



**Health
Information
and Quality
Authority**

An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte

OVERVIEW REPORT

MONITORING AND REGULATION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN 2022

July 2023

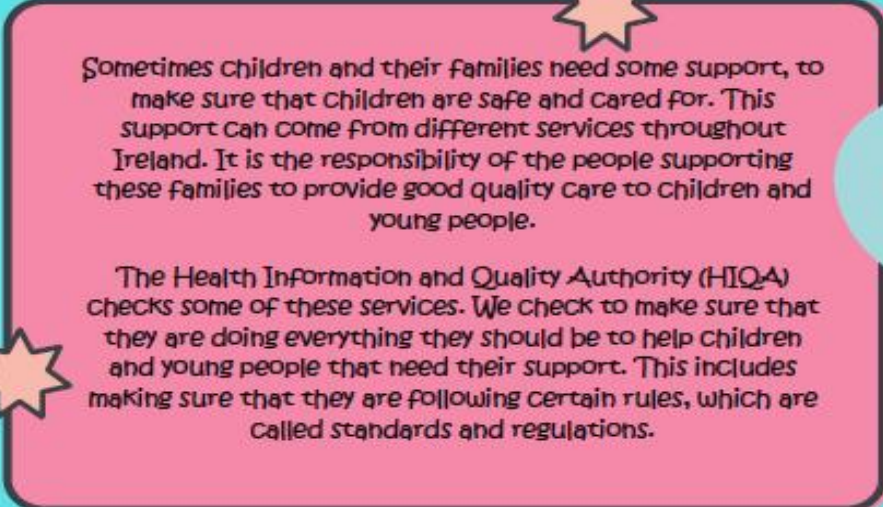


Safer Better Care

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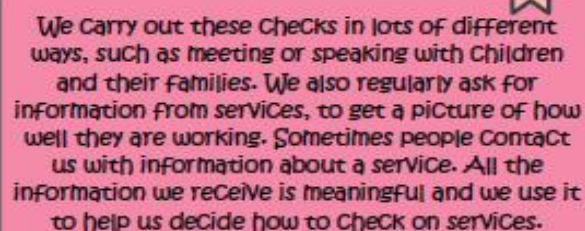
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1. What do we (HIQA) do?

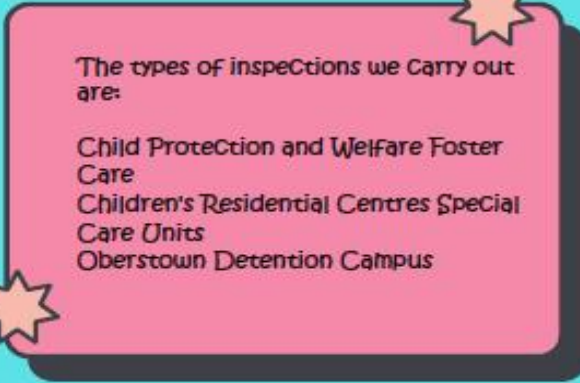


Sometimes children and their families need some support, to make sure that children are safe and cared for. This support can come from different services throughout Ireland. It is the responsibility of the people supporting these families to provide good quality care to children and young people.

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) checks some of these services. We check to make sure that they are doing everything they should be to help children and young people that need their support. This includes making sure that they are following certain rules, which are called standards and regulations.



We carry out these checks in lots of different ways, such as meeting or speaking with children and their families. We also regularly ask for information from services, to get a picture of how well they are working. Sometimes people contact us with information about a service. All the information we receive is meaningful and we use it to help us decide how to check on services.



The types of inspections we carry out are:

- Child Protection and Welfare Foster Care
- Children's Residential Centres Special Care Units
- Oberstown Detention Campus





Message from the Chief Inspector

Hello, my name is Carol Grogan and I am the Chief Inspector of Social Services in HIQA. My job is to make certain that children and young people get a safe and good quality service when they need it. I do this by making sure that these services are checked by inspectors regularly. Inspectors make sure that the provider and staff working with children are doing everything they should to help children and young people and keep them safe. We also check that children are supported by foster carers and staff who can take good care of them.

Every year, the Chief Inspector writes a report called our 'Overview Report' which tells the reader about the work we did in the last year and what we found. We also write a short summary report for children and young people that describes what we found as well as areas needing improvement in children's services. As this is a summary report, you will find more information in the 'Annual overview report on the inspection and regulation of Children's Services - 2022'. If you want to read the full report, you'll find it [here](#).

In 2022, our inspectors spoke with or received information from 180 children and young people. We enjoyed meeting and speaking with each child and young person. They gave us their views on what was worked well and what needed improvement. We will continue to listen to children and young people in 2023.

In 2022, the Children's Team in HIQA completed 54 inspections of a range of services.

Overall, inspections of children's services found that services had improved, and the majority of children who had an allocated social worker, social care worker or keyworker spoke positively about their experience of services. Children in residential care, special care and detention were well cared for. Children who lived at home and who had a plan to stay safe had a social worker who worked with their families, relatives and other professionals to keep them safe. Where improvements were needed in individual services, these services provided good plans in order to improve

the service.

We found that child protection and welfare services were challenged by more children and families needing their support since COVID-19, and also an increase in children from Ukraine who needed support. In 2022, we also looked at how managers of foster care services did their job and found that they worked hard to have good arrangements in place to run a safe service, even where they did not have enough foster carers and social workers. They were also always trying to improve their services to ensure that children, young people, their families and foster carers received a better service.

Unfortunately, again this year, we found that the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) also did not have enough social workers and we found that this meant that there were delays in some children and young people getting a social worker or a suitable placement that met their needs. Children, their families and foster carers told us that it is very hard when there are changes in social workers and that it is important that they have one consistent social worker to speak to. Some children spoke about how they were happy that they were supported by social care workers when they didn't have a social worker. More work is needed to make sure that Tusla have enough staff and placements so that children and young people get the right support when they need it.

Where inspectors found that improvements were needed, each service area developed a plan in order to make their service better for children and their families.

I want to thank all of the children, parents, foster parents and staff who gave their time to talk to inspectors about their experience of services. It is important to say that, in our experience, staff and the providers of services want to provide good quality safe care to children and work hard to do so.



Carol Grogan

Chief Inspector of Social Services, Health Information and Quality Authority

Message from the Head of Programme – Children’s Services



Hello, my name is Eva Boyle and I am the Head of Programme - Children’s Services in HIQA. Carol is my boss. My job is to make sure that a team of children’s inspectors check out all information that we get about services and that we visit children’s services around the country. Our job as inspectors is to check if those services are supporting children and keeping them safe. You may have met some of our inspectors over the course of the last year, as every year, they visit some children’s residential centres, foster care services, child protection and welfare services and Oberstown Children Detention Campus. We write a report on all of the services we visit, and these reports can be found on our website at www.hiqa.ie. As Carol said, this report is a summary of all the work that we did in 2022. There is a lot of information in our overview report which you can find [here](#).

Talking to you is very important to us, and when we go on inspections, you can speak to an inspector and tell us about your experiences of the support and care you get. In 2023, we are going to ask children and young people in residential care and Oberstown Children Detention Campus to tell us what information they want to know after inspections take place. We will also be looking closely at how your rights are promoted by children’s services.

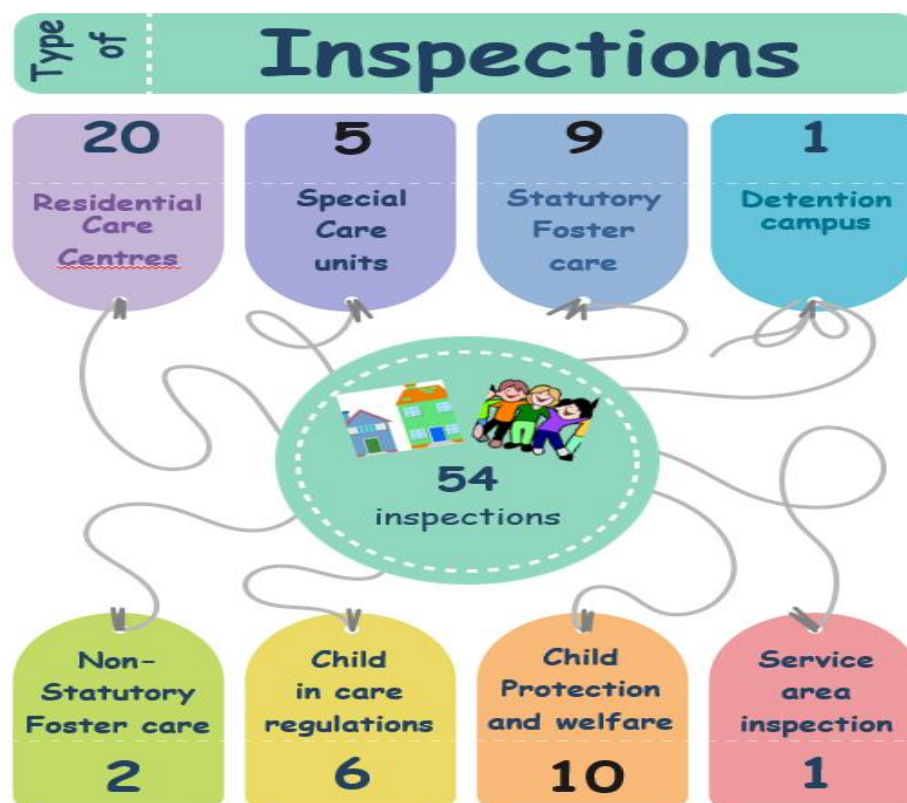
I want to thank all of the children, young people, parents, foster parents and staff who gave their time to talk to us over the last year and we look forward to hearing your experiences in 2023.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eva".

Eva Boyle

Head of Programme – Children’s Services, Health Information and Quality Authority

2. Inspections of Children's Services in 2022



Of the 54 inspections completed in 2022, 51 were of services provided by Tusla. Their job is to work with children and their families to make sure they are safe and well cared for.

If a child or young person cannot live at home due to worries around their safety, they may come into care. Some children and young people who come into care live with a family carer, foster family or in a residential centre. If a young person needs extra supports to keep themselves safe, they may need to stay for a time in special care.

Sometimes children and young people who come into foster care are looked after by foster families who are supported by a service other than Tusla. These services are called non-statutory foster care services. Children who are placed in these services have a Tusla social worker who should visit them regularly. Two of these services were inspected in 2022.

Oberstown Children Detention Campus is the only centre in the country where young people are sent by the courts. This happens when a judge decides that a young person has broken or may have broken the law. Some young people may need to stay in this campus until the judge makes a decision on this.

We spoke with **180** children and young people across these services to explore their experiences of care and support provided to them in a number of ways that included:



Face-to-face conversations during inspections



Online focus groups



Phone conversations



Service-specific child-friendly surveys.

3. What did children and young people tell us during 2022



Key messages from children and young people included:



Children and young people said these changes would make their lives better:



4. What did parents and foster carers tell us during 2022?

Across these services, we also spoke with:

123 parents and

143 foster carers.

One of the key things that they told us was the same as what they had told us in 2021. They said it was difficult for children and young people when their social worker changed a lot. Foster carers felt that the service promoted children's rights and their cultural identity.

Parents of children who were involved with a child protection and welfare service were generally positive about Tusla's involvement in their children's lives. They felt that their rights as parents and the rights of children were respected.

The parents of children in residential care were also very positive about the care given to their child. Parents said that contact and visits were facilitated, and that they felt listened to by staff.

Parents of children in secure care said that staff were very helpful and kept them up to date about specific behaviours. They were given clear information about the supports given to their child and received regular updates from staff.

While the majority of parents across the services spoke positively about the care and support given to their children, not all parents shared the same feelings. Some parents were not happy with parts of the service. These parents talked about not feeling listened to. They told us about the impact of lack of staffing and poor communication and support from staff and social workers on visits with children.



5. What did inspectors find?

Foster Care

In 2022, we looked at how managers in nine Tusla service areas and in two non-statutory services planned and ran their foster care services. We also looked at the arrangements that they had in place to make sure that all social work staff knew their role and how to do it. We checked if these services had enough social workers and foster carers to ensure that children and families got a good quality service that met their needs in a timely way. Overall, inspectors found that Tusla foster care services were good at managing their services, despite some of the challenges they faced. One of the two foster care services not run by Tusla was fully compliant with all the standards. Most Tusla service areas were either compliant or substantially compliant with the national standards. All nine Tusla foster care services had improvements to make.



What did we do?

- Inspected nine Tusla foster care services and looked at eight foster care standards
- Inspected two foster care services not run by Tusla and looked at eight foster care standards
- Spoke to 47 children and young people



What worked well?

- Most children had an allocated social worker
- Most children and families knew how to make a complaint and were aware of independent advocacy services
- Children placed with other services not run by Tusla had an allocated social worker and were visited regularly
- Children and foster carers who needed extra help received it
- Placing children with relatives was seen as a priority



What needed to improve?

- Children needed a consistent allocated social worker
- Some children were placed far away from their community
- Tusla foster care services needed more staff
- Recruitment of foster carers
- Suitable placements to meet children's needs

Child Protection and Welfare

Tusla is the organisation that is responsible for making sure that children are safe and well cared for. Tusla is divided into 17 service areas. We inspected 10 service areas, and we inspected one service area twice because of the worries we had. Eight of these inspections were of Tusla's child protection notification system (CPNS). The CPNS is the record that Tusla keep where social workers are worried about a child's safety. Any child on this list has to have a child protection case conference which is a meeting where parents, social workers and other adults involved in a child's life (such as their doctor, public health nurse or teacher) can attend. Depending on their age, children can go to this meeting. If they choose not to, then their views are shared by their social worker or parent. A decision has to be made at the end of the meeting if a plan is needed to keep the child safe. If a plan is needed, then the child's name goes on the record and the plan is checked regularly to make sure it's the right plan to keep the child safe. Some children who could not be kept safe with a plan were taken into care and were placed away from their family. Overall, our inspectors found that there was a high level of compliance with the national standards relating to children listed on the child protection notification system. All services had improvements to make.



What did we do?

- Inspected 10 child protection and welfare services
- Looked at a total of 11 child protection and welfare standards
- Spoke to 24 children and young people



What worked well?

- Children at risk were identified and were referred to the CPNS
- Children on the CPNS had an allocated social worker
- Children on the CPNS had protection plans
- Children were encouraged and supported to attend their child protection case conference



What needed to improve?

- The tracking of child protection plans and visits to children
- Gaps in information on children's files
- More placements were needed for children who could not stay safe at home
- Waiting lists for children and families
- How quickly Child Protection and Welfare services acted

The remaining three child protection and welfare inspections were risk-based. This means that we were very worried about an area's child protection service and did an inspection. Two of these inspections were done in one service area that looked at how Tusla managed the steps from when a social worker received concerns about a child until they had completed an assessment of the child's needs. In the first inspection, we were very concerned that children and families were getting a very poor service and there were long delays in the response times from the child protection and welfare service. This meant that children in the area were not always safe as Tusla could not respond quickly. We did a second inspection towards the end of 2022 in this area to check that changes had been made. We found that some improvements had been made but the service area still had a lot of work to do to make sure their waiting lists got shorter and that children were being kept safe.

The third inspection was in another service area which looked at the progress the service had made since their last inspections in 2020 and 2021. While the area had made some improvements, they needed more time and more staff to reduce the number of children waiting for a service.

Residential Care Services

When a child has been placed in a residential centre, a Tusla social worker is responsible for the care of the child. Their main aim is to ensure the child is safe and supported in their placement. In 2022, we checked if children had a social worker, how often they visited the child and what the social worker was doing to ensure that the child was being cared for and kept safe. We checked how staff in each residential centre were supporting children around their care plan. We also looked at how children's rights were being promoted, especially about their right to be involved in their care and to have access to information. Overall, we found that the quality of care provided was very good, and that staff ensured that children's wellbeing and personal development was promoted. Most of the residential centres and the service areas where we inspected the role of the social worker were either compliant or substantially compliant with the standards and regulations. However, some centres or service areas had further improvements to make.



What did we do?

- Visited 20 children's residential centres and looked at nine standards
- Inspected six service areas on how children in residential care were being supported by their social worker
- Looked at four regulations in relation to the role of the Tusla social worker
- Spoke to 65 children and young people



What worked well?

- Children's needs were recognised and they were given good care and support
- Children's rights were respected and promoted
- Children's views were listened to about their care plan and could attend a the care plan meeting if they wished
- Children were helped to keep in contact with their family and friends
- Children were kept safe
- Children were helped to stay healthy and develop
- Children were generally happy with the level of contact with their social worker



What needed to improve?

- More placements for young adults when they leave care at 18 years of age
- Children's care records
- Children needed their social worker to stay the same for longer
- More placements so young children could stay with a family and not in a residential centre

Oberstown Children Detention Campus

Oberstown Children Detention Campus is the only place in the Republic of Ireland where young people are sent by the courts on remand or detention. It provides secure care; this means that young people cannot come and go from this service as they wish. In court, the judge decides whether a young person may have broken the law or has broken the law. If a young person has been sent to the campus before their trial or before the court has decided on their sentence, this is called being on remand. If a young person has been sentenced, this is called being in detention; this means that the young person has to live and go to school in the campus for a set amount of time. We inspect the campus every year using their children's rights policy framework which has 12 rules. In 2022, Oberstown Children Detention Campus achieved a high level of compliance with the six rules assessed which was a big improvement from their previous inspections.



What did we do?

- Looked at six rules
- Spoke to or received completed surveys from 28 young people



What worked well?

- Young people were well cared for
- Young people had lots of opportunities to take part in activities and programmes
- Young people's rights were promoted and they took part in relevant meetings about their care
- Young people were asked about plans for the campus and their ideas were listened to
- Restrictive practices were used less often



What needed to improve?

- Consistent and accurate recording of all interventions with young people
- How staff were supervised
- Making sure that all child protection and safeguarding concerns were followed up on when the campus social worker was not available

Special care units

There are three special care units in Ireland. Children aged between 11 and 17 years old can be placed in special care units by a court. This happens when the court believes that the child's behavior is placing them at a lot of risk. Special care units have locked doors and young people cannot come and go from the unit as they wish. All three special care units were inspected in 2022. Two of the units were inspected twice as we were concerned about particular risks that they needed to follow up on.



What did we do?

- Inspected three special care units
- Inspected two special care units twice
- Looked at a total of 14 regulations
- Spoke to 16 children and young people



What worked well?

- Children were well cared for
- Children's safety, wellbeing and protection was given priority
- Children were supported and encouraged to make decisions about their care
- Children's views were actively looked for by staff



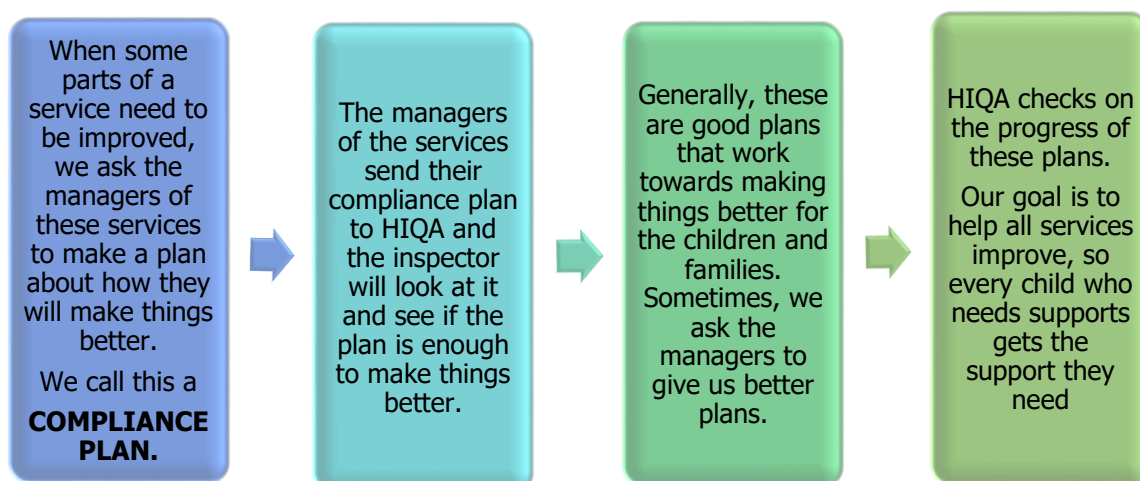
What needed to improve?

- More placements for children leaving special care so they did not stay in special care for too long
- Staffing levels
- in one special care unit, the building needed to be improved

Overall findings

Our inspectors found that children's services continued to improve. Most children and young people spoke positively about their experiences of these services. While some services worked really well, others had some more work to do to improve how they worked with children and families. Some services did not have enough social workers or social care staff and this was a big challenge in these services. Children and young people gave us valuable information about what worked well and what needed improvement. Where improvements were needed, each service developed a plan in order to make things better.

6. What happens when we (HIQA) finds that some services need to make improvements?



7. What we are doing in 2023?

Some of the work that inspectors started in 2022 needs to be finished in 2023, to make sure that children and young people receive a service that is safe, that provides good care and is run in line with national standards and regulations.

We will continue to inspect:

- how children's rights are promoted in all children's services
- child protection and welfare and foster care services plan
- children's residential centres run by Tusla
- special care units
- Oberstown Children Detention Campus.

We want to hear from you and will continue to talk and listen to the views of all who use children's services, so as to make sure that the voices of children, parents, foster carers and the staff of children's services are heard.



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