

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2024MO003				
Name of Service:	Stepping Stones Cuilmore				
Address of Service:	Cuilmore National School, Newport, Co. Mayo				
Eircode:	F28 VF68				
Name of Registered Provider:	Catherine Sheridan				
Service type:	Part Time, Sessional				
Date of Inspection:	11/10/2024				
No of pre-school children:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>AM</td> <td>7</td> <td>PM</td> <td>-</td> </tr> </table>	AM	7	PM	-
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Year's Inspectorate, TUSLA, Child and Family Agency, 2nd Floor, St. Mary's HQ., Castlebar, Co. Mayo.
Inspection undertaken by:	M Farrell
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 Cuilmore is a registered part time and sessional service located in a primary school in a rural area near Newport in Co Mayo. The service has a sister service in Newport town. Sessional services are provided from for children aged between 2 and 6 years of age from 09:15-12:15 hours with parttime services provided until 14:15 hours. There is one large playroom, a storeroom and sanitary facilities provided. The children have access to an enclosed outdoor play area to the side and rear of the building.

Staffing

There are two staff members working directly in the service and the registered provider works between the two services. An additional two staff members are available to provide relief services when 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

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.

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.*

(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.*

(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) There was a named designated person in charge in the service and the registered provider was the deputy designated person in charge.
 - (b) Both the designated person in charge and deputy were available in the service during the inspection. A review of attendance records found that the designated person in charge or deputy were always available during hours of operation in the service.
- (2) The following vetting information for five staff members was on file and available for inspection:
- (a) Two written validated references from past employers particularly their most recent employer for four staff. One written validated reference from their most recent employer for one staff member.
 - (b) One written validated reference from a source other than a past employer for one staff member.
 - (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all five staff. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting for staff members every three years.
- (4) There was evidence available on file to show that the five staff members held the required qualifications in Early Childhood Care and Education or equivalent.

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.*
- (3) Subject to paragraph (5), a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 2 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) therefore at that reference number is satisfied.*

Compliance Information

- (1) An adequate number of adults worked directly with the children attending the pre-school service. There were three adults working directly with seven children on the inspector's announced arrival to the service on the morning of the inspection.
- (2) No child stayed in the service on the day of inspection to avail of part-time services. However, a review of attendance records found that the minimum required adult to child ratios were maintained during the provision of the part-time services.
- (3) During the sessional service the minimum required ratio of adults to children were adhered to as three adults provided direct care to the seven children.

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 staff had developed a daily plan of activities for the children that was adaptable depending on the children's needs incorporating for example free play, snack time and outdoor play daily. The service's daily plan or routine was on display in the playroom and provided structure and routine to children's activities. The children had access to a range of developmentally appropriate play equipment and materials both indoors and outdoors. The play equipment in the playroom was organised in well equipped, defined areas of interest such as a home area, café/shop, farm area reflecting the service's rural location, transport and construction areas and art area. The children were observed to direct their own play and the display of toys in low open shelving allowed them to make choices about what toys they wanted to play with. During the inspection children were observed to play with playdough, cutters and rollers set up at one table while a child played with a farm set with stable, animals, small piece of green artificial grass in another area. Later, groups of children and staff played at a table with coloured magnets and spoke about the colours and different shapes. Some children played on a transport mat with a staff member with cars. At one stage a child went to the open shelving containing art supplies, picked up paper and a plastic box with crayons and pencils and started to draw a picture sitting at a table.

The children played outside for a substantial amount of time in line with their daily routine in the enclosed outdoor area directly accessible from the playroom. The outdoor area had cement and tarmac ground cover suitable to be used in all weathers. The children played with a variety of toys and equipment including sandboxes, ride on toys and in playhouses. The staff used coloured shapes that had been painted on the ground for different games with the children that helped them to learn and identify shapes. One staff member played a game blowing bubbles with a wand for children who excitedly tried to catch them.

The service was preparing to celebrate Halloween with decorations on display on a window of pictures of pumpkins made by the children. Autumn pictures had also been made by the children using leaves that they had stuck on to templates of trees.

The staff had made a family wall with photographs of the children and their families that was used during the session with the staff asking children to identify their own families photographs on it. Music and dance were included in the children's play with action songs sung such as "ring o' roses" and danced to by one of the staff and a group of children.

An electronic application was used to interact with the children's parents. The staff recorded observations of the children's progress including photographs and shared them with their parents some of whom provided feedback in a sample observed by the inspector. The staff were observed to speak with the parents and provide information at drop off and collection times. There was a keyworker system in place with each staff member having a small number of children in their keyworker groups and this information was on display in the playroom. The staff told the inspector that there is an open-door policy in the service as referred to in the parent's handbook with parents welcome to the service. The registered provider informed the inspector that a handbook with information on the service and shortened versions of service policies was sent electronically to parents before their children started in the service.

A positive approach from the staff to managing children's behaviour was observed by the inspector reflecting information in the service's policy on managing behaviour. The staff were calm in their approaches to children and used positive language to redirect children where needed. Children were alerted to upcoming transitions from one activity to another allowing them time to prepare themselves. The staff encouraged children to play with each other. Sand timers were available in the playroom to be used represent passage of time if needed and when age appropriate.

Healthy eating advice and information was provided in the service's parent handbook and reflected in the healthy snacks that the children ate during the session including yoghurt, fruit, crackers and sandwiches. The staff sat with the children during their mealtime to supervise them and encouraged children to chat to each other.

There was rest area with soft furnishings in the playroom that the children were free to use at any time. Stackable beds were provided for children availing of parttime care but no children used this service on the day of the inspection.

The children were encouraged to be as independent as possible putting on their own outdoor coats and wellingtons where feasible. Each child had a photograph of themselves beside the storage space for their belongings in the entrance hallway. The staff prompted children to wash their hands before eating and after using the toilet and messy play, helping them when needed. The service's policy on children's toileting was on display in the sanitary units and was observed to be adhered to by staff. Children used the toilet by themselves if they were able to with support given by staff to children where needed.