



**Health
Information
and Quality
Authority**

An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte

SUMMARY OVERVIEW

REPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN 2021

June 2022



Safer Better Care

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1. What does HIQA do?

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) is an independent organisation. We were set up to help improve the quality and safety of health and social care in Ireland. We are responsible for setting standards and inspecting services to make sure they meet the standards. Sometimes children, young people 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, such as:

- Child protection and welfare
- Foster care
- Children's residential centres
- Special care units
- Oberstown Children's Detention Campus

We speak with children and young people using these services as often as we can, so that we can understand what children think services do well or could improve on. We use this information to make sure that children feel safe and are being cared for.

Some of these services provide support in different ways to children and their families. HIQA checks some of these services to make sure that they are doing everything they should be to help children and young people that need their support. This includes checking that they are following certain rules, which are called standards and regulations.

- We carry out these checks in lots of different ways. 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. We also carry out checks through inspections, where we visit services. Inspectors look at information recorded about children and young people.

We speak with a variety of people such as staff that work for the services, social workers and other relevant professionals and advocates. Speaking with children and young people is especially important, as we like to hear, in their own words, what they think services do well or could improve on. We use this information to make sure that children feel safe and are being cared for. Inspections helps us understand whether the service is doing really well, or if there are things that they need to improve.



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's services are checked by inspectors regularly to make sure and that the provider and staff are providing safe services to children and young people. We also check that children are supported by foster carers and staff who can take good care of them.

Every year, we write a big report called our 'Overview Report' which tells the reader about the work we did in the previous year and what we found. At the end of 2021, I decided that we would also write a short summary report for children and young people which would describe 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 - 2021'. If you want to read the full report, you'll find it on our website, www.hiqa.ie.

In 2021, our inspectors spoke with or received information from 195 children and young people. What you tell us is so important to our inspection process. We enjoyed meeting and speaking with each child and young person. You gave us valuable information about what what worked well and what needed improvement. We will continue to engage with children and young people in 2022. In 2021, we also developed a new children's survey as another way of hearing children's experiences of services.

In 2021, our Children's Team completed 56 inspections of a range of services.

Overall, inspections of children's services found that services had improved, and the majority of children spoke positively about their experience of services.

Children in residential care, special care and detention were well cared for. Where improvements were needed, these services provided good plans in order to improve the service.

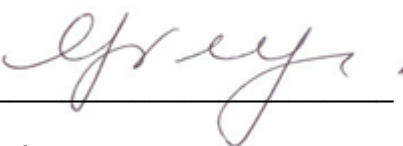
We found that there were a small number of children who were unable to get the services they needed when they needed them. There were delays in a small number of children coming into care because there was no suitable foster care or residential care placement available for them. There also continued to be a lot of children waiting to meet a social worker, and delays in some children being visited by a social worker. A lot of children also told us that they had a lot of different social workers and that they didn't like having to repeat their stories. The reason for this was that in some areas, there were vacant social work jobs. In other areas, where there weren't enough social workers, social care workers visited children to make sure that they were well cared for. This plan worked well.

The country continued to be affected by COVID-19 in 2021. We found that, due to lockdowns, public health advice or illness, children's lives were impacted. For children in care or in Oberstown Children Detention Campus who could not have face-to-face contact with family at all times, inspectors found that these services had plans in place to try to keep everybody safe. These plans were looked at regularly and sometimes needed to be changed.

Inspections of children's services stopped for a short period of time in 2021 as the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) had a cyber-attack on its computer system. This meant that a lot of information about children was not available to social workers and was not available to inspectors. Inspections of children's residential services and special care units run by Tusla were only paused for a short period of time and by the end of July, inspectors were inspecting all services again.

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 and foster parents, 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.

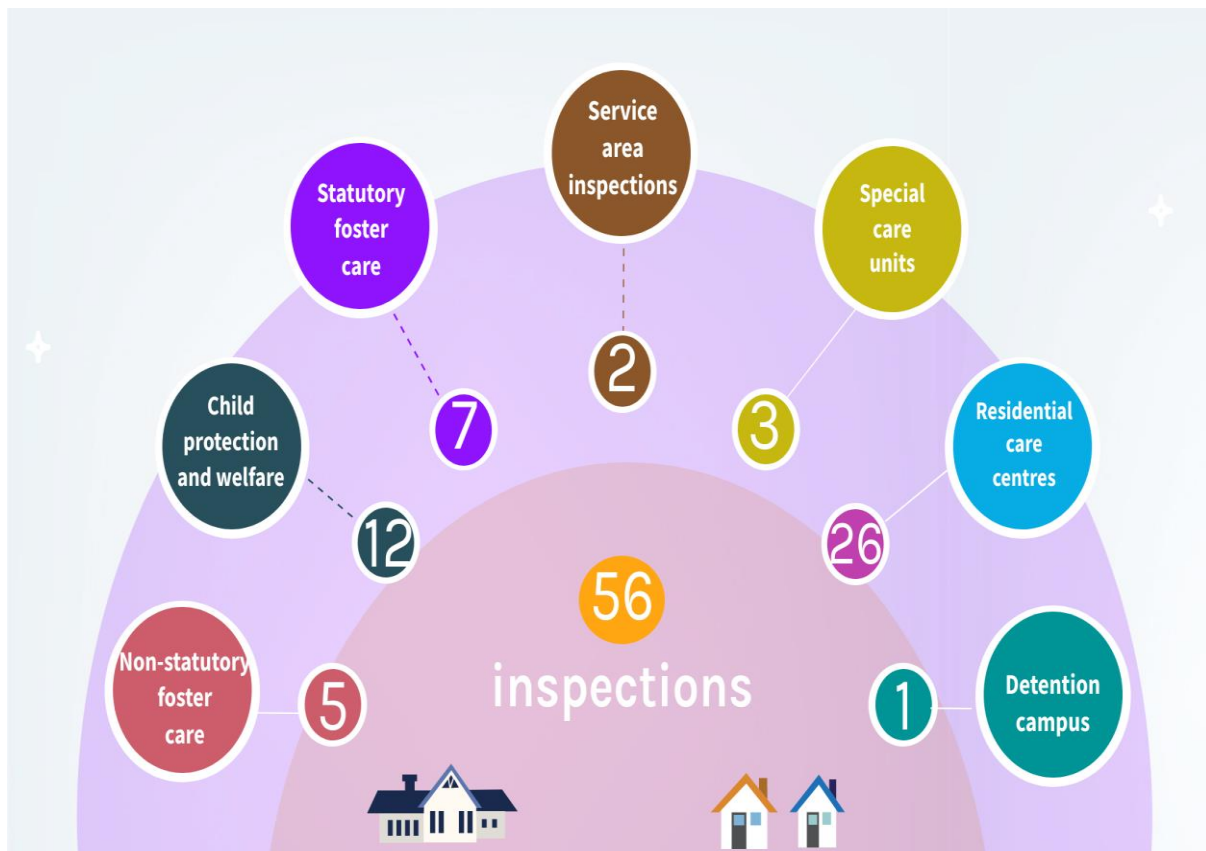


Carol Grogan

Chief Inspector of Social Services

Health Information and Quality Authority

2. Inspections of children's services in 2021

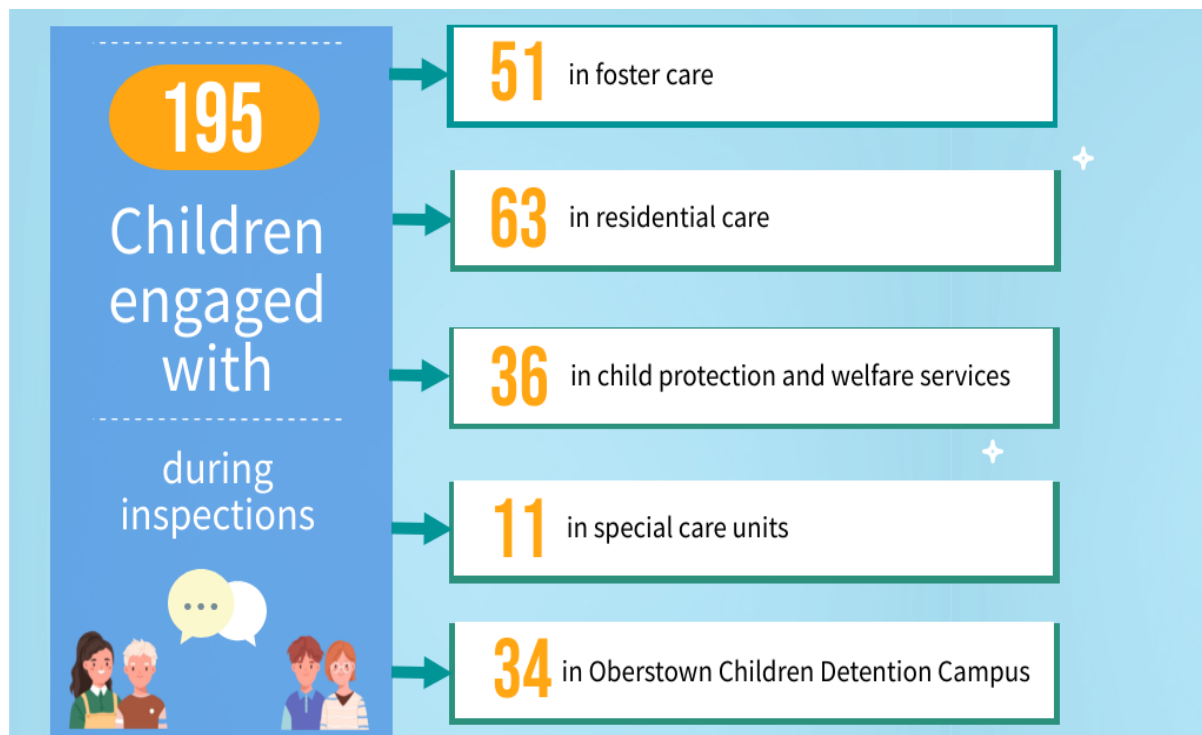


Fifty of the 56 inspections of children's services that were completed in 2021 were of services provided by Tusla. Tusla is the national organisation that has responsibility to support children and their families. If a child or young person cannot continue to live at home due to worries around their safety, the child or young person may come into care. Some children and young people who come into care live with a relative 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 short time in special care.

Some 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.

Oberstown Children Detention Campus is the centre where young people are referred to by a judge if they have broken or suspected to have broken the law. Some young people may need to stay in this campus until the judge makes a decision on this.

3. What did children and young people tell us during 2021?



The majority of children and young people spoke to us by telephone or through group meetings held online.

65

children and young people were asked to complete a survey about their experience of residential care, child protection and welfare services and detention.

41

children responded and overall they were positive in their responses.

Where children raised concerns about the service, these concerns were followed up on by inspectors as part of the inspection.

Key messages



Children and young people suggested the following improvements:

- Less changes in social workers
- Social workers to visit or be in contact more
- To listen more to individual children and young people
- Improvements in planning for aftercare and some children wanted more help in finding somewhere to live
- Some children said that they needed more support in relation to their cultural and religious beliefs.

Parents' views

We also spoke with parents and foster carers. They told us that it would be better for children if they did not have a lot of changes to their social worker, as it can be difficult in having to get to know different people.

The parents of children who were in secure care were satisfied with the care that their child received. The parents outlined that they got to regularly visit their child.

Parents whose children were in foster care had mixed views of the service, but the majority said that their children were happy and well cared for by their foster parents. Some parents felt they were listened to by social workers, while other parents did not have this experience.

The majority of parents of children who used child protection services were generally

satisfied with the service they received and the support they received from social workers. However, some parents felt that improvements could be made in the following areas:

- Less delays in getting access to a service from Tusla
- Better communication with parents.

4. What did inspectors find?



Foster care

In 2021, six inspections of foster care services looked at how managers in Tusla planned and ran their services. Inspectors found that three of the six service areas were good at managing their service, while the other three services had some improvements to make.

Inspectors looked at the arrangements that areas had in place in order to make sure that social workers, social care workers and their managers knew their role and how to do it. For example, inspectors looked at the instructions that social workers followed if a child or young person had a worry or a concern about how they were looked after by their foster carer. Inspectors found that four out of six service areas followed the same instructions in checking out young people's worries or concerns, to make sure that they were safe.

Managers in all foster care areas had a plan for their work that they followed. Most of the areas checked regularly about what work was done and what was still to do. In two areas, there were not enough social workers or managers and this meant that not all work could be completed. For example, this meant that there were delays in children and young people's child in care reviews or in how often that they were visited by a social worker.

Inspectors found that social workers and social care staff who worked with children in foster care had the correct qualifications for their jobs and An Garda Síochána (Ireland's National Police Service) had checked that they were safe to work with children. Training was given to all staff and special training was given to new managers so that they knew what to do in their new job.

As there were not enough foster carers in all six areas, improvements were needed in how foster carers were found and in making sure that foster carers would continue to be involved in fostering children and young people. Inspectors found that social workers were good at placing children with foster carers who could provide good care to them.



Some children need extra help and sometimes foster carers also need extra help too in looking after children. Inspectors found that in five out of six areas that this extra help was in place. However, there was no overall plan in how extra help was given to foster carers. This meant that the help provided to children and foster carers in some areas was different. Tusla has been asked to look at how they provide this extra help to children and foster carers to make sure that all children and foster carers receive the same help.

All foster care services are required to have a group of people in place to meet and talk about the people that social workers have said are suitable to become foster carers. This group is called a 'Foster Care Committee'. The committee's job is to make sure that social workers complete a lot of checks with people who want to be foster carers to make sure that they are suitable to foster. It is also this committee's job to check out information about foster carers and children who might go to live with them until they are 18. Inspectors found that all areas had one of these committees, and that they did their work well. Sometimes when Tusla cannot find foster carers for children, they ask private (non-statutory) foster care agencies if they have carers who can give a home to these children. Five of the six areas inspected had children staying with foster carers who worked for these private agencies. Tusla needed to have an agreement in place with these agencies about what they could provide but Tusla did not have this agreement in place. Social workers from Tusla visited these children to make sure they were kept safe.

The role of Tusla involves listening to children and to respond to children's complaints. In order to do this, Tusla has put in place a 'complaints process' – this is to make sure that when children make a complaint that it is listened to and, if

necessary, to make changes to make sure that the problem is fixed . All areas had this in place and they listened to children’s complaints and also tried to solve them. One area needed to do more work to make sure that they solved the complaint before closing it.

Child protection and welfare services

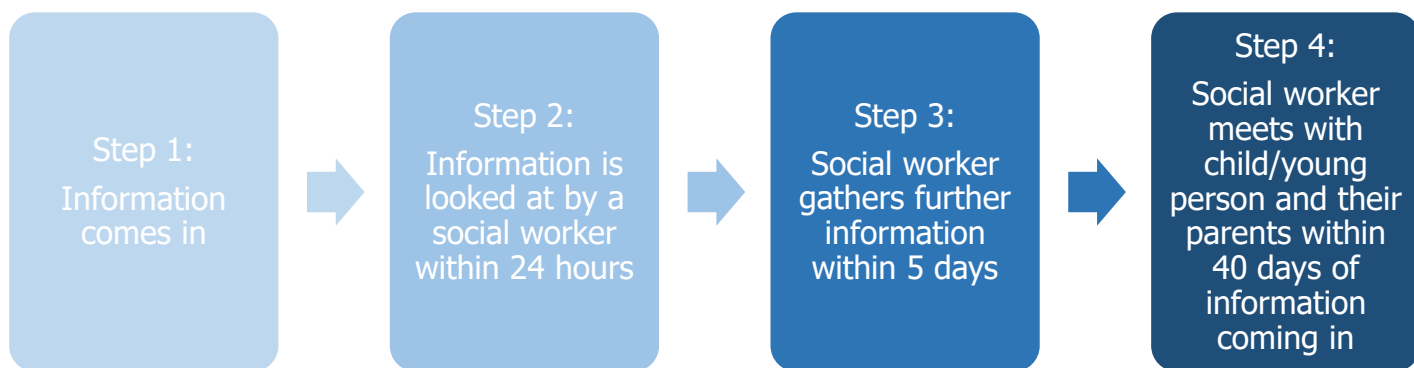
Tusla is the organisation that is responsible for making sure that children are safe and well cared for. In Ireland, there is a law in place where people working in certain jobs – doctors, teachers, nurses, social workers, social care workers, foster carers and many others – have to tell Tusla if they have concerns about a child. Sometimes, parents, relatives or other people in the community may also talk to Tusla if they are worried or if they believe that a parent or child needs support.

HIQA inspected five areas where we were worried about the service they were providing. Most of these areas had plans in place to improve their service. We found that all of the five areas at the time of inspection had reduced the number of children on a waiting list for a service and that the staff were doing their best to make sure that children and young people whose situation was most urgent were given a social worker.

We found that in many of these areas, there were not enough social workers, so the service found it hard to do all of their work when it was expected to be done.

Figure 1 below shows the steps that a social worker takes when information about a child comes into Tusla. When information is received by Tusla, a social worker will decide if the information is something that Tusla can help with within 24 hours, and all five areas did this, usually within the 24 hours. Social workers decide, along with their managers, which children need help urgently (these situations are called high-priority concerns) and which children are less urgent (these are called medium and low priority concerns).

Figure 1: Steps taken by a social worker when information is received



Inspectors found that steps two and three often took longer than five days. At this stage the social worker will decide if they need to meet the child and their family to see if they need some further help.

Social workers should complete all four steps and develop a plan for the child or young person if needed within 40 days of getting the information. Not all were completed within that time frame. However, inspectors found that the work that social workers did with children at this stage was good, and focused on what was best for the child or young person.

HIQA completed inspections of the Child Protection Notification System (CPNS) in 2021 in seven service areas. Where social workers found children at ongoing risk of significant harm (where social workers were worried about children's safety), these children had a Child Protection Case Conference. This is a meeting where parents, social workers and other adults involved in their lives such as their doctor, public health nurse, and teacher attend. Sometimes young people also attend these meetings, but when they don't attend, their views are shared at the meeting by their social workers and their parents. At the end of the child protection case conference, a decision is made on whether a plan is needed to keep the child or young person safe and, if so, the child's name is put on a list called the Child Protection Notification System (CPNS). All of these children had a social worker and most were visited regularly by a social worker to make sure that their plan was working well for them. Children's plans were checked often to make sure that the right plan was in place to keep them safe. Some children who could not be kept safe came into care.

Residential care

HIQA's job is to inspect children's residential services that are run by Tusla. In 2021, 26 of these centres were inspected. In the first half of 2021, inspectors looked at children's rights, especially children and young people's right to be involved in and consulted about their care, and about their access to information. There were good examples of where young people had been listened to by getting a say in relation to their care. The right to choose was seen in all services inspected and staff in residential services encouraged young people to be involved in their choices, for example, their leisure activities, choice of food and their attendance at meetings relevant to them.



Inspectors found that, overall, children's residential centres run by Tusla were well run and planning for children's care was good. All centres had a document called a statement of purpose which said the age group of children that the service could look after and the facilities that the service had. Inspectors found that sometimes services had changed their statement of purpose in order to allow other children to move in or to allow young people who were 18 years old to continue to live in a centre. This meant that children could finish their exams or could move in a planned way into their new home.

Some residential centres did not have enough staff, but inspectors found that children continued to be well cared for.

Oberstown Children Detention Campus

Oberstown Children Detention Campus is the centre where young people are referred to by a judge if it is thought that they may have broken the law (this is called being remanded in custody) or it has been decided that they have broken the law. When a judge makes a decision that a child has broken the law, one of the decisions that they can make is to give them a sentence; this means that they have to live and go to school in Oberstown for a set amount of time. Oberstown Children Detention Campus provides secure care; this means that children cannot come and go from this service as they wish.

Most young people were positive about their experience of their time in Oberstown. Our new survey, which asks children about their views on the service, was given to all children in the campus and all children filled it in. Inspectors found that they were well cared for and that they went to the school that was on the grounds. Children

also attended health services and there was a lot of activities available to them, however, some young people said they would like more support to deal with some issues. Inspectors found that not all young people had meetings in their units where they could speak to staff and managers.



Special care units

Children aged between 11 and 17 years old can be placed in special care units by a court, where the court believes that their behavior is placing them at 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 2021. Inspectors found that young people were well cared for and were involved in making decisions about their care. Many children who were living in special care at the time of inspection had extra supports in place, such as having a psychologist or psychiatrist. Young people attended schools that were on the grounds of their special care unit.

COVID-19

All services had good plans in place to make sure that they were able to continue to provide services to children and young people.



Children in care continued to have contact with their families either by meeting up or through video calls.

Social workers continued to visit children who were most at risk.

Overall findings

Children's services continued to improve the ways in which they worked with children. There continued to be improvement in how services met the standards (rules); however, further work was needed.

In all children's services, there were a small number of young people who needed additional help. There were often delays in finding them places to live or services to support them. Tusla told HIQA in 2021 that they are committed to developing a new plan about residential care for children and young people. At the time of publishing, Tusla had provided HIQA with their plan for residential services over the next three years. It is important that all children receive the service that they need when they need it.

As there were not enough social workers, not all children were visited as often as they should have been.

5. What happens when HIQA finds that services need to make improvements?

When we find that there are some parts of a service that should be improved, managers at these services have to make a plan, which we call a compliance plan, about how they will make things better. Our goal is to help all services improve in order to meet the standards and regulations, so that every child who needs support receives it in a way that meets their needs.



6. What are HIQA doing in 2022?

Some of the work that inspectors started in 2021 needs to be finished in 2022, so inspectors are continuing to inspect how managers of foster care services plan and run their services. Children who are most at risk and on the CPNS will be inspected in 10 service areas run by Tusla.

Inspectors will continue to inspect residential care run by Tusla, special care units and Oberstown Detention Campus, 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.

HIQA are committed to hearing the voices of children, their parents, foster parents and the staff of children's services and will continue to talk and listen to the views of all who use children's services.



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