipment were positioned on open low-level shelving in these rooms which promoted independence and facilitated choice for the older children.
- There was evidence of the children’s artwork on display for example; “The hungry Caterpillar” painted footprints, handprint ladybirds and a variety of photographs that included family pictures and “all about me” pictures and information.

Programme Of Activities

- Staff reported that observations and emerging interests of the children are documented and support the planning of activities in the service.
- Scrap books containing photographs and art activities are developed for each child attending the service. These are sent home at the end of the year as a ‘keep sake’ of their time in the service.
- The children were observed to engage in a variety of activities that promoted many areas of development for example; story time where the children were allowed to choose the story. The children requested to do a painting activity, and this was facilitated by the staff after story time. One child who did not wish to partake in this activity was facilitated with playdough.

Non-Compliance Information

The children attending the service did not get a change of environment to the outdoor play area during the inspection and this was confirmed by the staff present.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

Staff have been made aware of the importance of outdoor play and its effects on the children.

The manager /person in charge has ensured that all age groups get an appropriate change of environment on a daily basis.

Supporting documentation submitted

Documentary evidence of a staff meeting which included a review of the outdoor policy.

Summary Comment

The registered provider submitted details of the corrective and preventative actions taken in the service to address the non-compliance. Based on this information the non-compliance has been addressed. Implementation of the corrective and preventative actions will require assessment at the next inspection.

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

It was observed that the registered provider has taken the following measures to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the pre-school children attending the service including:

General Safety:

- The external doors were appropriately secured to prevent children from exiting the service unsupervised.
- The designated emergency exit doors were clear and unobstructed.
- All blind cords in the service were restricted or made inaccessible to the children.
- Documentary evidence of daily risk assessments were evident in the service.
- Cleaning equipment was stored out of reach of the children.

Infection Control:

- There was a supply of liquid hand soap and single use paper hand towels available to support hand washing in the service.
- There were individual lidded storage boxes for the storage of the children's soothers.
- Good environmental cleaning practices were observed during the inspection, with tables being wiped down prior to lunch, snack times and after activities. Staff were able to verbalise correct cleaning processes for toys and equipment.
- All waste bins were appropriately maintained on the day of the inspection.

Safe Sleep:

- None of the children attending the service were observed to sleep during the inspection.

Non-Compliance Information

The Inspectorate is not assured that adequate steps have been taken to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the pre-school children attending the service. The following observations were made:

General Safety:

1. Fire drills were not being carried out on a monthly basis as per best practice guidelines.
2. The safety surface squares in the outdoor area were separating and created gaps which are a potential trip hazard.

Infection Control:

3. There was not a constant supply of running hot water available in the service. When the inspector checked the hot water tap in the sanitary area at 11.40am the water was cold. This does not support effective handwashing and is an infection control risk.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Actions

1. A fire drill for the month of July has since been undertaken. The manager/person in charge will ensure fire drills are undertaken on a monthly basis.
2. The manager has secured the squares in the garden temporarily while we are waiting on a 'sleeper beam' to made. The manager /person in charge will ensure the safety of the garden on a daily basis before the children use the area.
3. All staff have been reminded of the importance of handwashing and infection control and the hot water has been switched on each morning during operating hours since our inspection took place. The manager/person in charge will ensure the hot water is switched on each morning during operating hours

Supporting documentation submitted

- Photographic evidence of safety surface in the outdoor area.
- Documentary evidence of a staff meeting which included a review of the outdoor policy and infection control policy.
- Documentary evidence of an outdoor risk assessment.
- Documentary evidence of hot water temperature temperatures in the service.

Summary Comment

The registered provider submitted details of the corrective and preventative actions taken in the service to address the non-compliances together with supporting evidence. Based on this information the non-compliances have been addressed. Implementation of the corrective and preventative actions will be assessed at the next inspection.

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 ensured that a person trained in first aid was available to the preschool children at all times. This was evidenced by the availability of up to date First Aid Responder (FAR) certificates for 5 staff members in the service.

(2)(a) and (b) The first aid box available in the service was stored in conspicuous location in the premises and was available for the children at all times.

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.*
- (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 record was maintained of all fire drills which had been completed in the service. the last recorded on 30/06/2023 and prior to this was 03/03/23 and 14/10/2022.
- (b) A record was kept of the number, type and maintenance of the fire-fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises dated the 30/09/22 and 22/06/23 respectively.
- (4) Notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were conspicuously displayed in the premises