

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2020WX001			
Name of Service:	Stepping Stones Montessori			
Address of Service:	5 Irish St, Bunclody, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford			
Eircode:	Y21 FV30			
Name of Registered Provider:	Fiona Kavanagh			
Service type:	Full Day			
Date of Inspection:	14/08/2025			
No of pre-school children:	AM	15	PM	11
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla Early Years Inspectorate Ely Hospital, Ferrybank, Wexford.			
Inspection undertaken by:	C. Ryan			
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			

Description of service

Stepping Stones Montessori is a privately operated preschool service. It offers a play-based curriculum for children aged between 2 years and 6 years of age. The service operates from 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday and is registered to accommodate up to 52 children at any one time. The service is located on Irish Street in Bunclody in north county Wexford. The building was completely renovated for the purpose of operating as a preschool and school aged service. It consists of three playrooms over two floors with sufficient toilets, nappy changing areas, a sleep room and a kitchen. An outdoor play area is available to the rear of the premises and is enclosed and secure.

Staffing

The service employs 11 staff including the registered provider, a cleaner and a bus driver. The registered provider works directly with the children. The staff working directly with the children were qualified in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 and above on the National Qualifications Framework.

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) (2) (a) (b) (c) (d) (4),

Regulation 11 Staffing levels (1) (2),

Regulation 15(1) – Record of Preschool Child,
Regulation 17 Information for Parents, and
Regulation 19 Health, welfare and development of the child.

Inspection findings are documented in the inspection report which is first issued in draft format to the service with an opportunity to respond to any findings. Where statutory requirements are identified as not being met, the registered provider must demonstrate how they have rectified the non-compliance and will prevent any non-compliance from re occurring. The Corrective Action and Preventive Action plan (CAPA) will be used to inform decisions about compliance with regulatory requirements. Where the registered provider fails to meet the statutory requirements an escalation process may be commenced.

The inspectorate reserves the right to edit responses received for reasons including clarity, completeness and compliance with administrative and legal processes.

The contents of the report are compiled by the inspectorate body.

Acknowledgments

The inspector wishes to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(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.

(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 registered provider was the designated person in charge of the service on the inspector's arrival. There was a second named staff member available to deputise as needed.

The files for all staff working in the service were reviewed on the day, including the cleaner and the bus driver.

(2)(a)(b)

There were validated references for all employees kept in each staff member's file.

(c)

Garda vetting disclosures were available for all staff working in the service. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to re-new Garda vetting every 3 years.

(d)

Police vetting disclosures were available on file for staff who had lived outside of the state for a period of longer than six months as an adult.

(4)

There were certificates of qualification for all staff members working directly with the preschool children available on file.

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)(2)

During the inspection, there were an adequate number of staff working directly with the children.

There were 7 staff caring for 15 preschool children and 3 school aged children

During the afternoon there were 7 staff caring for 11 preschool children and 3 school aged children.

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 10 children's enrolment forms completed by the parents were reviewed as part of the inspection process and were found to contain all the information required under parts (a) – (i) of this regulation.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 17 – Information for parents

A registered provider shall ensure that a parent or guardian of a child proposing to attend the service is provided with the information referred to in subparagraphs (a) to (g) of Regulation 16(1).

Compliance Information

The service had a handbook and welcome packs for parents with information about the service. Information in the packs included contact details, opening hours, drop off and collection policy, child safeguarding policy, communication with parents, sickness exclusion, services offered and fees. The parents were provided with information about the staff who cared for their children and were able to drop off and collect their children directly from the individual rooms.

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)

On arrival to the service, the children from all three rooms were engaged in play in the outdoor environment. The staff members outlined that the service operated an open-door approach to the outdoor environment, each room has an allocated time to use the outdoor area but if children wish to play outside this is facilitated. During this time staff were observed engaged in play and conversation with the children.

A table was set up outside where the children left their water drinks and were seen to freely have a drink when they wished. A new sensory quiet area had been developed in the outdoor area this year and the children were observed to enjoy using it throughout the morning. The space consisted of a variety of textures and materials. The staff were observed to reapply sunscreen to children during the morning.

The children brought their own food for the mid-morning snack and the service provided lunch and dinner. At lunchtime children had sandwiches, fresh chopped fruit and yogurt. Children washed their hands before eating and then sat together. The children were asked to choose what and how much they ate, with extra servings available to the children. The staff members sat with the children and chatted about their day and what they would like to do after lunch.

The indoor play environments provided the children with a space which supported their play ideas, choice and varying types of play. The rooms were well developed and laid out. The interest areas were resourced with a variety of materials that included open ended, natural and loose parts. The three playrooms reflected the individual age groups using them. For example: the Juniper room was used by the younger aged children and contained soft matting for crawling and climbing and a nurturing chair for staff to sit and hold children. Each of the rooms had home corners/kitchens, sand play, waterplay, dress up clothes, art materials, birthday walls, family walls and emotional support props/check ins for the children.

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The staff positively responded to the children during the inspection. The staff supported a child who got upset over sharing toys and calmly offered an alternative toy to the child. Parents were emailed a monthly newsletter. This included information about staff, key dates, reminders and planned activities.