



Parent Handbook

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Welcome to Shining Stars Academy

At Shining Stars Academy we are committed to providing a Full day care service and a homework club of the highest standard.

Our day care service is located in the heart of the Coneyboro Estate and our homework club is centrally located in Church Road in the town of Athy.

Shining Stars Academy is privately owned by Director Christine Bowden. A General Manager has been appointed to take overall day – to – day responsibility for the operations of the full day-care unit in Coneyboro Estate and the Homework Club. Assistant Managers are appointed to each location to support the management function along with team leaders. Parents will be directed to the appropriate on-duty manager should they have any query.

Our opening hours are as follows:

Full day Care:	8.00am – 6.30 pm
Homework Club	7.30 am – 6.30pm (incorporates a breakfast club and school pick-ups)

Our Full day care Service is aimed at children aged 2 years upwards
Our Homework club caters for all primary school children

Our full day care service has a 2 Junior Preschool Rooms and a Montessori Room which is used as an afterschool room in the afternoons.

Trained, motivated and friendly staff are the cornerstone of our service. We encourage a strong teamwork approach to help build and support our shared objectives.

Shining Stars aims to provide an excellent environment for children to develop their social, personal and educational skills and learn through a planned play based curriculum influenced by the Montessori philosophy and underpinned by the national curriculum framework Aistear.

We provide a warm, loving, home-from-home environment, where each child is treated with respect and will develop and learn as individuals while feeling safe and secure.

Christine Bowden
Director

Key People

Director:	Christine Bowden
General Manager:	Stephanie Cronan
Designated Fire Safety Officer:	Check notice board in each location
First Aid Co-Ordinator:	Check notice board in each location
Designated Child Protection:	Check notice board in each location
Pest Control Company:	Orkin Ireland
Fire Maintenance Company:	Horizon Fire Maintenance
Doctor:	Park Clinic (059 8631839)
Gardaí:	059 8631669
Tusla Social Worker:	045 873200

Our Mission

Our mission is to give each child an opportunity to develop his/her potential by fostering the intellectual, creative, social, emotional, and physical growth and development and to inspire a lifelong commitment to learning. A caring environment promotes cultural values and supports positive relationships and respectful interaction. We will provide an environment that allows children to learn by doing – moving from concrete, hands-on experiences to more abstract concept development. Our priority is to provide a healthy balance of child-directed and adult -guided activities, as well as time for children to work individually, in small groups and in large groups. We believe that a stable, safe, healthy, comfortable, and culturally relevant environment is crucial to a child's growth. A play-based approach provides a child-centered curriculum directed by practitioners in which children are encouraged to construct their own knowledge. We believe that our service reflects the needs and goals of children and families. We look forward to working closely with families which will provide an integrated, comprehensive approach to learning.

At Shining Stars Academy our ethos and practice values diversity and promotes equality.

- We aim to select friendly, dependable, mature and professional staff through our rigorous recruitment and selection policy.
- To ensure that the developmental, educational, emotional and social needs of each child are met daily.
- The voice of the child is heard, respected and contributes to our programme.
- We aim to deliver a quality curriculum which addresses children's well-being, identity and belonging, communication and exploring and thinking, along the principles of Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and influenced by the Montessori philosophy.
- We aim to make Shining Stars Academy accessible to all members of the community, regardless of race, gender, family status, age, disability, or religious belief.
- We aim to work with 'Síolta' The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, by following its 12 principles of quality and the 16 standards within its framework.
- We operate within the Childcare (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006 and The National Standards for Pre-Schools.
- The environment is planned and well-organised in a way that suits the different needs of individual children, while keeping in mind the importance of Safety and Hygiene
- Parents are actively welcomed at the service at all times. We endeavour to share information and communicate with parents directly, in order to give feedback at the end of each day and to ensure that they are made aware of on-going developments in policies and procedures.
- Shining Stars Academy wishes to promote a positive atmosphere where children, staff and parents are treated with respect.

Children's Charter

Children's welfare and their rights to secure, healthy and happy childhood are paramount.

The experiences children receive in their early years are critically important in terms of future development.

Children are entitled to expect that all adults will respect, uphold and preserve their rights and to ensure that their feelings and wishes are taken into account.

Children should have the opportunity to make choices and develop a sense of responsibility for their own actions appropriate to their age.

Children, parents and carers should not be discriminated against, particularly in relation to colour, age, race, religion, gender, disability medical conditions or background.

Parents should be recognised and respected as children's first and continuing educators.

Admissions

- Children must be over 2 years to attend Shining Stars Academy
- Children must be toilet trained before attending the Montessori (ECCE) session.
- Shining Stars Academy offers a two-year free pre-school place for children eligible for the scheme. Children outside this age range can avail of a place based on parents paying the appropriate fee.
- We operate the following TEC Programmes to support parents on eligible training courses and eligible categories of parents returning to work, by providing subsidised childcare places.

After-School Child Care programme (ASCC)

The ASCC is administered on behalf of the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and provides afterschool care for primary school children for certain categories of working parents and parents on DSP employment programmes (not including Community Employment).

- Shining Stars Academy places will be allocated on a “first come first served” basis, Siblings will be given priority for available places and a discount may apply.
- Existing children will be given priority for the ECCE free preschool year
- Each of the free years must be applied for separately and places cannot be guaranteed. Places will only be confirmed when registration forms are completed and deposits paid.
- In the event of places being over-subscribed. Management reserves the right to select places in order of application.
- A deposit of €50 is taken in advance when a child is given a place.
- Parents/carers are required to complete the registration form.
- A waiting list is established when all places are taken up and the child at the top of the list is given first available place depending on availability for the type of place required.
- This service operates an open door policy especially during the settling in period. The child is settled in over a 2 – 3 week period. Children attending the ECCE free preschool year will participate in a small group session the week before commencing,

- Children with additional needs and disabilities are welcome. Parents need to be aware that it may be required for them to provide a special needs assistant when necessary
- All details regarding a child's application form must be completed and any relevant important information or specific diet or health requirements must be noted.
- We reserve the right to refuse admission.
- Parents should familiarise themselves with our policies and procedures; they will be reviewed and changed accordingly to incorporate any new developments from the Tusla, the Child and family Agency.
- No uniform is necessary but we do ask that all children wear suitable, comfortable clothes, ideal for art work and outdoor messy play. (No 'good' clothes please). Velcro shoes are preferable. All long hair must be tied up. No hoop or long earrings.

The following are required with the child's name clearly written on all items

- *A bag containing a change of clothes, i.e. underpants, socks, top and pants, nappies and creams*
- Wellies, coat, hat (outdoor wear)
- Blankets and sheets
- Sun cream, sun hat
- A bag with a healthy morning snack
- Soother if required. This must be supplied in a plastic box.
- 2 Scrapbooks
- 2 copybooks

Enrolment Information and Policy for ECCE Only Children

This policy refers to children who are eligible to participate in the Government's Free Preschool Year. This scheme covers up to two years of free early education. Children can start preschool in the term after their 3rd birthday and remain in preschool until the 30th June of the year they are commencing in Primary School, provided that by the end of the pre-school year (i.e. 30th June), the child will not be older than 5 ½ years. The level of access to the full 'two year period' is 'date of birth' dependent and the eligibility is determined by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs [DCYA]. An eligibility table accompanies this policy and should be followed and reviewed in respect of each application.

Children can be enrolled into the scheme in September, January and April each year. It should be noted that the service may be over-subscribed and may not be able to accept children during all entry periods.

ECCE is an inclusive scheme and welcomes all children regardless of ability. In some cases parents need to be aware that the participation of their child may require additional resources which will be discussed at time of enrolment.

ECCE Places - PPS Numbers

PPSN information may be transmitted electronically through the PIP online system operated by Pobal. The system can electronically check and validate the PPSN number against the name, DOB and PPSN details

Where a parent's declaration is not verified by the DCYA's checks, a letter will be issued to inform them that the subvention (ECCE funding) applied for does not apply. We will correct our register of the subventions due to parents, and supply the parent with the letter, stating that as a result we will not receive grant aid to reduce the fee charged. We will not retain this letter, or a copy of it, for more than 1 month. If in the verification of information a parent disputes the outcome, they should contact the DCYA directly.

Criteria for Enrolment

- Children's date of birth must fit the eligibility for the scheme as directed by DCYA [see above and eligibility table]
- Full time places (5 days) will be given as a priority
- Part time places will be offered if all full time places are not filled

Over Subscription

- In the event of places being full a waiting list will be kept. And the following will apply when allocating a place.
 1. Priority to full time (5 days)
 2. Existing Children
 3. Siblings
 4. Past pupils
- Management will advise parents of their child's place on the waiting list upon request

Procedure

- The main 'due date' for decisions to accept children are as follows:
 - October to start in January
 - February to start in April
 - June to start in September
 -

Note: If a parent has enrolled their child they will receive a final confirmation letter of their place and commencement date during the above months. If a parent/guardian wishes to cancel or withdraw their child they must do so before beginning of the above months [October, February and June]. If a place is cancelled the deposit is forfeited.

- Each year of the two-year scheme is treated completely separately by our service with enrolment required for each year. If your child attends Year 1 you will be required to follow the enrolment criteria again for Year 2.
- A place on the ECCE Scheme will only be confirmed when the following is completed:
 - an agreement confirming the number of days required and confirmation of the child's eligibility
 - a PIP Registration form (DCYA)
 - registration form accompanied by deposit
- The service cannot 'hold' a place until the child becomes eligible. For example if a child becomes eligible in January a place will only be available if there is a vacancy. If parents/guardians want to guarantee a place in January they may be required to enrol their child in September and pay full commercial fees until the child is eligible in January when the free scheme becomes operational for that child.
- If a parent/guardian wishes to increase the number of days their child is attending the service this will only be possible if there is a vacancy. For example if your child is currently attending three days a week [this could be a free or paid place] and you wish to extend to five days this may not be possible if the service is full.
- A deposit of €50 is taken in advance when a child is given a place. The deposit will be returned at the end of October provided that the Parent Declaration Form is completed early in September, the child is verified as eligible for the programme, and my service is paid under the ECCE programme for the first four weeks. Otherwise the deposit is forfeit.
- All details regarding a child's application form must be completed and any relevant important information or specific diet or health requirements must be noted.

- We reserve the right to terminate our services.
- In the event that we cannot offer your child a place in the service we will endeavour to source other options for you.
- Parents should familiarise themselves with our policies and procedures; they will be reviewed and changed accordingly to regulation and best practice.

Attendance

It is essential to the efficient running of the service that you inform management if your child is unable to attend the service and follow up with a telephone call to inform the General Manager or Assistant Manager when the child will be returning. It should be noted that the income received by the service from the DCYA is based on the regular attendance of children. Services are subject to inspection by Pobal on behalf of DCYA. Therefore, absences must be covered by the completion by parent/guardians of an absence notification form. A register of the times and days that children attend is kept. Continued failure to attend may result in your child's place being withdrawn.

If a child is absent for 4 weeks, the child can be designated a Leaver on PIP which means the service will be paid for the 4 weeks. If a child is absent for more than 4 weeks (without notice) the place can be filled by another.

Procedures for Children with Allergies

When parents start their children at the service they are asked if their child suffers from any known allergies. This is recorded on the registration form.

If a child has an allergy, a risk assessment is completed to detail the following:

- The allergen (i.e. the substance, material or living creature the child is allergic to such as nuts, eggs, bee stings, cats etc.).

- The nature of the allergic reactions e.g. anaphylactic shock reaction, including rash, reddening of skin, swelling, breathing problems etc.
- What to do in case of allergic reactions, any medication used and how it is to be used (e.g. Epipen).
- Control measures – such as how the child can be prevented from contact with the allergen.
- This form is kept in the child's personal file and a copy is displayed where staff can see it.
- Parents train staff in how to administer special medication in the event of an allergic reaction.
- If a child is identified to have a nut allergy, other parents are made aware so that no nut or nut products are accidentally brought in, for example to a party.

Life Saving Medication and Invasive Treatments

Adrenaline injections (Epipens) for anaphylactic shock reactions (caused by allergies to nuts, eggs etc.) or invasive treatments such as rectal administration of Diazepam (for epilepsy).

Management must have:

- A letter from the child's GP/consultant stating the child's condition and what medication if any is to be administered;
- Written consent from the parent or guardian allowing staff to administer medication; and
- Proof of training in the administration of such medication by the child's GP, a district nurse, children's nurse specialist or a community paediatric nurse.
- A copy of such proof may be required by our insurance provider for appraisal so that our insurance can be extended if necessary.

Collections and Arrivals

Attendance

It is essential to the efficient running of Shining Stars Academy that parents inform the Manager if their child is unable to attend the service and follow up with a telephone call to inform the Manager when the child will be returning. A register of the times and days that children attend is kept.

Arrivals

- Children must be delivered to a room with staff in attendance. Parents should never leave a child in an unsupervised room.
- A staff member will register your child
- Parents should support children to remove coats and to find their coat pegs.
- Parents and other visitors should ensure that all external doors are securely closed for the safety of all the children when you leave.
- If a child will not be attending we request that parents advise a member of management

Collection Policy

The Collection Policy of Shining Stars Academy will be achieved by:

- Parents/guardians must collect their child by the agreed collection time. Parents will be asked to give the names of at least two other people who are authorised to collect the child. If the parent is late arriving to collect the child the Manager will endeavour to contact the parent. In the event of being unable to contact the parent The Manager will contact the other named persons to collect the child.

- Children will not be released into the care of a person under the age of 18 years or to a person who appears to be incapable of caring for the child. Should this situation arise the staff will contact an authorised collector. If no one is available to collect the child then the Manager should contact the Tusla social work child protection team.
- At Shining Stars Academy we ask that parents do not collect their child from the service while under the influence of alcohol. This can lead to embarrassment and worry within the team. If parents feel that this situation may arise they should arrange for an authorised collector to collect their child.
- Children should be collected only by the adult/s named on the Collection Authorisation, should the person responsible be unable to collect the child, a letter of explanation must be presented signed and dated by the parent / guardian with a contact telephone number, the staff member will then telephone the parent prior to allowing the child leave Montessori. If the parent personally arranges this with the staff the telephone call may not be necessary, but signed consent will be required at all times.
- Please ensure that you park safely and do not cause an obstruction, even for a very short time.
- In the event of a parent collecting another child a prior arrangement must be made.
- In order to comply with childcare legislation which determines the staff/ child ratios and in the best interest of the children (children can become distressed when no-one comes for them when all the others have been collected) it is important that children are collected on time from the service.

Late Collection of Children

Parents/Guardians are advised to keep within their agreed time for collection of their child/children for the above reasons. The service requests that all children should be collected by the designated time in order that the service may follow health and safety practices to ensure that the service may close safely. However, we understand that sometimes a parent is unavoidably delayed when coming to collect their child. We will ensure that the child receives a high standard of care in order to cause as little distress as possible. Parents in this situation must contact the Manager to say that they will be late and arrange with staff what to do. Children are only released from the service to individuals named by the parent.

Parents/Guardians should note that due to legislative requirements under the Childcare (Preschool Services) Regulations, 2006 and *Children First* – Child Protection Guidelines. Two members of staff are required to be with the child/children.

‘Persistent late collections of children will result in a surcharge being imposed. A fee of €10 per every 15 minutes or part thereof will apply

Early Collection of Children

We ask that parents let us know if you will be picking up your child early so that we can have the child ready for you and to minimise disrupting the rest of the group.

Late Drop Off

We ask parents to drop children off at the correct time to avoid disrupting the group once they have started and so that your child benefits from our full daily programme.

Separated and Divorced Parents

Married parents are automatically joint guardians of their children. Neither separation nor divorce changes this.

- We cannot refuse either parent to collect their child unless a court order is in place.

- We ask that parents give us information on any person that **does not** have legal access to the child.
- Where custody of a child is granted to one parent, we would ask you to clarify the circumstances with us. This information will remain confidential and will only be made known to the relevant staff. If there is any legal documents i.e. custody order, barring order we would ask you to provide us with a copy to keep on file.

Attempted collection by a parent who has been denied access in a court order

- A parent who has been denied access to a child through a court order will not be permitted on to the premises
- If the parent who has been denied access becomes threatening or violent and insists on removing the child from the service this will be viewed as trespassing. The service will in this event contact the Local Gardaí.

After School Care Service

If a child has not attended school due to appointment, illness etc. Shining Stars Academy should be informed no later than 10:30am. This policy also applies to un-notified changes of collection times. This should also apply in any event where by the child does not need to be collected. Failure to do so can waste valuable time and causes undue concern for staff collecting the child from their school.

- It is the responsibility of the parent to make the necessary arrangements to get the child/children to the day care service.
- Where the service agrees to collect the children from the school (e.g. homework club) **signed consent will be sought from the parent / carer.**
- The children will be escorted by a known staff member who will always carry proof of identity. Prior contact will be made with the children and the school for new staff members.

- The children will meet the staff in an arranged place and a register will be taken. Should a child be missing, the staff member will confirm with the school if the child was absent from school that day. This will cause delays for the staff and other children therefore we would request that the parent informs the service by telephone if a child will not be attending on any day.
- The children will go in a group directly from the school to Shining Stars Academy by the safest most direct route.
- When staff are collecting a child from school, the staff member walks up to the school.
- The children must also hold hands when crossing any roads. When walking staff will walk behind the children.
- In the interest of child protection and to comply with legislation child / staff ratios will be adhered to at all times.

Collection by bus/car

- Children are not transported by staff in their own cars.
- Two staff will travel in the car/bus with the children.
- On the bus children have booster seats (provided by parents) which have the same quantity as amount of children. No child is to sit on the bus without one. Children under 3 years may not travel in a car or goods vehicle (other than a taxi) unless restrained in a child car seat. Children aged 3 or over or who are 150cm in height and weighing less than 36 kilograms (i.e. generally children up to 11/12 years of age) must use an appropriate child car seat when travelling in cars or in good vehicles fitted with safety belts

- While seated (on the bus/in the car) children are forbidden to change seats or move around and noise is kept to a minimum as not to distract the driver. Children are always to wear their seatbelts.
- Children will never be left unattended (on the bus/in the car) and an adult is always to be at the door when children are entering or exiting the vehicle.

From the Homework Club

- Parents are asked to collect child/children on time.
- If a child is to walk home unaccompanied, the parent will be required to sign a statement accepting full responsibility for their child/children's safety.
- It is the policy of Shining Stars Academy not to allow children less than 10 years old to walk home unaccompanied.

If a child is booked into the afterschool service and they do not arrive we will follow the following procedures:

- Management will telephone the school to find out if the child was in school.
- Management will telephone the parent or other emergency contact from contacts list.
- If the child was in school and the parent cannot be contacted we will contact the local Garda station to report the child missing.

Fees Policy

We operate the following schemes

Childcare Employment and Training Support (CETS) scheme (Childcare places will be reserved for children of qualifying parents who are attending a FÁS training course or an educational programme administered by an Education and Training Board (ETB). Qualification for the scheme will be determined by FÁS and the ETBs.

Free Pre-School Two Years in Early Childhood Care and Education scheme (ECCE Scheme) under the Department for Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) Eligible children enrolled in part-time childcare services will receive free pre-school provision of 3 hours per day, 5 days a week over a 38 week period (term time).

The After-School Child Care Scheme (ASCC) supports low-income unemployed people to return to work. The scheme provides subsidised after-school childcare places to people with children of primary school age who find employment, increase the number of days they work or take up a place on an employment support scheme.

- Fees must be paid a week in advance.
- Fees must be paid by Bank payment. **Cheques or Cash are not accepted**
- Fees must be paid to the General Manager or Assistant Managers
- A receipt will be issued upon request.

Reviewing Fees

- Fees are reviewed in annually by the management.
- Parents/Guardians/Carers will be informed by giving one months' notice of the increase in fees.
- Increase in fees each year will be related to the cost of living increases and/or exceptional cost circumstances.

Payments in relation to Holidays or Illness of the Child/Children

- Parents/Guardians/Carers will be required to pay for any days/ week's that their child/children do not attend the service.
- In the case of a long term, medically certified illness of a child, parents/ guardians are advised to keep in contact with management on a regular basis. Further arrangements will be discussed with the Parent/Guardian.
- There is no reduction in fees for Public/Bank Holidays.

Closure in Exceptional Circumstances

In the event of the closure of the service exceptional circumstances, that is beyond the control of the Management i.e. adverse weather conditions

The following will apply:

Full fees for the closure period will be payable unless the situation continues into more than a short number of days.

Withdrawal of Children from Shining Stars Academy

Parents/Guardians sign up to agree in the Parents Fee Agreement Form that they will:

- Give notice, in writing that the child/children are leaving the service.
- Give the service one months' notice or pay one month's fees.
- The Management of the service also reserves the right to request that the Parent/Guardian withdraw their child/children from the service if they are not 'settling in' or adapting to the service. The Management agrees to give two weeks' notice of this to the Parent/Guardian so that they can make alternative arrangements.

Non Payment of Fees

- Non-payment of fees may result in loss of place for your child.
- A repeated failure to pay fees may result in suspension or withdrawal of your child's place until the matter is resolved.
- Any delays in payments must be discussed in advance and agreed with the General Manager.

Range Of Childcare Services

The type of service we currently provide is defined in the Childcare (Preschool Services) Regulations 2006 as Full Day Care. There are currently no regulations for the Homework Club but Shining Stars Academy follows the principles of the preschool regulations in running the homework club to ensure the best possible standards are applied.

Other relevant policies that we will adhere to are the:

- Admissions Policy and Procedure
- The Equal Opportunity Policy and Procedure

Our Service:

- We are open from 8.00 to 6.30pm Monday to Friday in our day care service. The Breakfast Club in our Homework Club commences at 7.30am and this service finishes at 6.30pm.
- The service is open 52 weeks per year including the homework club which is offered full-time during the Summer
- We are offering the FREE pre-school years for children qualifying for the ECCE scheme. This runs for 38 weeks per year and closures coincide with school holidays. The calendar will be on display for parents to review.
- The CETS scheme for qualifying parents is also on offer

Our Facilities include:

- Large fully fenced, well-equipped outdoor Playground with safety surface (Full day care)
- Large, bright, spacious (room(s))
- Safety-fencing, safe set-down area,
- Healthy and nutritious food
- Trained and qualified staff

The rooms are designed in such a way as to meet the developing needs of each individual child. The children are guided through a range of educational and play activities at their own pace. Our staff create a positive and secure environment where children feel confident in exploring their surroundings.

Junior Preschools

We have two Junior Preschools (1 and 2)

These rooms provide a happy and caring environment, which encourages children to learn social and development skills, through activities and play. At this stage of development children are introduced to feeding themselves, as well as free play with a range of activities and challenges including music, sand, water, arts and crafts, gardening etc. Comfortable sleeping arrangements are available during the day.

Montessori

The aim of Montessori Education is to prepare the child for life. The teacher introduces to each child the skills and qualities necessary to live life to the full in an independent, safe and happy way. It also develops the child to their full potential. In the Montessori classroom, the children explore the world through their senses and their own activity. They develop a love of learning and enjoy working, which hopefully will stay with them throughout life. Montessori is an education for life, a learning process environment. Montessori is about learning to balance responsibility with freedom of choice. It offers children the opportunity to realize their potential, in a non-competitive environment and seeks to promote in them:

- Self-confidence and self-esteem
- A sense of responsibility and self-worth
- A sense of responsibility for themselves and their actions
- Independence and adaptability
- Co-operation with others
- A sense of community respect for the rights and needs of others
- Concentration and persistence in completing a task
- Initiative and self-motivation

Breakfast and After School

Our Breakfast Club is a service that allows children to come along in the morning and enjoy a nutritional breakfast with their friends before being dropped to local National School.

At our After School we offer fun-filled activities such as cooking, arts and crafts, and homework support

Homework Policy

It is the policy of the Shining Stars Academy to provide a period of time each day for homework. This session will be scheduled to take place directly after children have had their snack/meal.

- Snack/M meal time is relaxed and leisurely to enable children to unwind, socialise and discuss daily events.
- Each child will get sufficient time to do their homework.
- Staff will contribute to a quiet relaxed atmosphere during homework sessions and encourage children to do the same and will be there to help children with their homework. However, staff will not be responsible for signing children's homework as it is very important that parents check each child's homework.
- No more than one hour will be spent on homework
- The After School Service recognises the importance of the parent's role in homework support and encourages them to check work completed, hear reading again etc. and play an active role in the homework supervision and support of their child.

Settling- In

We recognise that in some cases there may be particular difficulties experienced by children, parents/carers, and staff during the settling-in period and we are prepared to explore and consider various ways of settling children into the service. All children are individuals and we plan to meet their individual needs and resolve any difficulties quickly and smoothly.

This policy mainly applies to the younger children. Older children will visit the facility in advance as part of a small group so that they become familiar with their surroundings.

In order to accomplish this we will ensure that:

Pre-Admission

- Management invites the child and parents/guardians to visit Shining Stars Academy at an agreed time and to become familiar with the setting.
- Shining Stars Academy offers phased settling-in over a period of 2 – 3 weeks. However every child is different and each settling-in programme will be designed to suit the needs of the child.
- Prior to enrolment exchange of information will take place between parents and staff. In order to meet the needs of each child parents/guardians will be asked to fill out the “All About Me” form. Parents/guardians are encouraged to provide staff with information on their child’s likes/dislikes, interests, achievements etc.

First Day

- Staff will greet the child and parent together.
- Each child will be appointed a key worker.
- The parent will be assured of the value of their presence to the child in this process.
- Parents are requested to stay for the child’s first session. Some children may not be ready for a full session management will advise the parents on this matter.

- Parents will be made aware of the necessity of interacting with their child and the other people in the service in order to reassure the child of the safety of the new surroundings.
- Children must be collected on time and promptly from their session at the agreed time.

Ongoing Matters

- Parents must never leave the service without saying goodbye to their child.
- Staff will provide support and encouragement to parents/guardians during the settling-in period should the transition be difficult. staff will phone parents/guardians to reassure them, if necessary.
- Staff may need to assist parents/guardians through this separation process as an extended goodbye can be distressful for children.
- The 'settling in' process has no time limits and may need to be repeated if a child becomes unsettled.
- When children are beginning to settle without their parents/guardians, they should be supported in observing, experimenting and discovering for themselves without any attempt to make them participate in activities.
- Opportunities will be made available for parents/guardians and staff to exchange information on the child's progress at this stage.
- Parents/guardians and their children are encouraged to get to know the key people involved in their child's life.
- Children who are still clearly distressed having followed the above procedure may need to have their attendance at Shining Stars Academy deferred for a trial period.

Staff Ratios

Service	Age	Adult/Child Ratio
Sessional ECCE Places	2.5 - 6 YEARS 3.2 – 5.7 YEARS	1:10 1:11
Full/Part Day Care	0 - 1 YEARS 1 - 2 YEARS 2 – 3 YEARS 3 – 6 YEARS	1:3 1:5 1:6 1:8
Homework Club	4 years upwards	1:15

Car Parking

- At Shining Stars Academy we cannot accept responsibility for cars parked, or damage done while parking.
- We ask parents to show consideration to our neighbours and observe local speed limits and parking restrictions.
- Parents must accompany their child into the service.
- We request that parents do not park in front of neighbouring property or cause obstruction when parking.
- Parents are advised not to leave their car running while dropping off or collecting a child.
- We suggest that parents do quick drop off/and pick up to avoid road and parking congestion.
- Additional parking is available at the end of the road

Comments and Complaints

At Shining Stars Academy our ethos is to provide all enrolled children with the highest quality of care and commitment

- All complaints must be made to the General Manager. They will be dealt with in an open and impartial manner.
- The complaint will be documented
- The complaint will be investigated to assess if the service has breached our policy and procedures document.
- Every attempt will be made to resolve the matter as quickly and amicable as possible, and to the parent's satisfaction.
- If agreement cannot be reached, the parents must make a formal complaint in writing to the Director Christine Bowden.
- The parent will be sent an acknowledgement that the complaint has been received and told how it will be dealt with, by whom and within a time frame specified by Christine Bowden.
- The Director will keep dated records summarising what was said and by whom.
- In the case of a complaint made against a staff, the staff member involved will be informed that a formal complaint has been made and given full details.
- The General Manager and/or Director will arrange to meet with the staff member and discuss the lodged complaint.
- The General Manager/Director will keep a record and document what was discussed.

- The General Manager and/or Director will review the complaint and consider all the relevant information as discussed and a decision will be made and recommendations if necessary.
- If a complaint involves a child protection concern, a separate reporting procedure will be followed in line with our child protection policy.
- The General Manager and /or Director will inform all parties involved of the outcome of the complaint made.
- If a resolution is not found within a further 28 days the complainant will be advised on the options to complain elsewhere.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is of the utmost importance at Shining Stars Academy. It is our policy to keep all personal information about our children, families, and staff private. Confidential and personal information about our children/parents will only be shared by the General Manager in relation to child safety, in line with our child protection policy.

We will ensure that:

- All registration forms and records of children attending the service will be kept by confidentially.
- Parents may have access to the records of their own children but may not have access to information about any other child.
- Any confidential information given by parents/carers to the service will not be passed on to other adults without permission.
- Any information relating to a child's personal circumstances will be kept in a confidential file and will not be shared within except with the child's key worker, on a 'need to-know basis'.
- Where a child is believed to be at risk we will take a decision to share information with the statutory authorities, under child protection guidelines.
- All staff, volunteers, students, parents/carers will be made aware of this confidentiality policy. The policy implementation will be reviewed regularly at staff meetings.
- All the above points are subject to the overall commitment of the service which is to the safety and wellbeing of the children who attend it.
- Any breach of confidentiality by any member of staff will lead to disciplinary action.
- In the case that a child's welfare is at risk, it is permissible for the service to share confidential information with Tusla. This is in line with our Child Protection Policy.

Partnership with Parents and Carers

Parents are the first educators of their children and should be involved at all stages in their education and development. Shining Stars Academy recognises the importance of working in partnership with parents/carers to promote the best interests of children and that parents play a key role in the education of their children. Shining Stars Academy will work in partnership with and support parents in this role.

- We welcome comments and feedback. Parents are encouraged to follow our complaints/compliments procedure in relation to any issues they may have regarding the services provided.
- We will ensure parents/carers are given regular information about their child's progress through informal and formal feedback –verbal and written.

Open Door Policy

It is our policy at Shining Stars Academy to offer a bright, warm, welcoming environment. We understand the importance of consultation and building relationships with our children, parents and staff.

- All parents are welcome to visit the service at any time, however parents should be aware that we may not be able to give you our attention at this time as the needs of the children in our care come first.
- Potential parents are welcome to visit, however, an appointment must be made in advance.
- We ask parents to ensure that their child/children are collected on time; children can become distressed and worried if they are collected late continuously.
- We aim to give feedback on each child and their day to parents on leaving Shining Stars Academy each day.
- We would welcome that parents advise staff each morning of any significant happenings at home that we should know of e.g. child had a poor night's sleep, as he/she may be tired.

Child Protection

At Shining Stars Academy the welfare of the child is paramount. Therefore, we want to make sure that the children in Shining Stars Academy are protected and kept safe from harm while they are in our care. If we have a concern about a child we will follow our comprehensive Child Protection Policy and Children First; the National Guidelines on the Protection and Welfare of Children (2011). This may result in making a report to TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency.

Child Observations and Assessment

In order to plan, prepare and organise for good quality care we need to observe children, review and evaluate the curriculum regularly and maintain systematic records. We use our observations to develop our curriculum based on children's interests and needs. We share these observations with parents.

Curriculum

Shining Stars Academy is committed to offering the children in its care a comprehensive curriculum. Children will follow a play based curriculum combined with other good practice methods. Shining Stars Academy offers a range of learning opportunities to children, which are appropriate to the child's stage of development. Shining Stars Academy is fully committed to being guided by the principles of Siolta and the new curriculum framework Aistear.

We recognise how important high-quality early childhood experience can be in children's lives. This Curriculum aims to encourage active learning, problem solving, effective communication, creativity and socialization. It aims to give children a good start which will benefit their long-term success in life. Shining Stars Academy recognises the diversity of experiences and relationships that shape children's lives.

Montessori Curriculum

The Montessori approach is used with our older pre-schoolers. The Montessori approach was designed to help children grow by letting them explore the world. The classrooms are called "prepared environments" where children are given an array of stimulating learning and purposeful activities

The Montessori Curriculum is based on the research and findings of Dr. Maria Montessori (1870- 1952). Montessori's method is structured around, and promotes, the child's natural, self-initiated impulse to become absorbed in an environment and to learn from it. Based on her observation Dr. Montessori developed specific materials techniques and curriculum areas that assist each child in reaching his/her potential.

In Montessori classes the children follow a set programme of tasks or exercises. They learn everyday life skills such as dressing themselves, washing themselves etc. They learn social graces and manners but also cover a wide range of subjects including Mathematics, Reading and Writing, History and Geography, Science, Biology, Music, Irish, Art, Drama and Literature. Subjects may vary slightly.

Inclusion of Children with Additional Needs

Shining Stars Academy is committed to:

- Providing all children with the opportunity to access the service regardless of their ability within the expertise and resources available and in accordance with the best interests of the child
- Respecting the rights of all children to participate in a quality children's programme
- Providing a family-based approach which recognises that parents know their children best and want the best for their children
- Recognising that families are different and unique
- Recognising that all children learn in different ways and at different rates
- A child's right to social inclusion.

Parents/Carers should:

- Share information about their child and their child's needs within the service whilst maintaining the right to decide who will receive information about their child.
- Raise any issues/concerns they have about their child's participation in the programme
- Be involved in, and fully informed about, any support proposed for their child.
- Be given the opportunity to consent to any observations or reports on their child and have a right to copies of such documents.

Key Worker

Shining Stars Academy operates a key worker system. A key worker is a member of Shining Stars Academy who has special responsibility for the care, education and welfare of a particular group of children during their time at the service. The name of your child's keyworker will be on display.

Outdoor Play

Shining Stars Academy promotes outdoor play and will ensure children get ample access to the outdoors in order to promote a healthy lifestyle. Outdoor play is essential to early childhood development. Children learn social skills by interacting with other children, with adults and even with objects and natural materials found in the environment. The outdoor environment exposes children to opportunities to explore, question and develop theories about how things work. Negotiation, language and co-operation are all skills that develop through a well-planned outdoor curriculum. Outdoor play, physical activity and fresh air are important to children's overall health and well-being.

Outings

Shining Stars Academy is committed to planning and undertaking appropriate supervised outings. We will carry out a risk assessment for all outings and ensure we have adequate insurance.

Supporting Positive Behaviour

At Shining Stars Academy, we believe children are competent and confident learners. *We believe that children should be supported to make choices and accept responsibility for their actions and behaviour.* We acknowledge children are continually learning about their emotions, feelings and to manage same. Through positive and reciprocal relationships with staff, positive behaviour is encouraged from all children. Staff will ensure expectations on behaviour are fair and consistent to all children depending on their age and stage of development.

We will work with the children to ensure they receive positive guidance, support, and encouragement to finding positive solutions to manage their own behaviour. Shining Stars Academy sets realistic expectations of behaviour in accordance to the age and stage of development of the child. We apply rules and expectations fairly and consistently to all children. We do not use any form of physical punishment. We encourage children to respect themselves, others and the environment. We facilitate children to make positive decisions and choices about their own learning and development to develop a positive sense of self. We aim to facilitate a happy, caring environment with stimulating activities for all children. In the case of a particular incident, or persistent unacceptable behaviour, we will *always* discuss ways forward with the parent(s)/Guardian of the child.

Our comprehensive policy outlines in detail the strategies we will use when children display challenging behaviour.

Accidents and Incidents

- All accidents/incidents even minor ones, are recorded in an accident record sheet, minor accidents will be treated and parents informed of the injury. Records are accessible to all relevant staff in case of an emergency. Parents will be asked to sign off on the accident report and will receive a copy.
- In the case of a serious accident, we have a local doctor on call, they will be called and the child's parents contacted immediately or we will call an ambulance.
- If the child has to go to the hospital immediately staff will accompany the child, if the ambulance personnel permit. The child's record will be taken to the hospital. Parents are responsible for all doctors or hospital fees where applicable.
- The staff will not sign for any treatment to be carried out on the child in the hospital. The staff will wait with the child until the parent/carer arrives.

Camera and Photograph Use

Principles

We aim to use photographs and cameras at Shining Stars Academy for:

- Assessment, planning and recording
- Observation tools
- Information for visitors and parents
- Training purposes
- Language extension
- Teaching and learning resources

We are aware of the need for sensitivity when taking photographs and observe the following:

- Parental permission will always be sought before photos are taken.
- Only the services camera/video camera may be used to take pictures.
- The camera will remain on the service property at all times and is stored in the office.
- staff must enter the date and sign the camera usage book each time it is removed from the office and upon its return.
- staff are not allowed to take pictures with picture phones or their own personal cameras. (If this is breached disciplinary action may be necessary)
- The child does not object to having his/her photograph taken
- Photographs are used to show positive issues (e.g. a piece of work that the child has worked hard on or is pleased with, children playing cooperatively together.....)
- We are inclusive so that gender, race, special educational needs, and differing abilities are reflected in a balanced way.
- There may be cultural issues of which we need to be aware when taking photographs of children from different ethnic minority groups

We will always get prior permission from parents for any images/videos collected that we would like to post on Facebook or other social media.

Healthy Eating

Shining Stars Academy promotes healthy nutritional choices for our children. We feel it is important at this young age to introduce and educate our children about good nutrition and the health benefits of eating well. Allergens in food we provide will be listed as under Food Information for Consumers (FIC) Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 (S.I. No. 489 of 2014)

- Children bring in own healthy morning snack and ECCE sessional children bring lunch
- We provide healthy meals freshly cooked on the premises by our cook/chef
- Snack time will be enjoyed and socialisation and interaction encouraged.
- We do not allow fizzy drinks, sweets, chocolate, crisps, nuts or nut spreads.
- Some children are allergic to peanuts/nuts. We request that parents do not include these in their child's snack.
- Cultural dietary habits are respected. Parents or carers are requested to provide details of foods eaten (and not eaten) by the child.
- Well-balanced and nutritious meals are provided for the children. A variety of foods is selected from each of the four main food groups every day:-
 - Bread, cereals, rice, pasta and potatoes
 - Fruit and vegetables
 - Milk and dairy foods
 - Meat, fish and alternatives

- Menus are reviewed and changed on a regular basis to ensure a varied range of food choices for the children.
- All desserts provided are based on fruit and/or milk
- Fresh fruit is always available
- Processed meat products such as sausages, burgers, chicken nuggets and fish bites are kept to a minimum. If these are provided, healthier cooking methods are used, e.g. they are oven cooked or grilled. No food is fried.
- Special therapeutic dietary needs are respected. Parents are requested to give Shining Stars Academy a copy of the diet sheet provided by their dietician
- Meal times are used as an opportunity to encourage good social habits.
 - Whenever possible children and adults eat together.
 - Good table manners will be encouraged
 - Children will also be engaged in conversation if they wish
 - Children that are slow eaters will be given time to eat and not rushed
- Children will be allowed to have dessert if they do not eat their main course
- Parents will be advised on what their child eats each day
- Children will be encouraged to sit down when eating and/or drinking
- Mealtime should be engaged with in a positive way with the children. staff must not use any negative association with food at any time with the children.

Illness and Exclusions

Principle

Shining Stars Academy has been entrusted by parents to care for their children. Shining Stars Academy aims to provide as healthy an environment as possible for children and Staff. We will endeavour to minimise your child's exposure to infection by excluding sick children/adults. We will encourage parent's uptake of vaccinations. We will inform parents and the Health Service Executive where necessary of any infections in Shining Stars Academy.

Exclusion

In order to ensure the safety and health of all our children and staff those who have any of the following conditions will be excluded from the service:

- Acute symptoms of food poisoning/gastro-enteritis.
- An oral temperature over 37.5 degrees which cannot be reduced
- A deep, hacking cough
- Severe congestion
- Difficulty breathing or untreated wheezing
- An unexplained rash (see exclusion list also)
- Vomiting (48 hours from last episode)
- Diarrhoea (48 hours from last episode)
- Lice or nits - see Head Lice Policy and Procedure
- An infectious /contagious condition

- A child who is on an antibiotic for less than 48 hours
- A child that complains of a stiff neck and headache with one or more of the above symptoms

Infectious Disease Control

- Children/adults with infectious diseases should not attend the service.
- Employees suffering from a contagious illness should not work with children, i.e. gastro-enteritis, etc. and must inform the Management immediately.
- All children must provide up to date record of immunisations (see immunisation programme).
- Should there be an outbreak of any infectious disease or incident, a dated notice clearly stating the situation must be posted on the Parents Notice Board. Parents should also be informed verbally and in writing. This notice should be updated when relevant.
- Any children of staff who are ill should not accompany their parents to work in the service.
- Head lice are a contagious condition and if a case is noticed it should be brought to the attention of Parents immediately. A child is not permitted to attend the service until the condition has been successfully treated.
- Observation of children following immunisation is essential, parents should inform staff of immunisation. It is good practice to encourage two-way communication on all health issues.
- Staff in the service will be immunised against infectious diseases.

Head Lice Policy

Head lice can be a common problem in pre-school children. Head lice crawl and require head to head contact for transmission. It is our policy to be proactive and manage the treatment. Parents have a responsibility to adhere to all our recommendations, working together to address this common health concern.

- Parents have the primary responsibility for the detection and treatment of head lice.
- Parents must check their child's head regularly, even if they don't suspect their child has head lice.
- All cases must be reported to the General Manager. Parents must state when appropriate treatment was commenced.
- Parents will be informed and advised on the correct procedures to take.
- Notification will be displayed on the parent's noticeboard and information given if required.
- Confidentiality will be adhered to in every case reported.
- Children will not be accepted into the service with untreated head lice.
- We suggest children with long hair should have it tied back.
- There are a variety of effective preparations, shampoos and lotions available. It is vital that parents follow instructions accurately.

It is important to remember that anyone can get head lice, however infestation is more likely among small children due to nature of how they play. Head lice do not reflect standards of hygiene either in the home or preschool environment

Medicines

Our aim at Shining Stars Academy is to promote the health, safety and well-being of each child in our care.

We do not routinely administer ‘Calpol’ or other non-prescription / prescription medications. We only administer medicines with the correct signed permission.

Medicines must only be brought into Shining Stars Academy for administration by the staff when it is **essential**. This means where it would be detrimental to the child’s health if it were **not** to be administered.

- Management must be informed if your child is taking antibiotics or any other prescription or non-prescription medication.
- A record of the child’s medical history will be required on the registration form
- We advise that children must be taking antibiotics for two days prior to returning to the service.
- Essential medicines will only be administered where a parent/guardian has signed a consent form and at the discretion of management.
- We will only follow the dosage as instructed by the doctor.
- If the administration of prescribed medication requires medical knowledge, individual training is provided for the relevant member of staff by a health professional.

- No child may self-administer. Where children are capable of understanding when they need medication, for example with asthma, they should be encouraged to tell their key person what they need. However, this does not replace staff vigilance in knowing and responding when a child requires medication.
- If a child refuses to take their medication staff will not force them to do so.
- Parents must keep Shining Stars Academy up to date on their child's medical needs.
- Parents must fill in the medicine consent form of Shining Stars Academy, authorizing the administration of medicine (prescription or non-prescription) to their child. staff cannot give medicine unless this written permission is given.
- Parents must hand staff the medicine, which then stored in the fridge or the medicine cabinet. Any form of medication must never be left in a child's bag, including inhalers.
- Medicines must be in their original packaging clearly labelled with the child's name, the current date, expiry date, storage instructions and dosage plus the name of the health care provider that recommended the medication.

Note to Parents

This handbook outlines the key policies relevant to parents. We also have a full comprehensive policy and procedure document that is accessible to parents. This document expands on the policies contained in this handbook