

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

<b>TUSLA Identifier:</b>	TU2015LK074
--------------------------	-------------

<b>Name of Service:</b>	Free Range Kids Ltd
-------------------------	---------------------

<b>Address of Service:</b>	The Old Rectory, Croom, Co. Limerick
----------------------------	--------------------------------------

<b>Eircode:</b>	V35 YN67
-----------------	----------

<b>Name of Registered Provider:</b>	Jo Flinn
-------------------------------------	----------

<b>Service type:</b>	Full Day
----------------------	----------

<b>Date(s) of Inspection:</b>	21/11/2025
-------------------------------	------------

<b>No of pre-school children:</b>	AM	86	PM	71
-----------------------------------	----	----	----	----

<b>Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:</b>	Tusla Early Years Inspectorate Offices, Estuary House, Henry Street Limerick
<b>Inspection undertaken by:</b>	M Riordan
<b>Title:</b>	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).

<b>Conditions if applicable</b>	Not applicable
---------------------------------	----------------

### Description of service

Free Range Kids is a preschool service situated at the Old Rectory House, near Croom in County Limerick. The facility utilises an old period-style house, with several outer buildings on the premises thoughtfully converted into dedicated preschool spaces. This service caters to children aged between 2 and 6 years.

The preschool offers a variety of sessional and extended care options to accommodate different family needs. Morning and afternoon sessional classes run throughout the day. Children have the flexibility to remain at the service for longer periods outside the standard sessional times.

The service is grounded in the principle that exposure to the natural environment and outdoor experiences, along with engagement with natural materials are crucial for the early development of young children.

Free Range Kids operates across several well-resourced rooms, each located in different buildings on the premises. The Playroom is based within the main Rectory house, while other spaces such as the Swallow Shed, the Loft Room, the Coach House, and the Barn are situated in adjacent buildings. These varied environments provide distinct and diverse settings for children's activities.

The grounds feature expansive gardens, fields, forests, playgrounds, a polytunnel, farmyards, and sheds, offering ample opportunities for exploration and adventure. The preschool places a strong emphasis on outdoor play and discovery, which is central to the ethos of the service.

### Staffing

The registered provider is the owner and the manager of the service. There are an additional 25 staff employed to work at the facility. All staff working at the service have the required qualifications and have achieved a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education. Extra staff to assist children who have additional needs are employed under the Access and Inclusion model. This provides the necessary supports and help to ensure that every child can participate fully in all curricular activities.

### 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-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.

### 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) The registered provider was present on the day of the inspection. There was a designated person available who was able to deputise if required.

(b) During the period of the inspection, the registered provider was present, and the staff roster indicated that a person in charge was always available at the service. A lead person was also available in each room of the service.

(2)(a) Two written and validated references were available for all staff employed at the service.

(b) Where past employer references were not available, there were references from reputable sources provided.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all staff members. 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 available for 4 staff who had lived outside the Irish jurisdiction.

(4) All adults working directly with children had completed their studies and each held an appropriate qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education.

### 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.*
- (4) Subject to paragraph (5), where a registered provider contemporaneously provides-*
- (a) a sessional pre-school service, and*
  - (b) a full day care service or a part-time day care service, or both, the minimum ratio of adults to children applicable for the duration of the sessional pre-school service in respect of the children attending that service shall be the ratio specified in paragraph (3).*

#### Compliance Information

- (1) On the day of the inspection there were 86 pre-school children present with 23 staff members during the morning. In the afternoon there were 71 pre-school children present with 18 staff members. The adult/child ratio was above the required ratios at all times both in the morning and in the afternoon.
- (2) The registered provider ensured that at all times the number of adults present in the service was well in excess of the requirements of the regulations.
- (4)(a) The adult child ratio was correct each morning and each afternoon for the sessional service.
- (b) When the sessional service was over, the ratio applicable for full day care was maintained as specified under the regulations.

### 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

#### BASIC NEEDS

Free Range Kids is committed to supporting every child's learning, development, and wellbeing throughout their daily experiences at the service. Central to the preschool's approach is the belief that regular exposure to the natural environment and the use of everyday materials such as sand, water, wood, clay, vegetables, plants, and flowers alongside exploratory play, are essential foundations for early childhood development.

Healthy eating was actively encouraged within the service. Parents were asked to provide nutritious snacks for their children during break times, and any perishable food items were stored appropriately in a refrigerator until needed. On the day of the inspection, children helped with preparing and making homemade vegetable soup which they consumed for their morning break. They also baked scones to consume at lunch time. For children staying beyond sessional hours, a wholesome, hot meal was freshly prepared by staff onsite and served, ensuring that all children who attended for extended care received a balanced meal during their day.

Sanitary accommodation was conveniently located adjacent to each room, with dedicated nappy changing facilities available if required. The service provides an ample number of child-friendly toilet facilities to meet demand. All toiletries were safely stored, clearly labelled, and easily accessible to staff. Additionally, spare changes of clothing, outdoor coats, and suitable footwear were available to ensure all children were prepared for play and learning, both indoors and outdoors.

Restful areas were provided in every room, featuring soft couches, cushions, and blankets, to offer children spaces for comfort and relaxation. Staff encouraged quiet periods throughout the day to support each child's individual need for rest. For children requiring a calmer environment, small groups or individuals could use one of the dedicated sensory rooms, where a reduced sensory atmosphere supported more focused learning and relaxation. Children benefitted from frequent changes in environment, with daily access to all areas of the service. This included ample opportunities to explore the outdoor spaces, such as the gardens, sensory trails, polytunnel, and a large astro turf playing area, ensuring long periods of outdoor activity were a key part of each child's experience.

#### SUPPORTING RELATIONSHIPS AROUND CHILDREN

The service placed a strong emphasis on fostering and maintaining positive relationships between children and their adult carers. Consistency was a priority, with the same staff members present with the children each day, providing stability and familiarity and supporting children's emotional security.

Throughout each room, staff were actively engaged in children's play, demonstrating a responsive and inclusive approach.

Collaboration and communication with parents are integral to the service's approach. Parents were given dedicated time at both drop-off and collection to discuss their child's day with staff. During these exchanges, staff and parents shared valuable knowledge and observations concerning the child's interests, strengths, developmental progress, care needs, learning styles, and any changes or relevant events in the child's life. This ongoing dialogue ensured that the child's experiences both at home and at the service were connected and supported.

Staff collaboration was also evident in the planning and delivery of educational themes. Regular staff meetings provided opportunities for reflection and joint planning, ensuring that the learning environment remained dynamic and responsive to the needs and interests of the children.

### **PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT**

The physical and material environment of each room within the service was thoughtfully designed to support the holistic development of every child. A diverse array of activities were carefully selected to nurture social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and interactive skills. Each room maintained an atmosphere that was calm and encouraging, allowing children to engage and progress at their own pace. The environment was intentionally flexible and responsive, adapting to the evolving needs, preferences, and interests of the children.

Children had access to a broad selection of play-based activities and experiences, both indoors and outdoors. Throughout the service, photo boards were used to showcase the wide variety of activities and events in which the children participated, celebrating their engagement and achievements.

Within every room, a range of activities were made available and were rotated regularly to complement the changing programme. These include numerous table-top activities, dedicated building and construction play areas, and creative spaces for play dough and art. Art easels, paint pots, and brushes were easily accessible, and there were lots of designated areas for messy play, such as sand and water play.

Outdoor play was prioritised, with children encouraged to spend time outside as frequently as possible and in all weather conditions. Gross motor development was supported by outdoor play equipment, climbing frames in the garden, and ride-on toys on the Astro turf. Children were given ample opportunities to test and extend their own abilities within safe boundaries. Exploration was further promoted through time spent in the woods and on the sensory trail, while the barn provided sheltered space for games during wet weather. Outdoor activities also included lots of nature exploration, fostering curiosity and engagement with the natural world.

## 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:

Adequate measures were taken at the service to ensure a safe, secure, and well-monitored environment for all pre-school children.

**Controlled Access:** Entrance doors and gates to all areas of the service were secured with entry to and from the service managed by the staff to prevent children from leaving unsupervised.

**Outdoor Safety:** Exit gates were secured to prevent children from accessing unsafe areas, and supervision was continuous during all outdoor play activities.

**Emergency Exits:** All fire exits were unobstructed and clear.

**Safe Play Equipment:** Toys and play materials were age-appropriate, well-maintained, and free from hazards like pinch points, crush points, or sharp edges. Regular checks of all materials were carried out on a regular basis by staff.

**Waste Disposal:** Waste was kept inaccessible indoors and outdoors, with foot pedal-operated, lidded bins ensuring safe disposal.

**Chemical Safety:** Cleaning agents were stored out of children's reach on high shelves well away from accessible spaces where children were playing.

##### Infection Control:

Hot water, liquid soap, paper handtowels and foot pedal operated, lidded bins were located in all areas of the service ensuring children had easy access to regular handwashing throughout the day.

##### Fire Safety:

All fire exits in each area of the service were clearly labelled and unobstructed. A safe fire assembly point was identified in the outdoor area. Regular fire drills took place at the service, and all firefighting equipment was serviced on a regular basis.

### Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

#### Regulation 29 - Premises

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

- (a) of sound and stable structure,*
- (b) safe and secure,*
- (c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated*
- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and*
- (e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.*

#### Compliance Information

- (a) All the buildings from which the service operated appeared to be of sound and stable structure both internally and externally and no obvious defects were noted on inspection.
- (b) The premises appeared safe and secured. All entrance gates and doors were securely closed. The outdoor areas were well secured preventing any unauthorised access to or exit from this area of the service.
- (c) All areas were well lit by natural light and by artificial light when needed. There was no evidence of mould, mildew, stale smells, stuffiness or condensation in any of the occupied spaces.
- (d) Routine cleaning schedules were in place for all internal and external areas.
- (e) With regard to the number of children and adults attending, there were an adequate number of toilets and wash hand basins and nappy changing facilities available at the service.