

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LM018
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Name of Service:	First Steps Creche
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Address of Service:	15 Dartry View, Kinlough, Co. Leitrim
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Eircode:	F91 VX09
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Name of Registered Provider:	Michelle Dolan
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date(s) of Inspection:	23/06/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	16	PM	16
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, TUSLA Child & Family Agency, Markievicz House, Barrack St, Sligo, F91 XC84
Inspection undertaken by:	L Costello
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

First Steps Creche is a private full day care early years' service. This service caters for 2 to 6 years, operating from 8am to 6pm five days per week. A registered school age service is also provided. The service is located in a housing estate, in the village of Kinlough in county Leitrim. The service operates from two semi-detached bungalows, which have been adapted to provide an early years' service. There are four care rooms, a sensory/sleep room, two kitchens, a nappy changing area and sanitary accommodation. There is an outdoor area to the front, side and rear of the premises.

Staffing

There are a total of eleven adults employed within the service, ten of whom work directly with the children. The registered provider works in the service as a cook and person in charge. The registered provider and all the staff who work directly with the children on a daily basis hold the required Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) at Level 5 and above 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. 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, 11, 16k, 19, 27 and 32. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

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

This unannounced inspection was carried out in response to feedback received by the Early Years Inspectorate.

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.

Statutory Notices

Notice	Date Served	Detail
Improvement Notice IN1523	23/06/2026	Evidence of International police vetting was not available for one adult who had resided outside the state for a period of more than six consecutive months and had direct access to children. Garda vetting was received after the 30 July 2025.
Status	Action was taken by the registered provider following service of the notice and the provider submitted a written response with detailed corrective and preventive actions which were accepted by the inspectorate.	

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.
- (7) A registered provider shall ensure that all employees, unpaid workers and contractors are appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training, including in relation to the following:

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(a) the policies, procedures and statements of the service specified in Schedule 5;

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

There was a person in charge and a person available to deputise as required.

(b)

The person in charge remained in the service for the duration of the inspection.

(c)

Staff members were aware of their roles and responsibilities with clear lines of governance in place, including room leaders, childcare workers and deputy manager.

(2)

There are eleven adults employed in the service and all twelve files were reviewed.

(a)

Nineteen written and verified past employer references were available in respect of 11 adults.

(b)

One written and verified reference was available in respect of one adult.

(c)

Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for eleven staff.

The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years

(d)

Two adults who had resided outside the state for a period of six months or more as an adult had the required international police clearance.

(4)

Evidence of completion of a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent was on file for ten staff members.

(7)(a)

The person in charge demonstrated that they had taken all reasonable measures to ensure that all employees were appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information. Through a review of documentation, training records and observations of practices, the inspector was assured that all employees were provided with

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appropriate information and training on the policies and procedures in place in the service. Records of training indicated that staff members had received training including inclusion and diversity and child safeguarding.

Non-Compliance Information

(2) (a)

One staff member required a second written and validated reference from a past employer.

(d)

See Statutory notice section in relation to Improvement notice IN1523 served.

(3)

All vetting procedures had not been completed prior to staff members working directly with the preschool children as outlined in regulation (2)(a)(d) above.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

In a written response the registered provider stated:

(2)(a)

Second written validated reference received. All staff members will have all required vetting completed prior to having access to preschool children.

(d)

International police vetting submitted to the inspectorate.

(3)

All vetting will be completed prior to staff members having access to preschool children

Supporting documentation submitted

(2)(a) Witten validated reference submitted.

(d) International police vetting submitted.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection. This regulation is now compliant.

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Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 10 - Policies, procedures etc. of pre-school service

A registered provider of a pre-school service shall ensure that the written policies, procedures and statements specified in Schedule 5 are in place for the service.

Compliance Information

For the purpose of this inspection, a sample of the required written policies, procedures and statements that are specified and required under schedule 5 of these regulations were reviewed.

The following policies, procedures and statements were included as part of this inspection.

(b) Complaints policy

(e) Policy on managing behaviour

(j) Policy on accidents and incidents.

Documentation reviewed evidenced that the above policies were available and in operation in the service.

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

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Compliance Information

(1)

There were an adequate number of adults working directly with children attending the preschool service. There were four adults working directly with 16 children in the morning of the unannounced inspection and four adults working directly with 16 children in the afternoon. The person in charge also worked directly in the care rooms and covered staff breaks.

(2)

The minimum ratio of adults to children ratio were provided on the day of the inspection in accordance with the required ratio considering the ages of the children and the length of time each child spent in the service.

(8)(a)

A review of staff attendance records demonstrated that at least two adults are on the premises during operating hours.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of the following information in relation to the service:

(k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that-

(b) a record referred to in subparagraph (h), (j) or (k) of paragraph (1) is retained for a period of 2 years from the date on which the child to whom it relates ceases to attend the service, or in the case of a preschool service in a drop-in centre or of a temporary pre-school service, for a period of 2 years from the date on which the child attends the service.

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(3) A record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection on the premises, and the documents and records referred to in paragraph (2)(a) shall be open to inspection whether on the premises or elsewhere, by an authorised person.

(4) A record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection on the premises by a parent or guardian of a child but only in respect of information concerning that child.

Compliance Information

(1)(k)

Twelve accidents and incident records from January 2026 to June 2026 were reviewed. All records were in line with the service accident and incident policy.

(2)(b)

The registered provider is aware of the statutory requirement to retain this record for a period of two years from the date in which the child attends the service.

(3)

These records were made available to the inspector on the day.

(4)

All records recorded parent's signatures which demonstrated that parents had been informed of their child's accident or incident.

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.

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(3) A registered provider shall ensure that no practices that are disrespectful, degrading, exploitive, intimidating, emotionally or physically harmful or neglectful are carried out in respect of a pre-school child whilst attending the service.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)(b)

Basic Needs:

- All snacks and meals are provided by the service and served family style where children help themselves. Meals are provided in line with the service healthy eating policy.
- Drinking water was freely available throughout the day and staff members were observed to encourage children to hydrate regularly with the warm weather.
- Sun protection was applied to the children regularly and all children wore hats when outside playing in the sun.
- The children used the toilet when they needed to with support provided by staff where needed. Children were encouraged and supported by staff to wash their hands after using the toilet.

Supporting Relationships:

- Staff members were observed to be respectful, gentle, and kind in their interactions towards the children in their care. During mealtimes the staff members sat at the table and engaged in social conversation with children promoting a relaxed atmosphere.
- The staff members sat at the children's level when talking with the preschool children and explaining tasks.
- The service took measures to support the children's relationships including keeping parents and guardians fully informed of the daily activities. This was completed by an application messaging system and notice boards displayed with pictures of recent activities.
- Pictures of families displayed on the walls in all the care rooms ensured children's connection to home was maintained. The service had made effort to get to know the child and care rooms displayed all about me boards which described the child's likes and dislikes. This ensured that all staff members working with the children had a knowledge of the important information.
- A feedback wall displayed in each hallway evidenced positive feedback from parents of their experience in the service.

Programme of Activities:

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- Through discussion with staff members, they described that ongoing observations and assessments are documented which helped create a well-rounded picture of each child and their learnings. Journals are sent home after the term and were not available for review, however the service provided evidence of group learnings through pictures and social stories displayed on the walls of the care room.
- On the day of inspection, the children were facilitated to make their own choice in selecting play equipment and activities that they wished to engage with.
- Turn taking and sharing was promoted; this was evidenced in all rooms on the day. In some room the use of a timer as used as a visual to promote turn taking and sharing.
- Independence is strongly promoted throughout the service, and children were encouraged to optimise their independence in a variety of tasks, including blowing their own nose and cleaning their face with the support of a mirror at child height. Children were observed helping the adults tidy up after activities and prepare for mealtimes by sweeping the floor, putting away their toys.

(3)

A review of training records demonstrated that staff members had received training on the curriculum and interactions with children. Throughout the inspection, from discussion with staff members and observations of practices there was no evidence of practices that are disrespectful, degrading, expletive, intimidating or emotionally or physically harmful to the preschool child. Staff members were observed to intervene promptly to minor disagreements between children using various child friendly techniques. Staff members were observed to explain to children in a clear way behaviours that are not acceptable and behaviours that are expected.

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

- Effective supervision is maintained indoors through appropriate staff deployment, clear sight lines and purposeful movement within the room. Staff members remain attentive and responsive ensuring children are supported guided and protected at all times.
- The outdoor play is well supervised with staff members positioning themselves to monitor all areas. Staff actively engage with children, manage risk appropriately and ensure that supervision levels remain consistent across the play area.

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- Appropriate supervision is maintained during personal care routines in a manner that respects children's dignity privacy and individual needs while ensuring safety and well being

Part VIII - Notifications and Complaints

Regulation 32 – Complaints

- (1) A registered provider shall ensure that the complaints policy of the service specifies-
- (a) the procedure to be followed by a person for the purposes of making a complaint in relation to the service,
 - (b) the manner in which such a complaint shall be dealt with, and
 - (c) the procedures for keeping a person who makes such a complaint informed of the manner in which it is being dealt with.
- (2) A registered provider shall ensure that-
- (a) a record in writing is kept of a complaint made to the provider in respect of the pre-school service, and
 - (b) the complaint is duly dealt with in accordance with the provider's complaints policy.
- (3) A record in writing referred to in paragraph (2)(a) shall-
- (a) include the nature of the complaint and the manner in which the complaint was dealt with, and
 - (b) be open to inspection on the premises by an authorised person.
- (4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (2)(a) is retained for a period of 2 years from the date on which the complaint has been dealt with.
- (5) The requirement in paragraph (4) is without prejudice to any requirement to retain the record in writing referred to in paragraph (2)(a) under any other enactment or rule of law.

Compliance Information

- (1)
- A complaints policy was in place in the service and adequately outlined the following;
- (a) Details of the procedure to be followed by a person for the purposes of making a complaint in relation to the service.
 - (b) Details of how a complaint will be dealt with by the service.

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(c) Details of the procedures in place outlining how the person who makes such a complaint in relation to the service will be informed of how the complaint is being dealt with.

(2) (a) (b)

The person in charge stated that no complaints had been made directly to the service since the last date of inspection.

(3) (a)(b)

The person in charge stated they are aware of their obligation to detail the nature of any complaint made and the way it will be dealt with. The person in charge stated a record of any complaint made will be kept in the service and available for inspection on the premises.

(4)(5)

The person in charge in the service stated during discussions with the inspector they are aware of the statutory requirement to retain records for the required period set out in regulation.