

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CC156
--------------------------	-------------

Name of Service:	First Steps Montessori & Daycare
-------------------------	----------------------------------

Address of Service:	Bridgefield, Curraheen Road, Bishopstown, Cork, Co. Cork
----------------------------	--

Eircode:	T12 AF86
-----------------	----------

Name of Registered Provider:	Aine Murphy
-------------------------------------	-------------

Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
----------------------	--------------------------------

Date of Inspection:	29/07/2026
----------------------------	------------

No of pre-school children:	AM	28	PM	25
-----------------------------------	----	----	----	----

Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Administration Building, St. Mary's Health Campus, Gurrabraher, Cork, T23X440
Inspection undertaken by:	D Cotter
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).

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Description of service

First Steps Montessori & Daycare is a privately operated service that caters for children aged between 1 and 6 years of age. It provides full day-care, part-time care, sessional care and the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme. Daily opening hours are from 7.45am to 6pm and the service also provides care for school age children on the premises. The service operates from a purpose built one storey building that is situated in a residential area on the suburbs of Cork city. There are five care rooms namely the Infant Montessori 1 room, the Infant Montessori 2 room, the Toddler room, the Montessori 1 room and the Montessori 2 room. There is a designated sleep room beside the Infant Montessori 1 room. There are two large outdoor play areas, one provided at either end of the premises. The four care rooms positioned to the rear of the premises also each has direct access to a small secured outdoor area. On the day of inspection, only three care rooms were in operation. These were the Infant Montessori 1, Toddler and the Montessori 2 rooms.

Staffing

There are 19 adults attached to the service including the registered provider and the accountant who are not service based. On the day of the inspection there were 11 adults on the premises including the registered provider who visited the premises at 11am and stayed for part of the day. A manager from a sister creche also arrived at 10:30am. The person in charge and 8 other adults were working directly with the early years 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

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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-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, person in charge, 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, 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,*

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

(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 deputy that could deputise as required.

(b) Both the person in charge and the deputy person in charge was on duty when the inspector arrived at the premises and remained on duty for the duration of the inspection.

(2)

Following a review of previous inspection information, information available on inspection and discussion with the person in charge, it was determined that eight new staff members had been employed since the previous inspection, all of whom work directly with the children. A total of eight files were reviewed. In addition, Garda vetting for six staff members whose disclosures were identified as due for renewal were requested for review.

(a) Twelve of the required references were available from a past employer and written validations were on file.

(b) Four of the required references were available from a source other than a past employer and written validations were on file.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all eight staff. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Police vetting was required and available for four members of staff as they had resided outside of the state for a period of longer than six months. Two of these required certified translations, which were available.

(4)

Eight staff members held a relevant qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education from Level 5 to Level 8 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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)
The person in charge ensured that there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children in each room on day of the inspection.

(2)
During the period of inspection, the ratio of staff to children was maintained as per the regulations and an adequate number of adults were working directly with the children in each care room. The rooms were in operation as follows:

In the morning:

- The Infants Montessori 2 had 5 children aged between 1 and 2 years being cared for by 2 staff.
- The Toddler room had 10 children aged between 2 and 3 years being cared for by 2 staff.
- The Montessori 1 had 13 children aged between 3 and 5 years being cared for by 2 staff.

In the afternoon:

- The Infants Montessori 2 had 4 children aged between 1 and 2 years being cared for by 2 staff.
- The Toddler room had 10 children aged between 2 and 3 years being cared for by 2 staff.
- The Montessori 1 had 11 children aged between 3 and 5 years being cared for by 2 staff.

The service met the minimum adult to child ratios requirements during the inspection.

(8)
(a) The roster for the service indicated that at least two people were onsite at all times throughout the day.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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 external doors were appropriately secured to prevent children from exiting unsupervised.
- The external doors were secured to restrict unauthorised access.
- Cleaning agents observed on inspection were stored out of the reach of the children.
- The blind cords observed were secured.
- The children's bags and coats were stored safely off the floor.
- Windows in each care room had been made safe to prevent children from exiting or falling.
- The outdoor area was securely fenced to prevent unauthorised access.
- Flexes and cables were observed to be out of reach of children.
- Visibility strips had been placed on low lying windows and doors.
- Low level storage cupboards were secured with child proof locks.

Infection Control:

- Regular handwashing was observed on the day of inspection. Staff were observed to remind older children to wash their hands after the bathroom, after coming inside and before mealtimes.
- Staff were observed to wash their own hands and the hands of the children after nappy changes.
- Staff were observed to wear disposable gloves and aprons while changing nappies.
- Tables were sanitized before the children had their meals.
- Perishable foods were refrigerated.
- In the outdoor areas, sand trays not in use were covered.
- Cots in the sleep room were fitted with waterproof mattress protectors.
- The service appeared clean and in a state of good repair.

Administration of Medication:

- Staff stated they were familiar with the procedure for administering medication.
- A care plan was in place for one child with an allergy and staff were familiar with the signs and symptoms in case of an emergency.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Safe Sleep:

- Frequent checks of sleeping children had been documented and were available for review. At ten-minute intervals, children's breathing, colour and position were physically monitored, as per the requirement for safe sleep practice.
- Cots were maintained in a proper state of repair.
- Cot mattresses were clean and fitted correctly in each cot.
- A minimum space of 50cm had been spaced between each cot.
- Sleep temperatures were within the recommended guidelines while children were sleeping at 18.8°C.
- In the Toddler room, children over two years slept on stackable beds and the staff ratio was maintained to ensure supervision during this time.

Fire Safety:

- Wall tethered fire fighting equipment was available throughout.
- Fire doors observed were free from obstruction.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. An auto-adrenaline injector for one child was out of date since May 2026. This child was not on the premises on the day of inspection. Failure to ensure the medication is in date and safe to use poses a risk to the safety of the child should it be needed in the case of an emergency.
2. In the changing room adjacent to the Infant Montessori room, a plastic bag containing children's belongings was within reach of children. This poses a suffocation risk to children.

Infection Control:

3. The foot operated pedal bin in the bathroom servicing the Montessori 1 room was broken. This increases the risk to children of infection.
4. The bin in the Infant Montessori nappy changing area was overflowing. The lid would not close as the bin was full and used disposable aprons were spilling out of the bin. This poses a risk to children of cross infection.
5. The water was not thermostatically controlled. Water temperatures across the service were higher than the necessary 43°C. For example, in the Infant Montessori nappy change area, the water was measured at 45.4°C and in the bathroom between the Toddler room and the Montessori 1 room, the temperature was 45.5°C. Failure to ensure that water is thermostatically controlled to no higher than 43°C may pose a scald risk or may hinder effective hand washing.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

In her written response, the registered provider stated that:

1. Two new auto injector pens have been brought in for the child and the expiry date for the medicine has been placed on the door to ensure staff are reminded of the expiry.
2. All plastic storage bags have been removed from the changing area and staff have been reminded that these are not to be placed in the changing area.

Infection Control:

3. The bin has been replaced. A checklist for managers has been developed to ensure that regular checks are undertaken of the premises and any broken items replaced or removed.
4. Staff have been reminded to ensure the bin is emptied periodically during the day.
5. The mixer unit in the boiler room was adjusted bring the water temperatures down. A plumber has been contracted to find a permanent solution. The manager will complete regular checks of the water temperatures.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

1. Photographic evidence of the new auto-injector pens and a photograph of the new sign with the expiry date reminder on the medicine cabinet.
2. A photograph of the nappy changing unit and the premises checklist template to be completed by staff and management.

Infection Control:

3. A photograph of the new bin in place and a copy of the new premises checklist template to be completed by staff and management.
4. The registered providers statement is accepted as evidence.
5. A photograph of the lower water temperature and the registered providers statement are accepted as evidence.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The noncompliances identified under Regulation 23 have been adequately addressed.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that each pre-school child attending the service is checked in and out of the service by an employee or an unpaid worker.

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) no person other than-

(i) pre-school child attending the service,

(ii) a person dropping or collecting such a child,

(iii) an employee, or

(iv) an unpaid worker, can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee, and

(b) a daily record in writing is kept of the entry on the premises of any such person.

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (3)(b) is retained for a period of one year from the date to which it relates.

Compliance Information

(1) The person in charge ensured that each pre-school child attending the service was checked in and out of the service by an employee on the day of inspection. Children were signed in and out of the service via an electronic application.

(3)

(a) The registered provider has ensured that any person other than an employee, a preschool child of a person dropping the child off cannot gain entry to the premises. The door to the service is set on a mechanical release which can only be opened by a staff member.

(b) The Inspector was asked to sign the visitors book on arrival, and it was evident that a record is kept of any such person who enters the service.

(4) The registered provider has ensured that records are retained. Upon inspection of the visitors log, it was evident that records have been kept since 2020.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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) The registered provider had ensured that there was a person trained in First Aid Responder (FAR) training at all times available to the children. Through the inspection of staff records, it was noted that there were three staff who held in date certification. It was evident through examination of the staff roster that at least one of these adults was available at all times throughout the day.

(2)

(a) (b) The registered provider had ensured there were adequately stocked first aid boxes available to the children at all times. First Aid boxes were stored in a safe, yet conspicuous location, in the care rooms at either end of the main corridor.

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.

(2) The record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection by-

(c) an authorised person.

(4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire shall be displayed in a conspicuous position in the premises.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Compliance Information

- (1)
- (a) The registered provider has kept a written log of monthly fire drills. Through inspection of records, it was observed that fire drills take place monthly with the last recorded fire drill taking place in June 2026.
- (b) The registered provider has kept a written log of all firefighting equipment and smoke alarms on the premises. It was observed that all firefighting equipment has been serviced and maintained. Maintenance records dates for the smoke alarm system were last available for July 2026; and for the fire extinguishers in October 2025.
- (2)
- (c) The registered provider has ensured that all records relating to fire safety are stored safely and are open to inspection by authorised persons.
- (4)
- The procedure to follow in the event of a fire was prominently displayed in each care room of the service and staff stated they were familiar with the evacuation process.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured the service was insured, with insurance for 64 children until 27 March 2027. The records detailed the category of service covered which was full day care, the name and address of the premises and details regarding public liability cover, fire, theft, buildings, and outings cover.