

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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| TUSLA Identifier: | TU2023DY002 |
| Name of Service: | First Steps Academy |
| Address of Service: | Churchwell Gardens, Belmayne, Dublin 13, Co. Dublin |
| Eircode: | D13 HXR8 |
| Name of Registered Provider: | Shirley Flannery |
| Service type: | Full Day, Part Time, Sessional |
| Date of Inspection: | 06/12/2023 |

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| No of pre-school children: | AM | 32 |
| Address of the Early Years Inspectorate: | Early Years Inspectorate 2 nd Floor, Unit 4/5 The Nexus Building Blanchardstown Corporate Park Ballycoolin Dublin 15 D15 CF9K | |
| Inspection undertaken by: | T. Nelson and E. Griffin | |
| 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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| Conditions if applicable | Not applicable. |
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Description of service

First Steps Academy is a full day care service located in a residential area of Dublin 13 and is registered to provide early childhood care and education to a maximum of 101 children aged 1 to 6 years old, Monday to Friday. The service operates an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme sessional service from 8.45am to 11.45am. The service is one of two services operated locally by the registered provider.

First Steps Academy operates from a ground floor purpose-built premises of an apartment building and has four care rooms currently open, with Buddy Bears care room not currently in operation. These include the Boo Boo Bears Room (12 to 18 months old), Snuggle Bears room (18 to 24 months old), Cub Bears room (2 to 3 years old) and Teddy Bears room (2 to 5 years old). There are sanitary facilities located off each of the care rooms, and a cot room located off Boo Boo Bears room. Further sanitary facilities are available for staff. A fully enclosed outdoor area is located to rear of the premises.

Staffing

There are currently eleven staff employed by the service including the person in charge, a deputy person in charge, a training manager and eight childcare staff who work directly with the children. The management team manage the oversight of the service and provide cover where needed across the rooms. The management team and seven staff who work directly with the children, and a staff member from another service operated by the registered provider were present on the day of the inspection. The registered provider does not work 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 announced and focused on the area of governance/ health, welfare and development of child. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 19 Health, Welfare and Development. As a result, the scope of the inspection included Boo Boor Bears room, Snuggle Bears room and Teddy Bears room and did not include Cub Bears 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.

Acknowledgments

The inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the 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.*

(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 service had a designated person in charge and named person to deputise as required.
- (b) The person in charge was present during the inspection.
- (c) There was a clear management structure in place, and this was displayed clearly on the staff roster.

The files of twelve staff were reviewed including the eleven staff members and the visiting staff member. The registered provider had completed the following checks:

- (2)
- (a) Eighteen validated written references were available from recent past employers.
- (b) Six validated written references were available from a source other than a past employer.
- (c) Completed Garda vetting disclosures were available in respect of the twelve staff members.
- (d) Eleven adults who had lived outside of the state for six months or more as an adult had international police vetting from that state available for inspection.

(3) Documentary evidence was available that checks had been carried out for staff members prior to when they commenced employment.

(4) The twelve staff who worked directly with children attending the service held at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed eligible by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Affairs.

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) On the day of inspection there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the service to meet their basic care needs. There were eleven staff available to the 33 children.

(2) The adult to child ratios were correct when the inspector arrived announced to the service and throughout the inspection. Eight staff were allocated to work directly with the 33 children who were present on the day of the inspection with a breakdown as follows:

- Boo Boo Bears room - 2 adults to 8 children aged between 1-2 years old.
- Snuggle Bears room - 2 adults to 9 children aged between 1-2 years old.
- Cub Bears room - 1 adult to 4 children aged between 2-3 years old.

- Teddy Bears room - 3 adults to 12 children aged between 2 years and 8 months-5 years old.

(8)(a) A review of the staff roster provided for a minimum of two adults to be on the premises during the operational hours of the service.

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 child learning, development and wellbeing was facilitated by the following examples:

Basic Needs:

- Children were provided with food on a regular basis, with water available in the rooms throughout the day. A portion of chopped pear was served to the children at 10.30 am prepared in the service kitchen, and a hot meal of vegetable curry was served at 12.00pm which was provided by an external catering company. Staff reported that alternative meals were available for those who required them. Mealtime was observed to be a pleasant sociable experience for the children. Staff were available to support children to self-feed if required.
- Children's personal care needs were tended to in a timely and respectful manner. Nappy changes were completed at regular intervals, and children with a dirty nose were attended to immediately. Staff were observed requesting permission to tend to the children's care needs and used running commentary on the task. This demonstrated respect for the children, and a commentary on the task can facilitate speech and language development.
- Children were observed to have the freedom to move around their care rooms, facilitating the children's natural sense of exploration and curiosity.
- The transition to sleep was observed to be a restful calm experience for the children, where heavy clothing was removed, lights were dimmed, and soft music played.
- There were clearly detailed care plans available for those who required them.

Supporting Relationships:

- Staff were observed to be attentive and responsive to the children, in a warm, sensitive manner. Children were given comfort when required.
- Parents were updated on a daily basis with information on their child's food, nappies and sleep. Parents dropped and collected children from the rooms, giving an opportunity for brief conversation on the child's day.
- Staff were observed to be familiar with the children and with the routine of the room. This can promote a sense of comfort and predictability. This familiarity with the routine among the staff demonstrated teamwork which can facilitate smoother transitions for the children.

Physical and Material Environment:

- The hallways and rooms were bright and airy, and there were individual hooks and spaces for the children's coats and belongings. This can promote a sense of welcome and belonging.
- The furniture and equipment was suitable for the age and stage of the children in the rooms, with equipment stored on low level shelving making it accessible to the children, facilitating independent decision making.
- Equipment available in the rooms and outdoor area enabled children have access to a range of play experiences including construction, imaginative, creative and physical play.

Programme of Activities:

- Staff were observed to use strategies such as clear instruction, praise, encouragement, running commentaries and verbal gesturing with the children. These strategies provided children with appropriate supports to complete tasks and can facilitate speech and language development.
- There were long, medium and short term plans available for the children's learning and activities, and these were reflected in the products of the art activities displayed throughout the premises.
- The daily routine was reflective of the activities observed on the day, which provides for comfort in knowing what will happen next.
- Adult-led sensory activities were made available and children were invited to participate if they wished, enabling children's choice.
- Staff were observed to shadow children who required additional support, and used positive strategies such as low tones, slow pace, modelling, encouragement, choice and clear instructions. These strategies minimise negative behaviours.