

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CC389
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Name of Service:	Stepping Stones Montessori
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Address of Service:	51A Capwell Rd., Turners Cross, Cork, Co. Cork
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Eircode:	T12 V590
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Name of Registered Provider:	Laura O'Flaherty
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	1 February 2023
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No of pre-school children:	AM	5	PM	n/a
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Administration Office, St Mary's Health Campus, Gurranabraher, Cork
Inspection undertaken by:	C. Stokes
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

This sessional service was established in 2006 and offers a Montessori and play based pedagogical approach. This service runs for 3 hours a day from Monday to Friday. The service is based in a converted premises with a playroom, and sanitary area for staff and children. It is located in a residential area in a suburb of Cork city. The service caters and is registered for preschool children aged 2-6 years of age. The service also operates a registered school aged service in the afternoon.

Staffing

The registered provider is service based and operates this service with 1 other adult. Both adults working directly with children had a major award in Early Childhood care and education.

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*. The inspections may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 19, 23, 25, 26, 28. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulation(s) within this report.

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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, deputy person in charge, student 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) The service had a named person in charge and a named deputy person in charge.
 - (b) The deputy person in charge was available at the service when the unannounced inspection commenced. The registered provider arrived shortly thereafter.
- (2) In the period since the previous inspection was undertaken on 21/01/20, two people (1 adult plus 1 student) had begun working at the service. Therefore, the relevant file in relation to these people were reviewed.
- (a) There were 3 written and validated references on file from past employers.
 - (b) There was 1 written reference available from sources other than previous employers, with a satisfactory record of validation.
 - (c) A Garda vetting disclosure from the National Vetting Bureau was in place for one adult.
 - (d) Police vetting was not required as no adult had lived outside the jurisdiction.

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(4) A recognised award in Early Childhood Care and Education had been attained by the adult at Level 6.

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.

(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.

(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) At all times during the period of the inspection the registered provider ensured that there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children.

(3) The ratio of adults to children was adequate with 3 people working with 5 children in the playroom.

(8)(a) Not applicable. This service was not operated singlehandedly.

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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

BASIC NEEDS:

- The children's snacks were provided by the parents/guardians and followed the healthy eating policy of the service. It was served around 10.30/11am (comprised of sandwiches, rice cakes, crackers, fruit, and yoghurt) and staff were observed to sit with the children and chat to make the mealtime a social occasion.
- Children were encouraged and supported to develop independence regarding personal care, particularly, with hand washing and cleaning their noses/faces.
- The children were largely independent using the toilet and were supported appropriately by the adults to use the toilet, as necessary. A small number of children required nappy changing and adults were sensitive and responsive to children in regularly changing nappies as required.
- There was a cosy corner with bench/cushions/ rugs/soft mats in the playroom to provide for the children's need for rest and relaxation during the session.
- The adults were observed to support the children to interact positively with each other. There was a calm and positive approach to managing behaviour.

SUPPORTING RELATIONSHIPS AROUND CHILDREN:

- The registered provider advised the inspector that the service operated in partnership with parents, with regular communication at handover times and an online application for sharing information with parents.
- The adults were observed to show positive regard for the children on the day of inspection, with encouragement and praise for specific tasks in a warm and caring manner for example during tidy up/transition times and mealtimes where nurturing and enthusiastic interactions were observed.
- The adults modelled speaking in low tones and supportive interactions. Kind and playful interactions were observed between the adults and children and the adults supported the children to fully participate in the daily life of the service.

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- Team meetings were held every regularly and informally to contribute to the ethos of teamwork in the service.

Programme of Activities

- The service offered a play-based curriculum and playful opportunities were supported throughout the early learning and care programme. The setting was based around the Montessori ethos of a prepared learning environment to facilitate play based on the child's emerging interests, with more of an emphasis on play and free play rather than a Montessori pedagogical approach.
- Each child had a learning record template completed which described their learning records and their interests. The observations captured how the adults intended to incorporate and extend the children's interests into the planned programme of activities. The adults described that regular observations on the children are maintained each month and these contributed to the emergent curriculum based around the children's expressed interests. Parents can ask to see their child's observations according to the registered provider. The adults were observed taking photographs of the children in different activities to share with parents.
- Weekly planning meetings were conducted each Friday to review the week and to plan for the next week with an emphasis on facilitating free choice and free play opportunities among the variety of activities offered. Children's choices were supported, and staff actively engaged in listening to children

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 main doors of the premises were secured to prevent the unauthorised access of a person or the leaving of an unsupervised child.
- There was an openable window in the preschool room to ventilate the room.
- Lighting was appropriate and safe on the day of inspection

Infection Control:

- The service had a supply of liquid soap, and paper towels for hand washing/hand drying. Hand washing was observed prior to children having their snack.

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Administration of Medication:

- No medication was observed to be administered on the day of inspection.

Safe Sleep:

- Not applicable as no child was observed to sleep in this sessional service

Outing:

- Not applicable. No outings were observed on the day of inspection

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

- The cleaning agents were not stored out of children's reach. They were accessible on an open shelving unit in the playroom and on a shelf over the children's toilet, including bleach, wash up liquid and cleaning sprays. If ingested these would cause serious harm to a child.
- On the day of inspection two portable heaters were observed in the playroom. These were not fixed and may cause injury to a child.
- On the day of inspection, a number of accessible cords from electrical appliances were within reach of children, from a fan, a kettle, a telephone cord and a cord from a window which was an unused window fan. These posed a risk of strangulation to a child.
- There was an unstable shelf in the children's toilet in danger of collapse as it had bowed in its centre from the weight of the materials above, which if collapsed may cause injury to a child.
- The door mat at the front door was curled and may pose a trip hazard.

Infection Control:

- On the day of inspection, snacks were not refrigerated. A fridge was available but not in use, this may lead to food spoilage and the spread of infection.
- There were two toilets in the service both used by adults and children rather than keeping them in separate use to prevent the spread of infection.

Administration of Medication:

- A child's auto injector pen was stored inappropriately in the first aid box.

Fire Safety:

- No fire drill was conducted in the month of January 2023.

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Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action & Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

1. The registered provider responded by CAPA to state that cleaning agents have been removed from top of high shelving, and photographic evidence was submitted.
2. The registered provider responded by CAPA to state that the portable heaters have been removed from the room and replaced by wall mounted heaters and photographic evidence was submitted.
3. The registered provider responded by CAPA to state that the fan, kettle and telephone cords have been tacked to the walls and the cord hanging from window has been removed confirming that all electrical cords will be secured in future. Photographic evidence was submitted.
4. The registered provider responded by CAPA to state that the unstable shelf has been removed from the children's toilet. Photographic evidence was submitted.
5. The registered provider responded by CAPA to state that the door mat has been removed and replaced. Photographic evidence was submitted.

Infection Control:

6. The registered provider responded by CAPA to state that children's lunches are now placed in the fridge as per part of the daily routine.
7. The registered provider responded by CAPA to state a key is now in use for the adult's toilet – available only to adults. This ensures that toilets are not shared. Photographic evidence was submitted.

Administration of Medication:

8. The registered provider responded by CAPA to state the auto injector pen was discarded and in future medicines will be stored in a locked cupboard.

Fire Safety:

9. The registered provider advised that a fire drill was conducted on the 02/02/23 and will be conducted on a monthly basis.

Summary Comment

The response by the registered provider was deemed to meet the regulatory requirements of this regulation.

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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) A person trained in FAR first aid was on the premises, at all times. Both adults present had FAR qualifications which were due to expire in March 2023.

(2) (a) The First aid box was stored in clearly signposted in the playroom.

(b) The first aid supplies were readily available, should they be required.

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) There were records of fire drills carried out at the premises available on file for review. The records demonstrated that the last fire drill was carried out on the 2nd of December 2022.

(b) A record of the number, type and maintenance of firefighting equipment was available on file, dated 27/09/2022.

(4)

The fire evacuation procedure for the service which contained details in relation to the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed within a policy on the wall in the service. It could be more clearly displayed.

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Non-Compliance Information

(1b) A record of the number, type and maintenance of the smoke alarms was not available on file.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The registered provider responded to state that the service will conduct monthly checks on the smoke alarm and annual checks will be conducted by a professional alarm maintenance company.

Supporting documentation submitted

Evidence was submitted on the 23/03/2023 of the annual maintenance of the smoke alarm system.

Summary Comment

The response and evidence submitted from the registered provider was assessed and accepted in meeting the regulatory requirements of this regulation.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

A registered provider shall ensure that the pre-school service is adequately insured.

Compliance Information

Insurance cover was in place for up to 22 children to attend on a sessional basis. The policy was valid until the 27th of March 2023.