

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

<b>TUSLA Identifier:</b>	TU2025DS002
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<b>Name of Service:</b>	First Steps Academy
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<b>Address of Service:</b>	The Poplars, St. Edmunds Avenue, Lucan, Co. Dublin
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<b>Eircode:</b>	K78 E3V2
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<b>Name of Registered Provider:</b>	Shirley Flannery
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<b>Service type:</b>	Full Day
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<b>Date of Inspection:</b>	20/01/2026
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<b>No of pre-school children:</b>	AM	38	PM	29
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<b>Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:</b>	The Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla Child and Family Agency, Carysfort House, Carysfort Avenue, Blackrock, Co Dublin
<b>Inspection undertaken by:</b>	L Magee & R Duff
<b>Title:</b>	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).

<b>Conditions if applicable</b>	Not applicable
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### Description of service

First Steps Academy opened in September 2025. It is registered to provide full day, part-time and sessional care to children aged 0 to 6 years and is one of a multiple of four childcare services run by the registered provider. The service operates from a purpose-built building on the ground floor of an apartment building in Lucan, west Dublin. The service has seven care rooms. On the day of inspection, six rooms were open, these include Booboo bears, Snuggle bears and Cub bears who cater for children aged 1-2 years, Panda bears carers for children aged 2-3 years and Buddy bears caters for children aged 3-5 years. Polar bears provides an afternoon ECCE session from 2pm to 5pm catering for children aged 3-5 years. On the day of inspection, Teddy bears was closed. This room caters for children aged 2-3 years. An outdoor area is provided on the premises. The service opens from 7:45am to 6pm Monday to Friday.

### Staffing

In total fifteen staff are employed to work in the service including the person in charge and the operations manager. 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/ safety/ premises and facilities. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

A sampling process was used. Booboo bears, Snuggle bears, Cub bears and Panda bears were the rooms inspected on the day. The Teddy bear room was closed on the day of inspection. Security of the outdoor area with a perimeter fence of 1.32 metres in height could not be assessed on the day of inspection as children remained indoors due to the inclement weather.

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.

### Additional Information

#### Fire officer referral

On 11 February 2026, a referral was made to the fire officer – see regulation 29 premises.

#### Corrective Actions and Preventative Actions (CAPA)

The Early years inspectorate received the Corrective Action and Preventive Action plan (CAPA) on 19 February 2026. The CAPA plan contained insufficient information to meet regulatory compliance. A second opportunity was afforded to the registered provider. This was received on 24 February 2026. This contained sufficient information to meet regulatory compliance.

### Acknowledgments

The inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the person in charge, operations manager, 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, 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) There was a designated person in charge and a named person who was able to deputise as required.

(b) The designated person in charge was present at all times on the day of inspection.

(2) As this is a new service where 15 staff are currently working, all staff files were reviewed. Regulation 9(2)(c) was inspected for these 15 adults and that of the registered provider who does not work with the children in the service, but whose Garda vetting disclosure had been renewed in accordance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice.

(a) Twenty-nine written validated references were provided from a past employer.

(b) One validated reference was provided from a reputable source for one staff member.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for sixteen adults. Garda vetting disclosures had been renewed in accordance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, which requires services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Police vetting disclosures were available for thirteen staff members who lived outside Ireland for a period of longer than six months as adult.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to show that all staff members employed to work 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 equivalent by the Department of Children.

### Non-Compliance Information

(d) One police vetting disclosure was not available for a staff member who lived outside Ireland for a period of longer than six months as adult.

### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

#### **Corrective and Preventive Action**

The outstanding police vetting disclosure has now been requested from the relevant authority. The service acknowledges the omission and has implemented a monitoring system to ensure full compliance with regulation 9 going forward. The person in charge will review all staff documents to ensure full compliance prior to staff commencement.

#### **Supporting documentation submitted**

Completed police vetting received by inspectorate 13/03/2026

### Summary Comment

The regulatory requirement has been met

### 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) An adequate number of adults were working directly with the children at all times during the inspection.

(2) The minimum ratio of adults to children was adhered to at all times during the inspection. There were 38 children attending the preschool being supervised by 11 adults in the morning and 29 children with 8 staff in the afternoon.

(8)(a) There were at least two adults on the premises at all times. The staff roster provided for a minimum of two adults to be on the premises at all times of opening.

### 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*

*(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 (a) & (b)

The person in charge confirmed all food is provided by the service for children who attend on a full day or part time basis. On the day of inspection, dinner was chicken in a tomato and cheese sauce which was provided by a private catering company and served for the main meal of the day. Young children were given the opportunity to feed themselves. Bibs were provided to protect their clothing while they were eating. Water was available throughout the day in individual named cups and bottles. Children's toileting and hygiene needs were attended to promptly and they were supervised using the toilet independently. Regular nappy changing took place during which time adults were observed to interact attentively with infants and young children.

A large variety of toys and materials were available to the children. These were stored and displayed at the children's eye level on low shelving that facilitated easy access by the children. Rooms were separated into different interest areas which included a cosy area, a book corner and a selection of dress up clothing. The children's artwork was on display along the walls. The outdoor play area was at the rear of the service and had an artificial grass surface.

Staff were observed speaking kindly and respectfully to the children at all times. They spoke to the children by name and helped them with activities as required. Staff described how they communicate with parents on a daily basis at drop off and collection times.

### Non-Compliance Information

1. Two children in cub bears were observed lying down in the cosy area drinking bottles of milk after dinner. Children should not lie down while drinking from a bottle as this practice increases the risk of choking and may contribute to dental decay and ear infections.
2. There were no adult chairs in Booboo bears, Snuggle bears or Cub bears which would enable staff to cuddle and support children when drinking from a bottle.

### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

#### Corrective and Preventive Action

1. Bottle feeding while lying down has ceased with immediate effect. Staff have been reminded that children must be held or seated upright while drinking from bottles. The safe bottle-feeding policy has been updated and reviewed with all staff. This will now be included in staff induction and will be monitored through monthly room observations by management.

- Suitable adult chairs have been made available in Booboo Bears, Snuggle Bears and Cub Bears rooms to enable staff to safely hold and support children during bottle feeding. Management will ensure that appropriate adult seating remains available in all baby and toddler rooms.

**Supporting documentation submitted**

Supporting documentation was submitted.

**Summary Comment**

The regulatory requirement for regulation 19 (1) (a) & (b) has been met.

**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-*

*(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.*

**Non-Compliance Information**

1 (b) On the day of inspection, six children under 24 months of age were found to be sleeping on sleep mats in the service instead of either a cot or a floor bed. Sleep mats are generally used for children over 24 months. A sleep plan incorporating a risk assessment should be completed before moving a child from a cot to a floor bed. Neither was available on the day of inspection for these children.

**Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider**

**Corrective and Preventive Action**

Following inspection, all children under 24 months are now sleeping in either a cot or a designated floor bed. Individual sleep plans incorporating risk assessments have been completed in consultation with parents prior to any transition from a cot to a floor bed. Individual sleep plans incorporating risk assessments will be completed prior to any future transition from a cot to a floor bed.

**Supporting documentation submitted**

Supporting documentation was submitted.

**Summary Comment**

The actions taken by the service have met the regulatory requirement. Regulation 20 (1) (b) has been addressed.

## Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

### Regulation 29 - Premises

*A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-*

*(b) safe and secure,*

*(e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.*

#### Non-Compliance Information

(b) Locks were observed on six emergency exit doors, in care rooms, within the service. Locking an emergency exit door is prohibited because it prevents rapid, safe evacuation during an emergency.

(e) On the day of inspection, the service did not have adequate and suitable sanitary facilities to meet the needs of the children attending the service. All children present on the day were over 12 months of age, the four nappy changing tables used in the service stated they were suitable for children aged 0-12 months.

#### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

##### **Corrective and Preventive Action**

(b) All locks have been removed from emergency exit doors with immediate effect. No locks will be installed on fire doors going forward.

(e) The service has ordered new changing tables to replace the existing nappy changing tables with units suitable for children over 12 months. The service will ensure that sanitary facilities are now fully suitable to meet the needs of children attending.

##### **Supporting documentation submitted**

Supporting documentation was reviewed.

#### Summary Comment

The action taken by the service have addressed the non-compliances outlined under regulation 29 (b) & (e).