

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2016LH006
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Name of Service:	Stepping Stones
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Address of Service:	45 Anne Street, Dundalk, Co. Louth
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Eircode:	A91 H678
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Name of Registered Provider:	Aisling McElroy
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Dates of Inspections:	31/03/2026
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Date of Inspection:	01/04/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	10	PM	8
	AM	9	PM	-

Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	No.18 The Grange Plantation Road Monaghan
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Inspection undertaken by:	S. Skinnader
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Title:	Early Years Inspector
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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 is a privately owned service which is in operation since 2016. It provides a full daycare, part time sessional service to children aged 2-6 years. The service caters for a maximum of 31 children. This service is in a converted commercial building in the town of Dundalk Co. Louth. There are 3 care rooms the Preschool Room, the Toddler Room and the Play Room. Two were open, the Toddler Room was closed. There were sanitary accommodations and a kitchen. There was an outdoor area to the rear of the building.

Staffing

There are 5 staff employed in the service including the registered provider who all of whom work directly with the preschool children.

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/ premises and facilities. 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 -

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

Statutory Notices

Notice	Date Served	Detail
Improvement Notice IN 1301	01/04/2026	No staff member had up to date FAR training.
Status	The registered provider submitted a corrective action which was accepted and addressed the Statutory Notice. Four updated FAR certificates were submitted to the Inspectorate on 6/7/26.	

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) & (b) The service had a designated person in charge who is also the registered provider and a named person to deputise as required. The person in charge was on the premises when the inspector arrived unannounced to the service.

All 5 staff files were reviewed:

(2)(a)(b)

- There were 2 written and validated references from a past employer or an alternative source available for the 5 members of staff.

(c) Documentary evidence of a processed Garda vetting disclosure was available for all staff members however a Garda vetting disclosure for 1 staff member was not found to be within the re-vetting timeframes as stated below in Regulation 23.

(d) No applicable as none of the staff had lived outside of the jurisdiction for a period of 6 months or more.

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(4) Documentary evidence was available to show that 4 of the 5 staff members working directly with the preschool children had a minimum Level 5 qualification.

Non-Compliance Information

(4) Documentary evidence was not available for inspection for 1 staff member's qualification to show equivalency to a minimum Level 5 qualification.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(4) The registered provider has given assurance by submitting photographic evidence to validate equivalency of Level 5 qualification for said staff member.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of the corresponding page of DCYA list of qualifications.

Summary Comment

The registered provider's response was reviewed and accepted. The non-compliance was addressed.

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.

Non-Compliance Information

The Nappy Changing Policy in the service was inadequate, for example;

- It did not specify the need for the staff member to wear an apron.
- It did not specify the need to wash the child's hands after nappy changing.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The nappy changing policy has since been updated and the policies will be reviewed and renewed on a regular basis.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of Nappy changing policy.

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Summary Comment

The registered provider's response is accepted. The non-compliance has been addressed.

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) During the period of inspection there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) The following adult: child ratios were observed in the care rooms when the inspectors arrived at the premises:

Day 1

Preschool Room:

There were 4 preschool children (aged 3-4) attending this room with 2 staff members. Eight school aged children were also present.

The child adult ratios were correct.

Play Room:

There were 6 preschool children (aged 2-3 years) attending this room with 1 staff member.

The child adult ratios were correct.

The children from the Play Room who did not sleep and were attending on a full day care basis joined with the children in the Preschool Room when the Play Room converted to a sleep Room.

Day 2:

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Preschool Room:

There were 4 preschool children (aged 3-4) attending this room with 3 staff members. Five school aged children were also present.

The child adult ratios were correct.

Play Room:

There were 5 preschool children (aged 2-3 years) attending this room with 1 staff member.

The child adult ratios were correct.

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:

- (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;*
- (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;*

Non-Compliance Information

- (1)
- (i) None of the children were signed in on Day 1 of Inspection and therefore the registered provider did not have an accurate written record of the children present with their arrival and departure times. It is acknowledged that the children had been signed in for previous weeks.
 - (j) There was no staff rota available on Day 1 of inspection or for the whole week, to indicate what staff were rostered to work in the various rooms, to indicate breaks to be taken and cover to be provided. It is acknowledged that staff rotas were available for previous weeks.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

- (1)
- (i) All roll books have been updated to reflect the children attending each session daily. The manager/person in charge is to check and sign each roll book.
 - (j) The weekly and daily rotas have been updated. The manager/person in charge to ensure both daily and weekly rotas reflect accurately the number of staff on duty by signing them off.

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Supporting documentation submitted

Copies of weekly staff rota's and copies of the child's attendance records submitted.

Summary Comment

The registered provider's responses and supporting documentation were submitted and reviewed. The information was accepted and the non-compliances addressed. This will be for review at the next inspection.

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

There were 3 care rooms in the service namely the Preschool Room, Toddler Room and Play Room. Two rooms the Preschool Room and Play Room were in operation on the days of inspection.

(1)(a) The following examples demonstrate how the registered provider ensured that children's learning, development, and well-being was facilitated in the service.

Basic needs:

- Throughout the service the children were observed to move freely in the care rooms. On day 1 most children had a change of environment to the outdoor area and the children were dressed appropriately for going outside.
- In the Play Room child-led sleep needs were facilitated in the service as 2 children who required a sleep were facilitated to do so by converting the Play Room to a sleep Room from 11.30am.
- The toilet trained children were encouraged to be independent with toileting. Gentle handwashing reminders were also given to the children after toileting.
- Nappies were changed as required in a timely manner with nice interactions between the staff and children observed.
- Snacks and lunches were brought in by the children and consisted of breads, rice cakes, cheese dippers, fruit, sandwiches, yoghurts carrots. Drinks were freely accessible on a low-level table for the children.
- Dinner was provided by the service and a weekly menu was on display.

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Supporting Relationships:

- Soft tones, positive and respectful language were observed in interactions between the staff and children in the rooms for example “ah it was a wee accident pet” and “sure you are friends aren’t you”.
- The children were actively observed to seek out the staff and one child was observed to sit up on the staff member’s knee to seek comfort.
- All staff were observed to support children’s play by sitting with the children and being down at their level for activities and playing in their games when invited to do so.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 20 – Facilities for rest and play

(3) A registered provider of a full day care service, a part-time day care service or a childminding service, other than such a service to which paragraph (2) applies, shall ensure that-

(a) a suitable, safe and secure outdoor space to which the pre-school children attending the service have access on a daily basis is provided on the premises

Compliance Information

(3)(a) There was an outdoor area to the rear of the building accessed through the Toddler Room which was fully secured and walled. This area had a safety tiled surface and had 2 small rockers, 4 tyres, a ball, 1 small ride on toy and a small plastic slide/frame not in use on the Day 1.

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.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. 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 for 1 staff member.
2. The temperature of the hot water in the tap in the staff toilet was recorded at 51.2 °C. This exceeds the safe hot water temperature of 43 °C and is a potential scald risk. Although 2 children were observed to use this toilet none used this sink to wash their hands.

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3. There were unprotected sharp corners on brown shelving units in the Preschool Room. These are a potential injury hazard.

Infection Control:

The following infection control and cross contamination risks were observed:

4. There was no hot water in the children's sanitary accommodations outside the Preschool Room or outside the Toddler Room.
5. The staff were not observed to wear an apron during nappy changing.
6. All lunch items brought in by the children were stored in their bags and no perishable food items removed to the fridge.
7. The children's hands were not always washed after toileting, before the children's lunch at 1pm or after coming in from outside.
8. Tabletops were not cleaned down before lunch and some children were observed to place some food items directly onto the table.
9. The nappy bin in use in the service, was not pedal operated or lined and appeared to be broken requiring staff to lift the top off the bin to place the soiled nappies into the bin.

Safe Sleep:

10. The service did not have an adult present at all times with children who were sleeping on daybeds in the converted sleep area in the Playroom which is at variance with best safe sleep guidance. It is acknowledged that an adult stayed with the children once this was brought to their attention by the inspector.
11. There was no thermometer set up in the sleep area to record the room temperature while the children were sleeping. This is a health and safety risk. The registered provider set up the thermometer once this was brought to their attention.
12. Although 10-minute sleep checks were being carried out they were not being documented correctly on the sleep log for example:
 - Staff were only recording the child's position and not recording the child's breathing pattern, the child's colour or the room temperature.
 - The staff member was using a repeat sign instead of writing a word for position of the child.

Fire Safety:

13. The record of servicing for the fire extinguishers indicated that they had not been serviced on an annual basis as required to ensure that they are operating correctly in the event of an emergency.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. This particular staff member no longer works for the service. The registered provider will check all staff vetting is up to date by checking staff files on an annual basis.
2. Hot water boiler has since been checked and water temperature is recorded.
Water temperature is recorded twice daily and signed by manager/person in charge.
3. Corner cushioning has been added to all sharp edges in the care rooms.
Cushioning will be maintained and secured regularly.

Infection Control:

4. Manager/person in charge to ensure the hot water is switched on daily.
5. Staff have been advised to wear aprons during nappy changing. Manager/person in charge to ensure there is a supply of disposable aprons on site, nappy changing policy has been updated.
6. All perishable food items have been labelled with child's name and stored in fridge. Manager /person in charge to ensure all perishable items are stored daily in the fridge.
7. Children are supervised whilst washing their hands upon returning from garden and before snack times.
8. Staff have been reminded to ensure tables and surfaces are cleaned appropriately before and after snacks. Food items are placed on individual plates during snack times.
9. Nappy bins have since been replaced with pedal bins and bin liners.

Safe Sleep:

10. Staff are now aware to remain in the room during sleep time.
Staff updated on the sleep policy and regulations so that staff are aware they remain in the room whilst children are napping.
11. Staff preparing children for sleep, have since been made aware to ensure the monitor is also in the sleep room before the children have been put to bed. Person putting the children to sleep have been made aware to ensure room is set up properly for sleep including the monitor is in the room.
12. New sleep documentation books have since been purchased and the manager has ensured staff are aware on how to fill in and complete this book appropriately and sign properly.

Fire Safety:

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13. Photographic evidence of the servicing of the fire extinguishers submitted dated 04/26 and next service due 04/27.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

Copy of water temperature checks, photographic evidence of boiler setting, corner protectors,

Infection Control:

Copy updated nappy changing policy

Fire Safety:

Photographic evidence

Summary Comment

The Inspector has reviewed the responses and documentary evidence submitted by the registered provider in relation to the non-compliances identified under Regulation 23. The registered providers responses and assurances given are accepted and the non-compliances are addressed. These will be for review on the 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.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) See Statutory Notice section in relation to Improvement Notice IN 1301 served.

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.

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Compliance Information

- (1)(a) A record was maintained of all fire drills which had been completed in the service, the last recorded 3/3/26.
- (b) A record was kept of the number, type and maintenance of the fire-fighting equipment and smoke alarms 09/24 and 17/6/25 respectively.
- (4) Notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were conspicuously displayed in the premises.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

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

- (c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated*
- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and*
- (e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.*

Non-Compliance Information

- (c)
1. One of the ceiling lights was not working in the Playroom and in also in the Preschool Room. This does not provide adequate lighting for tabletop activities especially in the Playroom.
 2. On Day 1 there was a lingering odour in the small hallway outside the Preschool Room.
- (d) A deep clean was required throughout the service as areas were not maintained and cleaned adequately for example.
1. There were visible cobwebs hanging from the ceilings in the corridors and in the Play Room and dust and dirt particles on some of the skirtings.
 2. There was mould on the wall in the sanitary accommodation outside the Toddler Room.
 3. The ceiling tiles in the Play Room, Preschool Room and corridor were stained and had black dirt on them. In addition, the ceiling tiles in the staff toilet were stained and bowed leaving large gaps in the ceiling.
 4. Cleaning schedules were not up to date with none completed in the Preschool Room since September 2025 as stated by the registered provider and the last available schedule dated February 2026 in the Play Room.
 5. The orange sofa in the in the Preschool Room was in a state of disrepair as there were tears at the edges.
- (e)

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1. The nappy changing unit in the service was not suitable for use as it stated it was only suitable for use for children up to 12months/ 11kgs. All children requiring their nappy changed were over 2 years of age.
2. The toilet beside the Toddler Room was not adequately maintained as
 - There was no seat on the toilet
 - There was no single use hand towels or liquid soap available in the sanitary accommodation.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

- (c)
1. The registered provider has since contracted an electrician to check the lights. Bulbs have been replaced.
 2. The building has been deep cleaned.
- (d)
- 1&2.The building has since been deep cleaned.
- New cleaning rotas have been put in place and staff are required to carry out daily cleaning checks.
3. The registered provider has contacted the landlord to replace the damaged ceiling lights.
 4. Cleaning rotas have since been updated which staff are required to complete daily.
- Person in charge to check daily cleaning requirements have been carried out.
5. Any damaged equipment has since been removed.
- Manager to ensure all equipment is fit for purpose.
- (e)
1. Children have since been changed on a changing mat on the floor.
- Staff have been made aware to change nappies on a changing mat on the floor in order to ensure health and safety guidelines are being adhered.
2. The toilet beside the toddler room has since been replaced.
- Manager/person in charge to ensure there is soap/hand towels in all bathrooms. Daily checks have since been carried out to ensure all bathrooms have sufficient hand wash and hand towels.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence, copies of cleaning schedules/rotas, copies daily checklist, daily sanitary checklist.

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Summary Comment

The Inspectorate has reviewed the registered provider's responses and supporting evidence in relation to the non-compliances identified under Regulation 29 (c),(d) and (e).

(c) 1. & 2. Responses have been accepted and the non-compliances addressed. These will be for review at the next inspection.

(d)

1. & 2. The responses and assurances given by the registered provider are accepted and the non-compliances addressed. These will be for review at the next inspection.

3. On the 3/7/26 the deputy person in charge confirmed that the ceiling tiles have still not been fixed this non-compliance remains outstanding and will be for review at the next inspection.

4. & 5. The registered provider's response and supporting documentation reviewed have been accepted. The non-compliances have been addressed.

(e) 1. & 2. The registered provider's response and supporting documentation and photographic evidence have been reviewed by the Inspectorate. The non-compliances have been addressed and will be for review at the next inspection.