

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2018FL510
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Name of Service:	First Steps Academy Crèche & Montessori Ltd.
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Address of Service:	The Hermitage, Balgriffin, Dublin 13.
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Eircode:	D13 CXP7
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Name of Registered Provider:	Shirley Flannery
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	07/04/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	47	PM	43
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Floor 7 Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, St John's Road West, Kilmainham, Dublin 8 D08 X01F
Inspection undertaken by:	E. Griffin and C. Harte
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).

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Description of service

First Steps Academy Crèche & Montessori Ltd is located in a residential area on the ground floor of an apartment block in Dublin North. The service is one of four preschool services operated by the registered provider. The service operates from 8.00am to 6.00pm and provides a full day, part-time and sessional care for up to 85 preschool children aged between 1 to 6 years. The service participates in the Early Childhood and Education Scheme (ECCE) and offers a morning session from 9am to 12pm. The service is also registered to operate a school aged service; however, this service is currently not in operation.

There are six care rooms which consist of the Boo Boo Bears room which has a separate cot room, Teddy Bears room, Snuggle Bears room, Buddy Bears room, Polar Bears room and Cub Bears room. The Polar Bear room did not have children attending on the day of inspection. There is an office, a kitchen, a staff room and an outdoor play area to the rear of the property.

Staffing

The registered provider does not work in the service and employs sixteen adults to work in the service. This includes an area manager, a person in charge, a deputy person in charge, thirteen adults who work directly with the children including one relief support staff member who provides support where required across the four preschool services.

On the unannounced arrival of the inspection team the acting person in charge, deputy person in charge and ten childcare staff were present. The registered provider was not present on the day of the inspection. The area manager and a relief staff member arrived shortly after the inspection began and remained onsite for the majority of the inspection to help assist the inspection process and provide support where required.

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

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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. The following regulations were reviewed.

- Regulation 9 (1), (2), (4) and (7) Management and Recruitment
- Regulation 11 (1) and (2)
- Regulation 19(1)(b) Health, Welfare and Development of Child
- Regulation 23 Safeguarding the Health, Safety and Welfare of the Child
- Regulation 32 Complaints

However, on inspection an additional non-compliance was identified under Regulation 8 Notification of Change in Circumstances.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under Regulation 9 Management and Recruitment (1), (2), (4) and (7), Regulation 19 (1)(b) Health, Welfare and Development of Child and Regulation 23 Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of Child. As a result, the scope of the inspection included the Boo Boo Bear room and the Snuggle Bear room.

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.

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Additional Information

This inspection was triggered as a result of information received to the inspectorate on 20 March 2026.

Following the inspection an internal referral was made within Tusla, further information is available under Regulation 8.

Acknowledgments

The inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the area manager, acting person in charge, deputy person in charge, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part II - Registration and Register

Regulation 8 - Notification of change in circumstances

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a temporary pre-school service shall, subject to paragraph (3), notify the Agency in writing of any proposed change in the details in relation to the pre-school service contained in the register pursuant to section 58C(2) of the Act or Regulation 7(2) at least 60 days before it is proposed that the change would take effect.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) The service failed to submit a change of circumstance form to the inspectorate to notify the change in person in charge which had occurred in November 2025. An internal referral was made to Tusla's service operating outside of registered status (SOORS) department.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(1) The Change of Circumstance Form relating to the change in Person in Charge has now been completed and submitted. The Registered Provider has reviewed all current governance and compliance documentation to ensure all prescribed information held by Tusla is accurate and up to date. A formal review meeting was held with senior management to address the non-compliance and reinforce regulatory obligations under the relevant regulations. Responsibility for all statutory notifications has now been formally assigned to a designated member of senior management with oversight by the Registered Provider.

Supporting documentation submitted

- No supporting documentation submitted.

Summary Comment

The registered provider has addressed the non-compliance identified under Regulation 8.

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.

(7) A registered provider shall ensure that all employees, unpaid workers and contractors are appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training, including in relation to the following:

- (a) the policies, procedures and statements of the service specified in Schedule 5;
- (b) Part VIIA (inserted by section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (No. 40 of 2013)) of the Act, and
- (c) these Regulations.

Compliance Information

(1)

- (a) The service had an acting person in charge and named person to deputise as required.

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- (b) A review of the roster showed that a designated person is rostered to be present during the operational hours of the service.
 - (c) There was a clear management structure in place, and staff reported being aware of this.
- (2) A review of paperwork and discussion with management showed that there are currently sixteen adults employed by the registered provider to work within the service. The files of fourteen adults were reviewed. This included twelve adults who had commenced work since the previous inspection, the area manager and one relief support staff member.
- (a) There were twenty-three written and validated references available from past employers.
 - (b) There were five written references available from a source other than a past employer.
 - (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for the fourteen adults. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
 - (d) Police vetting was available for the fourteen adults who had lived in a country other than Ireland for a period of six months or more as an adult.
- (4) The fourteen adults who worked directly with children attending the service held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications, or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.
- (7) (a) Through discussions with staff and documentation reviewed on inspection there was evidence to show that staff had been provided and received training on policies and procedures prior to working directly with children as part of the induction process. Training included videos on health and safety, behaviour management and infection control. All staff had the required Children First certification.

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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.*

Compliance Information

- (1) There were ten adults caring for 47 children in the morning and there were eleven adults caring for 43 children in the afternoon.
- (2) The adult to child ratios were maintained correctly throughout the inspection and staff were aware of the correct adult to child ratios required.

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 registered provider ensured that.
- Staff advised that children are offered breakfast between 8am to 9am. The service also provided a morning snack and two hot meals which were prepared onsite. Different dietary requirements were catered for if required and additional food was observed to be available, for example, penne pasta with sauce was served at dinnertime and there was an alternative vegetarian pasta available.
 - The care rooms in the service were designed with the age and stage of development having been taken into consideration. Children were observed to take part in free play and group work. The layout of the rooms facilitated these choices as the toys and equipment were laid out on low level shelving and were visible and accessible to the children.

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- The transition from the garden to the Buddy Bears room was observed to be calm with staff at the front and back of the line supporting children.
- Staff comforted a child who was settling in when they appeared upset. Staff members offered cuddles and sat close to the child during activity time and offered support where required.
- Children's language development was supported through conversations and action songs. For example, a staff member was observed to engaged in conversation in a reassuring and friendly manner to the child while changing the child's nappy.

Non-Compliance Information

1. Staff in the Snuggle room did not change a child's wet top in a timely manner despite interacting with the child during this time. This did not ensure a comfortable experience for the child.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

1. Staff were reminded of their responsibility to ensure children's personal care needs are responded to promptly and sensitively at all times. A review of room routines and staff deployment within the Snuggle Room was undertaken to ensure children's care needs can be identified and responded to without delay. The Person in Charge conducted observations within the room to ensure appropriate standards of care and responsiveness were being maintained. The issue was discussed at a staff meeting to reinforce expectations regarding children's dignity, comfort, and wellbeing. Refresher training will be provided to all staff on responsive caregiving, children's wellbeing, and maintaining children's comfort and dignity throughout the day. Daily room checks and observations by room leaders and management will be strengthened to monitor the quality of interactions and care practices. Personal care procedures will be reviewed with staff to ensure there is a consistent understanding of expectations regarding timely changing of wet or soiled clothing. Reflective practice sessions will be incorporated into regular supervision meetings to support staff awareness of children's emotional and physical wellbeing needs. Management will continue to monitor practice through ongoing audits and unannounced observations to ensure sustained compliance and quality improvement.

Supporting documentation submitted

- No supporting documentation submitted.

Summary Comment

The registered provider has addressed the non-compliance identified under Regulation 19. The practices outlined in the corrective and preventative actions will be reviewed on the next inspection.

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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:

- On the unannounced arrival at the service by the inspectors, the entrance door leading into the premises was appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises throughout the inspection.
- The inspection team were asked to show identification and sign in the visitor book by management who answered the door.
- The internal door handles in the service were positioned at a high level and were inaccessible to children reducing the risk of children exiting the care rooms unsupervised.
- The outdoor play area was secure reducing the risk of children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to this area.
- Blind cords were observed to be secured.
- Cleaning agents were stored in areas that were inaccessible to children.
- There were no trailing flexes or wires observed to be accessible to the children.
- There were visibility strips on low windows and doors and window restrictors on low level accessible windows secured.
- Toys and equipment used by the children were observed to be well maintained and in a good state of repair.
- A sample of fifteen accident and incident records showed the service documented the relevant information required.

Infection Control:

- Thermostatically controlled warm water, liquid soap and hygienically dispensed hand paper towels were available to support hand washing.
- Floors and equipment surfaces were observed to be suitable and appropriate to facilitate effective cleaning practices.
- The premises was observed to be in a clean and hygienic condition. There were completed cleaning schedules on the wall of the care rooms.

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- Soothers were stored in individually labelled boxes.
- Individual bed linen was used for the sleeping children and stored in individually labelled bags.
- An ambient temperature of 18-22°C was maintained in the care rooms, and the windows were open to allow fresh circulation of air.
- Foot pedal operated bins used for the disposal of waste were available throughout the care rooms and sanitary areas.

Safe Sleep:

- Heavy outer clothing and footwear was removed from the children before sleep time.
- An ambient temperature of 18-22°C was maintained in rooms where children over the age of one were sleeping. There was evidence this is checked daily with a sleep room temperature log completed on the wall.

Fire Safety:

- Up to date contemporaneous attendance logs for staff and children were available which facilitate the safe evacuation of the premises in the event of an emergency.
- Emergency evacuation routes were clear of any obstructions.
- Fire evacuation procedures were clearly displayed.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. Seven children aged between 1 ½ to 2 years were observed not to be securely seated in the highchairs provided during mealtimes. Of the nine highchairs observed to be used, six highchairs did not have the safety straps secured and one highchair did not have any safety straps to be secured. This practice was not in line with the highchair manufacture guidelines. This posed a potential risk of injury.
2. Chairs were observed to be stacked in a hazardous position in the Boo Boo Bear room where two children aged between 1 to 2 years played. The inspector observed chairs to be stacked in groups of three and four. This posed a potential risk of injury. A similar non-compliance was observed on the previous inspection, and the preventive action had not been sustained.

Infection Control:

3. The mattress protective covers used on the five cots in the Boo Boo cot room were not waterproof. This posed a risk of cross infection as the cot mattresses used were not waterproof.

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Safe Sleep:

Sleep practices were not in line with the service safe sleep policy or the safe sleep guidelines developed by Tusla.

The following practices were observed:

4. Children under two years old were not provided with a suitable floor bed with a mattress depth of at least 6cm.
5. Individual sleep plans which are a requirement for children under two years of age who are not provided with a cot for sleeping were not adequately completed. Evidenced by the following:
 - Three of the five children observed to be sleeping on low mats did not have an individual sleep plan available.
 - Five of the individual sleep plans in the Teddy Bear room and two of the individual sleep plans in the Snuggle Bear room did not include a parent signature. In addition, one of these plans did not detail if the child is developmentally ready to make the transitions from a cot to a suitable floor bed completed.

Sleep plans should include an assessment of the individual child's sleep routines and sleep requirements, to be determined and agreed in collaboration with parents/guardians and consideration of the child's developmental readiness to move from a cot to a floor bed.
6. The staff member in the Boo Boo Bear room did not complete physical sleep checks while four children aged between 1 to 2 years old slept. The staff member was observed to open the cot room door and look in momentarily from the care room. It is important that sleep checks are carried out from a position that the adult is able to observe the breathing, position, and colour of each child. This posed a potential risk of safety.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. The highchair identified as missing safety straps was removed from use immediately. All remaining highchairs were inspected to ensure they were in good working order and fully compliant with manufacturer safety requirements. All staff were immediately instructed that safety straps must be secured for every child seated in a highchair at all times. Room leaders conducted immediate safety checks during mealtimes to ensure compliance. A daily equipment safety checklist has been implemented to ensure all highchairs and safety equipment are checked before use. Staff have completed refresher training on mealtime supervision, risk management, and safe use of equipment. Management will conduct regular spot checks and audits during mealtimes to ensure consistent compliance. Safe mealtime practices will be reviewed regularly at team meetings and incorporated into induction training for new staff.

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2. Chairs were immediately removed and stored safely away from children's access. Staff in the room were reminded of safe storage procedures and the importance of maintaining hazard-free play environments. A full environmental risk assessment was completed within the room. A revised storage procedure has been introduced outlining safe storage requirements for furniture and equipment. Daily room safety inspections have been strengthened and documented by room leaders. Management will complete unannounced health and safety audits to monitor ongoing compliance. The issue will continue to be monitored through supervision and governance meetings to ensure sustained improvement.

Infection Control:

3. Waterproof protective covers have now been purchased and fitted to all cot mattresses. All sleep equipment was reviewed to ensure compliance with infection prevention and control requirements. An infection control equipment audit schedule has been introduced to ensure all sleep equipment remains compliant and fit for purpose. Staff have received refresher guidance on infection prevention and control practices. Management will review equipment inventories quarterly to ensure replacement items are sourced promptly where required.

Safe Sleep:

4. Appropriate sleep mats and mattresses compliant with Tusla guidance are being sourced. Existing unsuitable sleep equipment was removed from use. A full review of all sleep environments and equipment has been completed. Safe sleep compliance checks have been incorporated into daily opening and closing room checks. Management will conduct regular audits of sleep equipment to ensure ongoing compliance.
5. All Children under two years of age now have completed individual sleep plans in place. Parents/guardians were contacted immediately to review, update, and sign all sleep plans. Sleep plans were reviewed to ensure developmental readiness assessments and individual sleep requirements were clearly documented. A standardised sleep plan review process has been implemented to ensure all plans are completed fully prior to a child transitioning to a floor bed. Sleep plans will now be reviewed with parents at regular intervals and whenever there is a developmental change. Management will complete monthly audits of all sleep plans to ensure documentation remains current and complete. Staff have received refresher training on Tusla safe sleep guidance and documentation.
6. Staff were immediately reminded of the requirement to complete and document direct physical sleep checks in accordance with the service policy and Tusla guidance. Sleep supervision practices were reviewed immediately with all staff members. Management conducted direct observations of sleep practices following the inspection. Refresher training on safe sleep supervision and sleep check procedures has been provided to

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all staff. A revised sleep monitoring procedure and recording system has been implemented to support consistent practice. Room leaders and management will carry out regular observations and audits of sleep practices to ensure compliance is maintained. Safe sleep practices will remain a standing agenda item at staff meetings and supervision sessions.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

- No supporting documentation submitted.

Infection Control:

- No supporting documentation submitted.

Safe Sleep:

- No supporting documentation submitted.

Summary Comment

The registered provider has addressed the non-compliance identified under Regulation 23. This will be reviewed on the next inspection.

Part VIII - Notifications and Complaints

Regulation 32 – Complaints

- (1) A registered provider shall ensure that the complaints policy of the service specifies-*
- (a) the procedure to be followed by a person for the purposes of making a complaint in relation to the service,*
 - (b) the manner in which such a complaint shall be dealt with, and*
 - (c) the procedures for keeping a person who makes such a complaint informed of the manner in which it is being dealt with.*
- (2) A registered provider shall ensure that-*
- (a) a record in writing is kept of a complaint made to the provider in respect of the pre-school service, and*
 - (b) the complaint is duly dealt with in accordance with the provider's complaints policy.*
- (3) A record in writing referred to in paragraph (2)(a) shall-*
- (a) include the nature of the complaint and the manner in which the complaint was dealt with, and*
 - (b) be open to inspection on the premises by an authorised person.*

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Compliance Information

- (1) The registered provider ensured there was a complaints policy maintained which outlined the following:
- (a) The procedures to be followed when making a complaint.
 - (b) The way complaints would be dealt with.
 - (c) The procedures for keeping the complainant informed on how the complaint is being dealt with.
- (2)
- (a) Management advised there had been no complaints received since the last inspection on 30 July 2025.
 - (b) Management confirmed if a complaint was received it would be handled in line with the service policy.
- (3) A review of records referred to in (2)(a):
- (a) Management advised there was a complaint logbook available which could be used to document the way a complaint would be dealt with if received.
 - (b) All documents requested were made available for review by the inspection team.