

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2022WH001
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Name of Service:	Early Steps Childcare
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Address of Service:	Corcloon, Milltown Pass, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath
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Eircode:	N91 W7T2
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Name of Registered Provider:	Niamh Ryan
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Service type:	Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	23/05/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	19	PM	9
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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.
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Description of service

The service is registered as a part time service and delivers the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) to children. The service operates from 08:30 to 15:30 on a Monday to Friday basis providing two ECCE sessions from 09:00 to 12:00 and 12:30 to 15:30.

The single storey premises consists of a reception area, a pre-school room and a kitchen. An outdoor play area is located to the rear of the premises. On-site parking and set down facilities are available. The service is rural in its location on the outskirts of the village of Milltownpass, County Westmeath.

Staffing

There are three adults are employed in the service. The designated person in charge and two adults were working directly with children on the 23 May 2025. The registered provider arrived to the service after the inspector's arrival and returned for the closing meeting.

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)

Regulation 11 -Staffing levels - (1) (3) (8)(a)

Regulation 15 Record of a Pre-school Child (1)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(g)(h)(i)

Regulation 16 Record in relation to a Pre-School Service 16(1)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(h)(i)(j)(k)

Regulation 18 Copy of the Act etc

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

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

Regulation 23- Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child

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

Regulation 26 -Fire safety measures - (1)(a)(b)(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, 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*

(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)

A person in charge was available in the service. A deputy person was available if required.

(b)

The designated person in charge facilitated the inspection.

Four staff files were reviewed including the registered provider. The following was noted:

(2)(a)(b)

Eight written validated references were available from past employers or from a source other than a past employer in respect of three staff members. Two written references were available in respect of the registered provider.

(c)

Garda Vetting disclosures were reviewed in respect of the three staff members and the registered provider. 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 in respect of the registered provider who had lived outside the state for a period of longer than six consecutive months.

(3)

Documentation reviewed indicated that the registered provider ensured correct recruitment procedures were carried out prior to the employment of staff in the service.

(4)

Staff members working directly with children attending the service held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at level 5 to level 8 on the National Framework of 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)

The minimum ratio of adults to children was maintained during the inspection.

(2)

There were 19 children attending the service supervised directly by 3 adults in the morning.

There were 9 children attending the service supervised directly by 3 adults in the afternoon.

(8)(a)

Documentation reviewed indicated that two adults are on the premises at all times.

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)

In a review of a sample twelve child enrolment records information relating to (a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(g)(h)(i) was available in respect of children attending the service.

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:

- (a) the name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee, unpaid worker and contractor;*
- (b) details of the class of service and the age profile of children for which the service is registered to provide services;*
- (c) details of the adult:child ratios in the service;*
- (d) the type of care or programme provided in the service;*
- (e) the facilities available;*
- (f) the opening hours and fees;*
- (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;*
- (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 service kept and maintained written records of information in relation to the service in accordance with Regulation 16 (1) (a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(h)(i)(j)(k).

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 18 – Copy of Act etc.

A registered provider shall ensure that a copy of Part VIIA (inserted by section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (No. 40 of 2013)) of the Act and of these Regulations is kept on the premises and the said copies shall be open to inspection on the premises by-

- (a) a parent or guardian of a child attending or proposing to attend the service,*
- (b) an employee, unpaid worker or contractor, and*
- (c) an authorised person.*

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured that a copy of Part VIIA (inserted by section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (No. 40 of 2013)) of the Act and of these Regulations was available and open to inspection by (a) (b) and (c).

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)

Children were happily engaged in the various play experiences and activities including creative, sensory play, free play and manipulative play in the indoor and outdoor environment supported by the staff members. Children enjoyed singing songs in preparation for their upcoming graduation ceremony. Transitions were smooth as notice was given to children to the change in the activity during the morning session. A little helper system was in place to encourage independence as children took turns to give out lunches to their peers.

Children enjoyed a healthy snack provided by their parents consisting of sandwiches, crackers, cheese, yoghurts and a selection of fruit with water to drink. Children enjoyed their snack and took their time conversing with their peers.

Staff members held children in positive regard using their individual names, interacting and conversing with children at eye level. Staff were familiar with each child and their personality. Access and Inclusion plans were in place for children requiring extra support. Good teamwork was observed amongst staff.

The service worked in partnership with parents in the following ways: A short messaging system (SMS) is used to send information and updates to parents. A newsletter is sent to the parents on a regular basis. The child's learning journal depicting the child's developmental observations, play and work activities are shared with parents quarterly during the pre-school term. Parents are invited into the service for the graduation service on the 13 June 2025.

The indoor environment was bright and colourful. A range of developmentally appropriate, creative and enriching experiences was available for all children. Age and stage appropriate toys and materials were accessible to children on low level shelving. Children were observed to avail of the areas of interest that included a fully equipped home area, hair salon, cosy rest area and a construction area. The playroom was large in nature and allowed for freedom of movement for physical and active play activities. Children’s artwork and photographs were noted. Children enjoyed a sports day and teddy bears picnic recently in the service.

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,

(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, or

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

Adequate and suitable play equipment and materials were provided in both the indoor and outdoor environments.

(b)

Soft matting and cushions were provided in the service for children to rest and relax. Low level beds were available for children to sleep on if required.

(3)(a)

The outdoor play area was safe and secure surrounded by fencing. Toys and equipment included a large wooden swing, a playhouse, a wigwam, sand play and chalk play. Picnic benches were noted.

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 to the service was safe and secure. Access to the service was by means of a doorbell at the fence entrance. A coded entry system was noted on the front door of the service allowing no unauthorised access into the service. The inspector signed the visitors book on arrival.

The service met the necessary safety requirements in respect of the indoor environment, toys and equipment and the safe storage of cleaning agents. Safety checklists were available for review.

Infection Control:

The premises was visually clean. All toys and materials were easily cleanable. Records for cleaning were available and reviewed.

Children were observed to wash their hands before snacks and after using the toilet.

Warm water, hand paper towels and liquid soap was available in both sanitary accommodations in the service.

Mechanical ventilation was working in the sanitary accommodation.

Administration of Medication:

Temperature reducing medication was available if a child presented with a high temperature. Medication was stored safely in the service. Documentation reviewed indicated that correct procedures were carried out when administering medication to children in the service.

Fire Safety:

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

Outing:

The registered provider stated the service does not undertake outings.

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)

Three adults were qualified in First Aid response (FAR) and available on the premises during the hours of operation.

(2)(a)

A fully equipped first aid box was located in the entrance area in the pre-school service.

(b)

A first aid box was accessible to adults caring for children in the pre-school 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.

(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 15 May 2025.

(b)

The firefighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises were serviced in September 2024 and in May 2025.

(4)

A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed in a conspicuous position in the service.

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 27 March 2026.