

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CW041
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Name of Service:	Stepping Stones Community Childcare
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Address of Service:	Moneybeg, Royal Oak Road, Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow
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Eircode:	R21 N838
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Name of Registered Provider:	Patrick Purcell
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date(s) of Inspection:	19/05/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	61	PM	38
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla Child and Family Agency, Athy Road, Carlow.
Inspection undertaken by:	E Cullen
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).

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Description of service

Stepping Stones Childcare Centre is a full day childcare centre, located in a purpose built premises on the grounds of Bagenalstown family resource centre. The service provides sessional, part-time, and full day childcare services, Monday to Friday, for 50 weeks of the year, closing for a week at Christmas and at Easter. The service operates from 08:00 to 18:00 hours and also provides a school age service. The centre contains a total of five early years classrooms (four of which are currently in use) and two designated school aged classrooms. There is a spacious outdoor area, which is further divided into separate play areas, each of which, can be directly accessed from each classroom, and a further larger outdoor grass area with sensorial areas and physical challenging elements for the children.

Staffing

There were 23 staff employed in the service including 20 staff members working directly with the children, which included participants of the community employment scheme. Auxiliary staff included an administrator, chef and a cleaner/kitchen assistant. The registered provider is a member of the voluntary board of management that governs the service and 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 unannounced and focused on the area of governance/ health, welfare and development of child/ safety. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

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The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9 – Management and Recruitment, 11 – Staffing levels, 15 – Record of a pre-school child, 23- Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child, 25 - First Aid, 26 – Fire safety measures, 27 - Supervision ,28 – Insurance. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 15, 23 and 27. As a result, the scope of the inspection included sky, forest and sunshine rooms.

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 person in charge, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

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Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(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

(2) Documentation was reviewed for the twenty-three staff members employed by the service.

(a)(b) Two validated references were available for each staff member from either a past employer, or from a source other than a past employer.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all staff. However, the service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.

(d) International police vetting was available for seven staff members who had lived outside the state for a period over 6 months.

(4) Certificates of qualification were available on file demonstrating that staff members held a qualification at the minimum level 5 and above on the National Framework of Qualifications.

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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.

Compliance Information

(1) On the day of inspection there were adequate numbers of staff were working directly with the children at all times. There were 61 children with 14 staff members directly supervising them during the morning of the inspection and 38 children with 7 staff members during the afternoon.

(2) On the morning of the inspection, the staff to child ratios were maintained as follows throughout the service:

- The sky room, there were 9 children aged 1 to 2 years old being cared for by 3 staff.
- The forest room, there were 13 children aged 2 to 3 years old being cared for by 3 staff.
- The sunshine room, there were 18 children aged 3 to 4 years old being cared for by 5 staff.
- The acorn room, there were 21 children aged 3 to 5 years old being cared for by 3 staff.

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;*

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- (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)(a) – (i) Prior to a child commencing in the service, all parents and guardians were issued with a child registration form. This registration form was developed by the service and contained all the required information for parents and guardians to complete.

A sample of ten child registration forms were reviewed on the day of inspection, and all were completed in full with appropriate declarations signed by parents and guardians.

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:

There was a keypad and buzzer entry and exit system in place on the main entrance door of the building to prevent unauthorised persons gaining entry or children exiting unsupervised. The kitchen and staff areas were inaccessible to children. All cleaning agents were stored safely and out of reach of children.

Accident and incident books maintained a record of any incidents, these were completed in detail and signatures confirmed that relevant parents, staff and a manager were informed.

All highchairs, tables and chairs used by children were in good condition and suitable for use by the age range of children using them. Equipment and materials used in each of the rooms were appropriate for use by the age range of children using them, for example small items which may pose a risk of choking were not observed in room occupied by younger children.

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The outdoor play areas were maintained to a good standard and free from hazards. The service has recently installed retractable awnings over the enclosed outdoor areas directly accessible off each classroom to provide shelter from the sun during warm weather.

Infection Control:

The service was clean and well maintained with cleaning schedules maintained daily by staff. Children were observed washing their hands before eating and after outdoor play. There was warm running water, liquid soap and paper hand towels available for hand washing throughout the service. Each room had designated children's toilets or a nappy changing area. Hand washing facilities were adequately stocked with paper hand towels and liquid soap.

A system was in place for the appropriate storage and sterilisation of children's soothers. Tables and equipment were cleaned prior to food being served to children and appropriate safe food storage and preparation was observed.

Administration of Medication:

Signed medication record books documented the details of any medications which had been administered in the service in line with the service policy on administration of medication. Medications supplied by parents were stored securely and inaccessible to children. Health care plans were put in place where required.

Safe Sleep:

Staff were familiar with best practices in safe sleep and carried out physical checks on individual sleeping children, every 10 minutes, recording individual children's sleep positions, colour and breathing on the service's digital application. A staff member remained in the room while children were sleeping on low level beds. The sleep room temperatures were continually monitored by staff, with a digital thermometer located in each sleep room. Staff were familiar with the services sleep policy which was displayed in the sleep room.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. Garda vetting was available for all staff but three vetting disclosures were not dated within the previous three years in adherence to with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting'.

Infection Control:

2. Sections of floor covering in each classroom and lobby area were distressed and cracking, preventing effective cleaning procedures.

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3. A nappy bin used by staff members was hand operated and not in adherence with Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.1 Use of nappy storage and disposal bins in Early Years Services'.
4. Nappy changes practices observed in the service did not adhere to the service nappy changing policy and procedure. Child and staff hands were not consistently washed after each change.
5. The service did not have a supply of disposable aprons for use during nappy changing. The requirement to use disposable aprons was not detailed in the service nappy changing policy.

Safe Sleep:

6. A cot mattress was too big for the cot it was observed in, resulting in the mattress folding over at one end. Staff members acknowledged this issue and detailed how the cot is only used when needed.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. Applications for renewal of the relevant Garda Vetting have been submitted to Early Childhood Ireland A system will be in place to ensure that Garda Vetting will be reviewed regularly and renewed within the 3 year timeframe.

Infection Control:

2. Voluntary Board of Management have been made aware of the need to replace the flooring, and we are currently seeking 3 quotes from local flooring suppliers to replace the floor coverings.
3. This nappy bin has been replaced with a pedal operated bin. We will keep up to date with Early years Inspectorate Regulatory Notices.
4. Nappy changing policy has been discussed at staff meeting, highlighting the need for consistent washing of children's and staff hand. Policy has been updated in line with recommendations.
5. Disposable aprons are available in the changing areas. Signage directing the use of aprons has been put in place. Policy has been updated in line with recommendations.

Safe Sleep:

6. A new mattress has been ordered, and we are awaiting delivery of same.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

1. Confirmation of vetting applications.

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Infection Control:

2. No evidence submitted.
3. Photographs of new bin.
4. Updated policy on nappy changing.
5. Photographs.

Safe Sleep:

6. Invoice for new mattress.

Summary Comment

The actions taken by the registered provider address 5 of the 6 non-compliances identified. The findings documented at infection control point 2 remain non-compliant as works to address the non-compliance identified have been scheduled.

This regulation remains noncompliant as actions have not yet been completed and will be reviewed on next inspection.

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) There were five staff members trained in first aid response available to the children attending the early years service.

(2)(a)(b) There was a suitably equipped first aid box stored in the main lobby of the premises and each classroom had a dedicated small first aid box for minor injuries available for the use of the children attending the early years service.

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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.

Compliance Information

- (1)(a) There was a record of fire drills which had taken place in the service. The most recent fire drill was recorded as having taken place on 18 May 2026.
- (b) There was a record available demonstrating that the firefighting equipment was last serviced on 08 September 2026 and the smoke alarm system was last serviced on 12 March 2026.
- (4) There was a notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire displayed beside each emergency exit door on the premises.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

A registered provider shall ensure that pre-school children attending the service are supervised at all times.

Compliance Information

The service ensured that all children were appropriately supervised throughout the inspection. All relevant staff were suitably qualified and the child to staff ratios exceeded the minimum requirements required under the Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016.

During mealtimes staff members sat with children or were nearby to closely supervise eating, including the monitoring of food intake for children with allergies when allergens were being eaten by other children in the group. Supervision of toileting varied depending on the age of children, in some rooms staff accompanied children to the toilet and offered support when needed, while in others where children were more competent with toileting independently staff were within listening distance. Sleeping children were monitored at regular intervals and children sleeping on low level beds had constant supervision.

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The layout of the indoor and outdoor environment in each classroom and outdoor play areas was divided into areas of interest, with small nooks to facilitate a variety of play activities. The considered used of shelving and partitions afforded children the right to play privately while allowing staff to appropriately supervise play. Outdoors staff members were observed to station themselves in different areas of the gardens to maintain appropriate levels of supervision.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service demonstrated insurance cover for a full day care for up to 90 children at any one time. The insurance policy commenced 28 March 2026 and will expire 27 March 2027.