

# SUMMARY OVERVIEW REPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 2024



December 2025

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## Introduction

This report is a summary of the Health Information and Quality Authority's (HIQA's) experience of inspecting children's social services in 2024. This includes services run by the Child and Family Agency (Tusla), providers of non-statutory foster care services and Oberstown Children Detention Campus.

## What does HIQA do?

Sometimes, children and their families need support to make sure children are safe and well 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) is an independent body that promotes safety and quality in Ireland's health and social care services. We inspect a number of services for children. We check services run by Tusla, like child protection and welfare services, foster care services, children's residential services and special care. We also inspect foster care services that are run by private providers for Tusla. We also inspect Oberstown Children Detention Campus at least once a year.

In all services, we check to make sure that staff and managers are doing everything they should to help children and young people who need their support. This includes making sure that they are following certain rules. These 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, or visiting the services to inspect them. 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 of the information we receive is meaningful, and we use it to help us decide how we check on services.

## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES WE INSPECT AND REGULATE**



**Child Protection  
and Welfare**



**Foster Care**



**Statutory Children's  
Residential Centres**



**Special Care Units**



**Oberstown Children  
Detention Campus**



## Message from the Chief Inspector Designate



*Finbarr Colfer, Chief Inspector Designate, Health Information and Quality Authority*

Hello, my name is Finbarr Colfer and I am the Chief Inspector Designate in HIQA. My job is to make sure that managers and staff running services ensure that children and young people get a safe and good-quality service when they need it. I do this by making sure these services are checked by inspectors regularly. Inspectors visit services, speak with staff and their managers, and to children and young people to make sure that everyone working in or providing the services are doing everything they should to help children and young people. We want to make sure that children are being listened to and that everyone is working together to help keep them safe. We also check that children are supported by foster carers and staff who can take good care of them.

Every year, we write a report called our overview report, which tells people 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 that need improvement in children's services. This report also includes what children told us about their experiences of services. As this is a summary report, you will find more information in the *Overview report on the inspection and regulation of Children's Services – 2024*.

In 2024, our inspectors spoke with or received information from 147 children and young people. We enjoyed meeting and speaking with each child and young person. They gave us their views on what worked well and what needed improvement. We will continue to listen to children and young people in 2025.

In 2024, we completed 47 inspections of a range of services.

Overall, we spent a lot of time last year looking at how child protection and welfare services and foster care services safeguarded children. This means we looked at how

they checked that children were safe and that they had what they needed to have a good-quality life. We were worried about some of these services, as they did not have all of the staff that they needed to be able to meet with children and families quickly, and we asked Tusla's senior managers to come up with a plan to help these services. Throughout 2025 we checked how this plan was working during our inspections, and found that some areas still did not have enough staff to meet the needs of children and their families. We found that staff across all services were motivated to provide children with the best service that they could, and that they often worked long hours to do this. Foster carers similarly spoke out for children and provided good care to them. We found, similar to other years, that 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.

Unfortunately, again this year, we found that Tusla did not have enough suitable placements that met children's 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 they have one consistent social worker to speak with. Some children spoke about how they were happy they were supported by social care workers when they did not have a social worker. It is important that different groups, like the Department of Children, Disability and Equality and Tusla, work together to make sure children have the right places to live and get the care they need.

I want to thank all of the children, parents, foster parents and staff who gave their time to speak with inspectors about their experience of services. It is important to say that, in our experience, staff and service providers want to provide good quality, safe care to children and work hard to do so. We will continue to work them to support this.



Finbarr Colfer

Chief Inspector Designate, Health Information and Quality Authority

## Message from the Head of Programme for Children's Services



*Eva Boyle, Head of Programme for Children's Services, Health Information and Quality Authority*

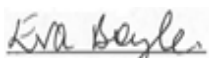
Hello, my name is Eva Boyle and I am the Head of Programme for Children's Services in HIQA. I work with Finbarr. My job is to make sure that our team of inspectors visit children's services around the country and check all of the information that we get about these services. Our job as inspectors is to check if those services are supporting children and keeping them safe. You may have met some of our inspectors over the last year, as every year, they visit some children's residential centres, special care units, foster care services, child protection and welfare services and Oberstown Children Detention Campus. We write reports on all of the services we visit, and these reports can be found on our website at [www.hiqa.ie](http://www.hiqa.ie). As Finbarr said, this report is a summary of all the work that we did in 2024 and includes a lot of information, which you can find on our website.

Last year, we also looked at the work that we did over the last 10 years and wrote a summary report for children and young people to give you this information – I hope that you had the chance to read it. You can find it on our website as well.

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. I would like us to hear more of your views. In 2026, we are going to do some work on how best to get your views on the services that you use.

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 of your experiences of 2025.

Eva Boyle

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eva Boyle".

## Inspections of Children's Services in 2024





## Children's voices

Speaking with children and young people is important to us. When we inspect a service, we speak with the children and young people using the service to hear about their experience. Children's views on what is working well or what could be better are very important for inspectors to hear. This helps us to get a better understanding of how the service is doing. You will be able to read what children told us about their experiences throughout this report.

In 2024, our inspectors received feedback from **147** children and young people.

We did this in a number of ways:



Face-to-face chats



Chats on the phone

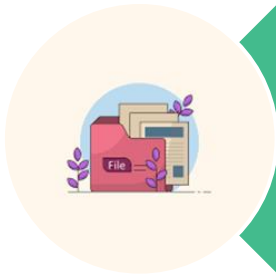


Children filling in surveys

At times, some children and young people choose not to speak with inspectors, which is their right. When this happens, we can learn about their experiences by:



Observing children  
with their carers



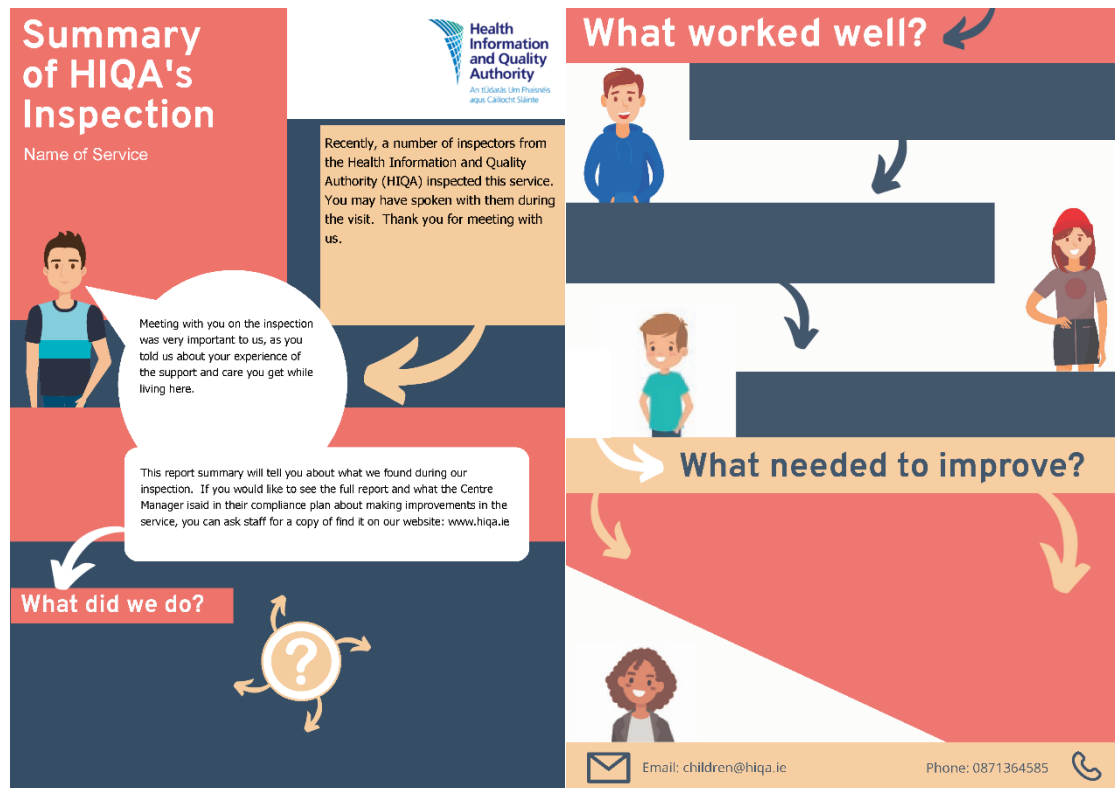
Reading children's  
files



Speaking with  
children's carers or  
guardians

## Our engagement with children

Following each inspection of residential services, a young person's summary report is sent to the person in charge of the service to share with each child or young person.



In our overview reports, we write summaries for children and young people, sharing what they told us about their care.

During the summer of 2024, HIQA held an art competition for children and young people. Children and young people designed a poster on the theme of 'Hear my voice,' as the care and support of children is at the core of what we do.

Many great entries were submitted. The winner of the competition was a 15-year-old who receives care in a children's residential centre. Their artwork is on the front cover of our *10 Years of Monitoring and Regulating Children's Social Care Services* report and on the cover of the summary report. The winning entries are shown below. All entries can be viewed on [www.hiqa.ie](http://www.hiqa.ie).



## Child protection and welfare services

Child protection and welfare (CPW) services are very important for the safety and welfare of children. They protect and keep children safe from harm, abuse or neglect. It is often a family's first time meeting with a social worker and the first chance for Tusla to help keep a child safe if needed. Our inspectors carried out a total of 11 inspections of CPW services in 2024 and spoke with nine children. Last year, most of our inspections of CPW services were in areas where children and their families were waiting to get a service. This meant that there were many children and parents that we were unable to speak with, as some of them had yet to be contacted by the service.

When someone is worried that a child is not safe or well cared for, they can tell Tusla. This is called a referral. All referrals are read by a Tusla worker. After this, a worker will carry out checks, like talking to the person who made the referral, to decide what to do next. These checks should happen very quickly to see if a child is safe or not. If needed, a social worker will do more checks and speak with the child, their family and other people in the child's life. This takes longer. They do this to find out if a child is safe and well looked after. After all of these checks and meetings with the child and their family, the social worker may make a plan with them about what needs to happen to keep the child safe. This is called a safety plan. When social workers are very worried about a child, they are placed on what is called the Child Protection Notification System or CPNS.



### What children told us about their experience of child protection and welfare services 2024

Due to the difficult and upsetting experiences of some children who have to navigate child protection and welfare services, inspectors decided to look at children's case files to understand what they went through without upsetting them. Children's right to engage or not in the inspection process was always respected.

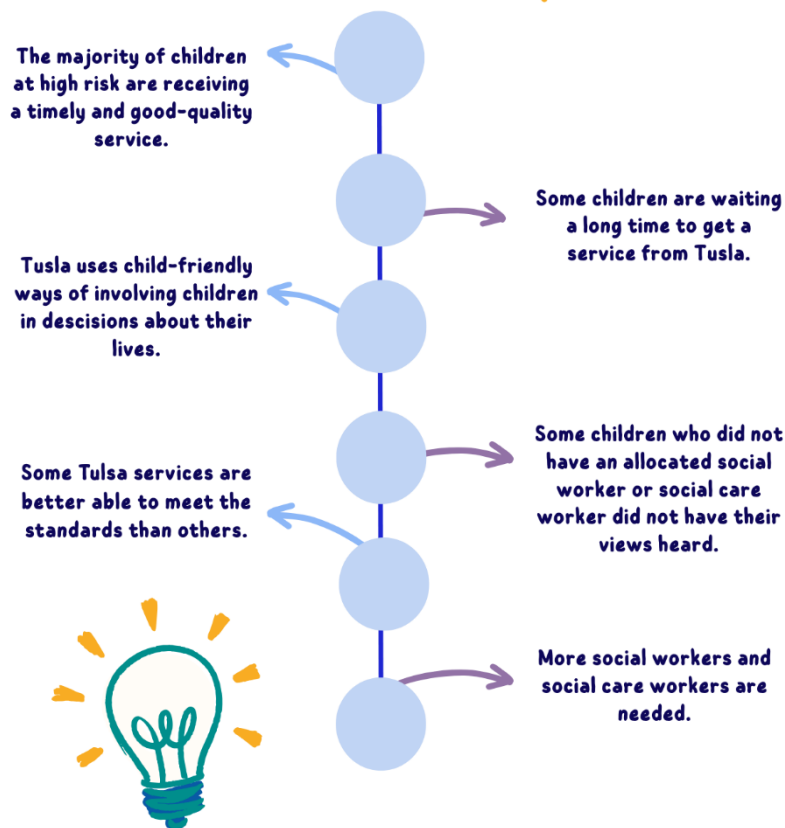
The majority of children who were receiving a child protection and welfare service had an allocated social worker, and were happy with the level of contact and the support they received from them. When children were waiting to be allocated a

social worker, there was limited contact made with them. This meant that children did not have the chance to have their views heard or considered when decisions were made to allocate their case or keep their case on the waiting list for support.

## Child Protection and Welfare

### What Worked Well

### What Needs to Improve



### What does this mean for children?

CPW services are usually a child's first contact with Tusla. It is really important that this happens at the right time. Children involved with Tusla's CPW services have not always had the service they needed at the right time. However, our inspections have found that children at immediate risk have been kept safe. Also, children who have a social worker or social care worker have said good things about how they have helped them. Tusla has developed a plan to improve child protection and welfare

services where a lot of children, young people and their parents are waiting for a service.

### A sample of some of the feedback of what children told us about their experience of the child protection and welfare services in 2024

#### What children told inspectors about the child protection and welfare service they receive

"She [social worker] is there for me" and "meets my needs."

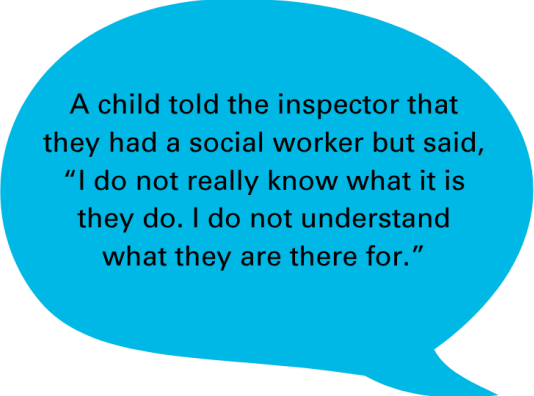
"She [social worker] is perfect, she does everything I need."

"The social worker is very nice, I could speak to her if I was worried or if there was something that I needed."

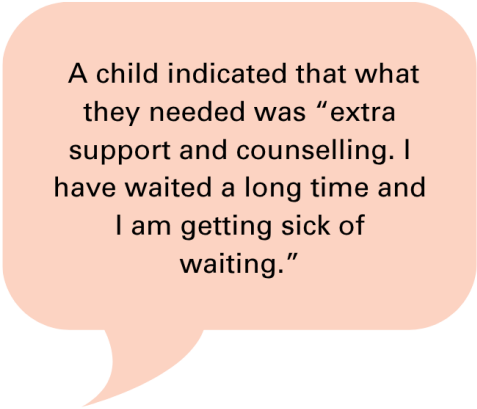
"[Social worker] comes visit school, phone calls, go out for tea. Going out is much better, there is no rush."

"I can really talk about what is going on and if I need any help."

### Challenges children faced in the child protection and welfare service they received



A child told the inspector that they had a social worker but said, "I do not really know what it is they do. I do not understand what they are there for."



A child indicated that what they needed was "extra support and counselling. I have waited a long time and I am getting sick of waiting."

### Foster care services

If a child or young person cannot remain in the family home due to worries about their safety, they may move into a foster home. Most children in care live with foster carers. Sometimes, these carers may be family members or other people the child knows well. This is called relative foster care. Other times, children may be placed with foster carers who they do not know. This is called general foster care. We



carried out a total of nine inspections of foster care services in 2024 and spoke with 20 children.



### What children told us about their experience of foster care services in 2024

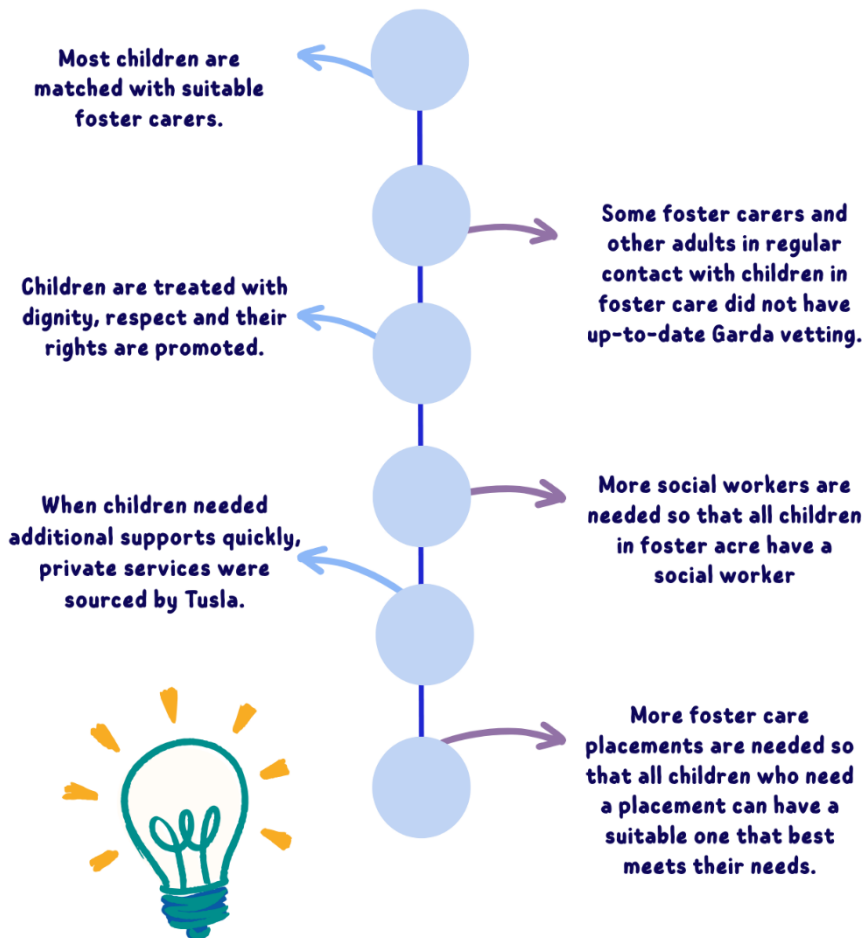
Some children had a social worker allocated to them, while others were placed on a waiting list. Many children who did not have an allocated social worker or were not receiving an active social work service were not checked on enough to ensure they were getting safe care that meets their needs.

Overall, children spoke highly of their social workers and other professionals working with them. Most children said they were listened to, were involved in decisions about their care and that they were often asked for their opinion. They felt their rights were respected as they were encouraged and supported to take part in decisions made about their lives and their care. They were also encouraged to take part in education and a lots of other activities and interests. For the most part, children were visited by social workers when they were supposed to be, with some visits slightly overdue. Where children did not have an allocated social worker, a secondary worker, such as a social care worker, was assigned to them. Some children gave feedback about areas for further improvement. For example, the need for social workers to revisit the information about children in care with them because this information was given prior to their coming into care, and they were “too young to remember”.

## Foster Care

### What Worked Well

### What Needs to Improve



### What has this meant for children?

Children who cannot stay at home are placed in foster care. Where possible, they are placed with family members or other people the child knows well. This is called relative foster care. However, our inspections have found that there are not enough foster care placements available for children and some children are placed far away from the area they come from. This makes it harder for them to keep in contact with their family and friends.

## A sample of some of the feedback of what children told us about their experience of the foster care services in 2024

### What children told inspectors about the foster care service they receive

"Easy to ask social worker if I need anything."

"The social care leader is good. She is kind and pretty. She asks me questions about my mammy, daddy and foster carer."

"[Social worker] listens and makes things happen."

"I have contact with my family. I know my foster carer will get in touch with my social worker if they need to speak to them."

"I like my social care worker and I see her about once a month. I am happy now, and I would tell her if I had any worries."

"Doing a good job, would give social worker a 10 out of 10."

### Challenges children told inspectors about the foster care service they receive

"I do not know how to make a complaint."

"Provide children with information on external advocacy groups."

The need for social workers to revisit the information about children in care with them because, this information was given prior to their coming into care and they were "too young to remember."

"More overnight trips with the fora [children in foster care groups.]"

## Children's residential centres

When a child cannot live at home and there are no foster care placements available which can meet their needs, they might live in a children's residential centre. These are normal houses in villages, towns and cities and sometimes in the countryside. The houses usually have between two and six children living there. These children attend local schools or training programmes and take part in local sports and other hobbies. Children in these residential centres are cared for by social care workers.

We carried out 25 inspections of children's residential centres run by Tusla in 2024 and spoke with a total of 66 children.



### What children told us about their experience of living in a children's residential centre

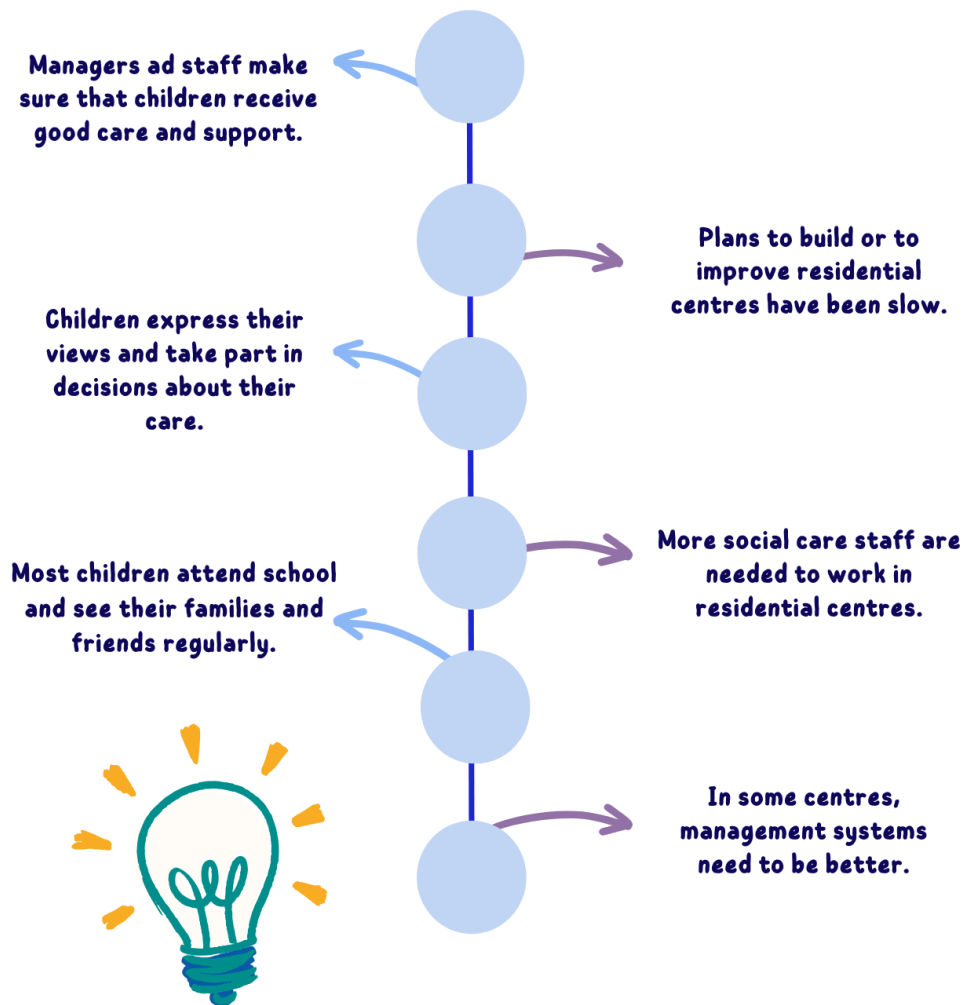
The majority of children said they felt safe and were happy living in their placements, and had built trusting relationships with staff and could speak to them if they had any worries or concerns. They were aware of their rights, understood them and were involved in decision-making about their care. Children told inspectors how their health and wellbeing were looked after and spoke about their school placements, training or work placements, favourite subjects and future ambitions. They also spoke about how they were supported with skills for independence and how they were supported in preparing to leave care and transition into adulthood.

While many children expressed very positive views, there were a small number of children who described different experiences. Some felt they were not asked for their opinions about their care enough or did not get the chance to make important decisions. Others said that it took a long time to get feedback on things. Where a child or young person did not have an allocated social worker or where there was a change of social worker, communication around this was seen as important to them. They felt unsure and no one had come to see them or speak to them about it. Others spoke about their placement being very far away from their home and that they had to travel long distances to see their family, and wanted to move closer to home. Some children said that sometimes they experienced challenges in seeing their social workers when they needed to as the centre was located a long distance from the social work team that placed them. Some children and young people spoke about the condition of the residential centres they lived in. They spoke about renovations and decorations that they were told about that had not happened.

## Children's Residential Centres

### What Worked Well

### What Needs to Improve



## What this meant for children?

Most children have had a good experience in residential care. Children were informed of their rights and encouraged to exercise their rights. Children had choices in all aspects of their care and their right not to take part was understood and respected. Children were assisted and supported through direct work with staff to develop their knowledge, self-awareness and understanding to protect themselves. Some children were placed far away from the area they come from and keeping in contact with family and friends was more difficult.

## A sample of some of the feedback of what children told us about living in residential care in 2024

### What children 'liked' about living in children's residential care

"It is a good place to live."

"Staff helped me to understand everything going on."

"Very happy there, I come to chill out and staff are great."

"This place has been great for me, they have really listened and helped me."

"There have been lots of ups and downs, [staff] are really good at supporting me."

"My life changed so much for the better since [the service] same into my life."

"They [the staff] are great. They are lovely and help you get through bad times."

"Yes, I do feel safe here, no reason not to."

### What children 'found hard' about living in children's residential care

"I want to move because it is too far from home."

"Hard to make friends."

"It is not great, feels like you are in a hospital."

"It sometimes takes a long time to get feedback on the things I have asked for."

"Life has gotten worse since coming into care."

"Sometimes I do not think that they are qualified enough to help with my problems."

"The house was supposed to be done up but it has not happened. It needs it."



## Special care units

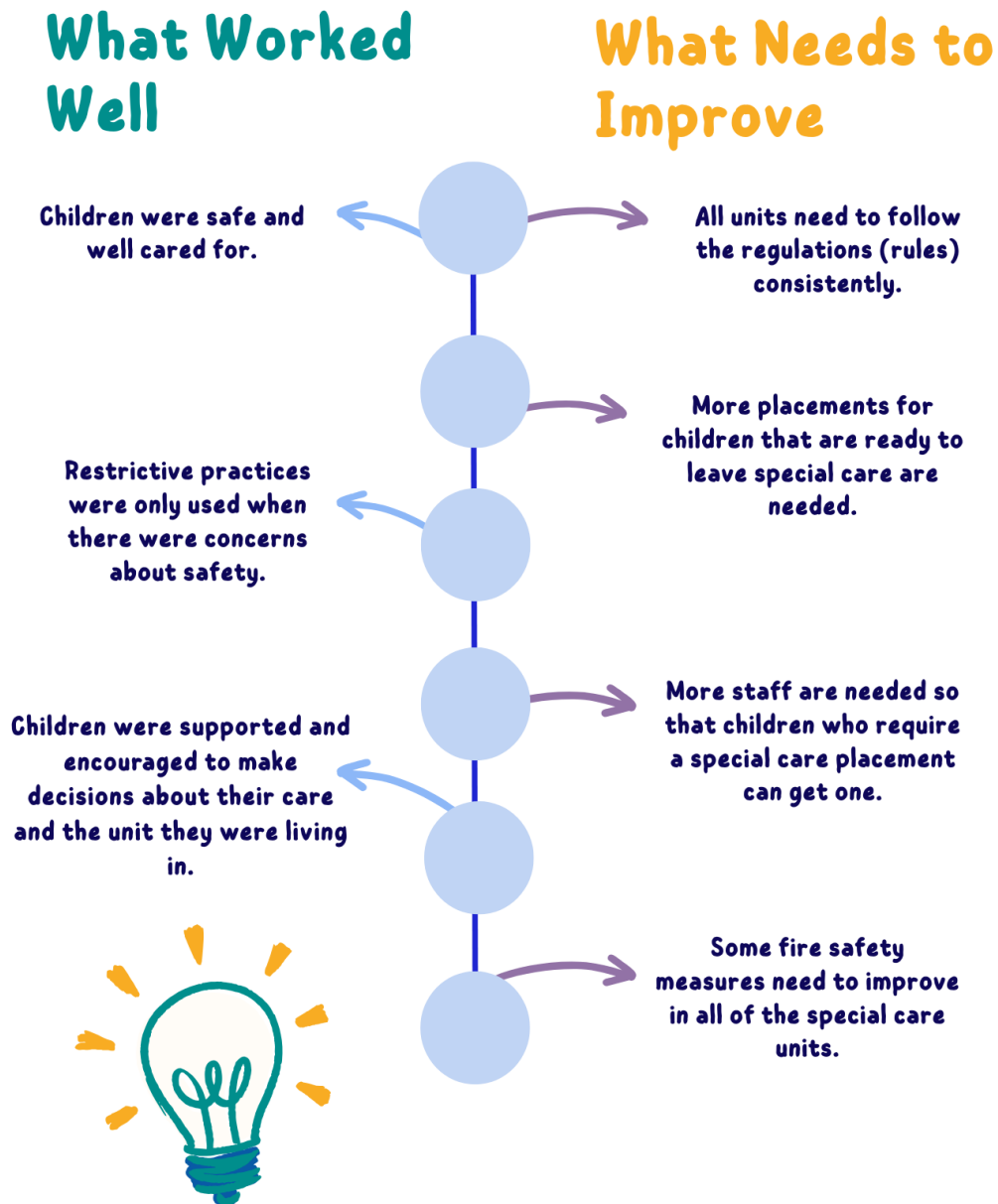
There are times for some children and young people when they cannot be cared for in their community. Children are placed in special care units by a court when they require care and protection. This happens when their behaviour places them (or others) at risk of harm to their life, health, safety, development or welfare. We carried out five inspections of special care units in 2024 and spoke with a total of 14 children. This included two children who were met more than once during the three inspections of one special care unit.



### **What children told us about their experience of living in a special care unit in 2024:**

Some children chose not to speak with an inspector. Instead, inspectors watched how they interacted with both staff and each other during the inspection. Children were provided with chances to take part in a variety of activities to support their development, including off-site activities. Overall, the children were very positive about their experience of special care units. Many spoke highly of the staff and the relationships they had built with them, and felt safe and listened to. However, some children said they did not want to live in special care and felt some parts of the service were unfair.

## Special Care Units



### What has this meant for children?

Most children have had a good experience most of their time in special care and felt that it had helped them. They felt safe and supported by staff and built good relationships with them. Children took part in a range of activities and interests on

and away from the unit, and were supported to reach their potential. Some were frustrated and worried as there were not enough placements for children to move to when they are ready to leave special care.

### A sample of some of the feedback of what children told us about living in special care in 2024

#### What children 'liked' about living in special care units

"As good as it can be."

"It is an alright place to be."

"Staff were nice."

"It is good...like the rules."

"I really like it here but I know I have to move on."

Helped them "tackle" individual "difficulties and issues."

"Look at me now."

"It [the centre] is not a place I ever wanted to go to but I am glad in a sense."

### What children 'found hard' about living in special care units



## Oberstown Children Detention Campus

Oberstown Children Detention Campus is the centre where young people are brought if a judge thinks 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. Inspectors spoke with 28 young people during the inspection. To ensure all young people had the chance to take part in the inspection, 35 surveys given to the centre before the inspection were completed by the young people. Inspectors spent time in all of the residential units and observed staff and young people interacting. They also watched young people's meetings and a number of their activities.



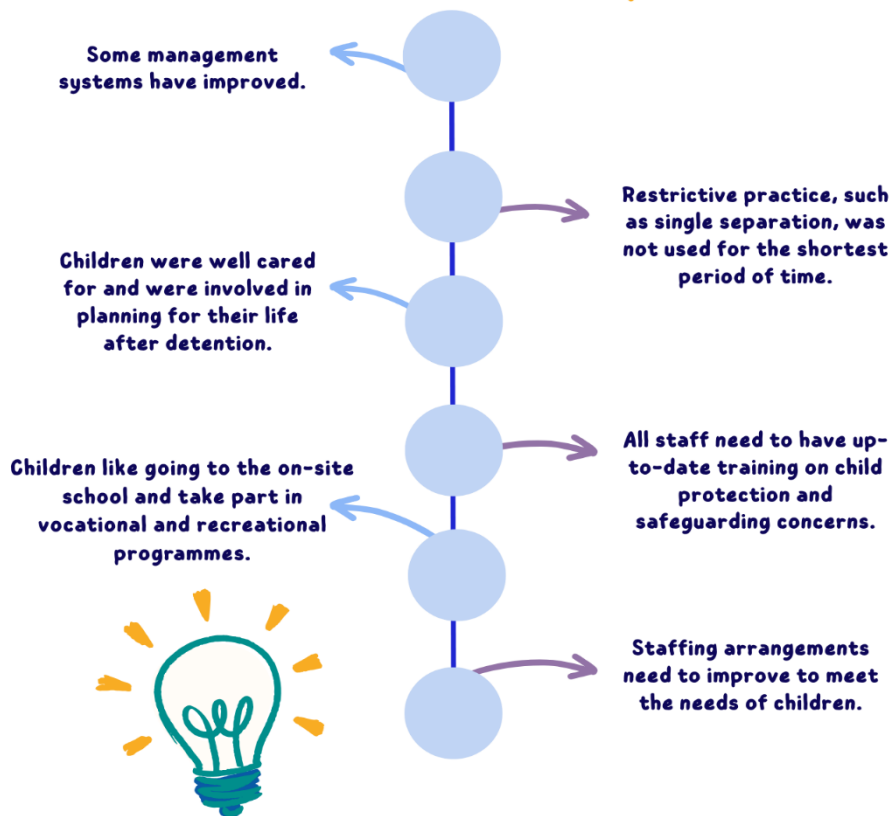
### What young people told us about their experience of living in Oberstown

Many were positive about the care they received. They were given support and information when they first arrived, staff listened to them and they felt included in decision-making about their care. They spoke positively about healthcare supports provided to them and liked attending the on-site school. They were aware of their rights and who they could talk to if they were worried, or felt they were not being treated right, such as their key worker and the advocacy officer. However, some young people expressed frustration and unhappiness about missing time in school due to behaviours that challenge and how these incidents were dealt with. They also expressed unhappiness with staffing levels, particularly at the weekends, which they felt impacted their activities.

## Oberstown Children Detention Campus

### What Worked Well

### What Needs to Improve



### What has this meant for children?

Children are cared for in a planned and personalised way based on their assessed needs. They can access educational programmes and ones that will help prepare them for their future careers. Children are supported to understand and take responsibility for their offending behaviour. They take part in decisions made about their care and are encouraged to express their views. Some children were unhappy about how incidents are dealt with and the impact this had on their time in school, as well as with staffing levels, particularly at the weekends, which they felt impacted on their activities.

## A sample of some of the feedback of what children told us about living in Oberstown in 2024

### What children 'liked' about living in a detention centre

"Good people in here... they take care of you."

"I have better fitness, I am off the drugs."

"Staff are brilliant, they do their best to help you."

"I have done a few exams. QQI level three, same as Junior Cert."

"This place will find you help when you need it."

"Courses I have done here will help me to get a job."

"The staff respect me on the unit."

"Looking at a new programme about victims of crime and not being a danger to the public."

### What children 'found hard' about living in a detention centre



### What is next?

In Ireland, we are only allowed by law to inspect children's residential centres run by Tusla. We have been waiting a long time to be given the power to inspect all children's residential centres that operate in Ireland. We believe that this is important as it would mean that all children in all types of children's residential centres would have the same type of inspection, which should make sure that all children receive good care.



We also want to look at how we can get better at hearing your views on services during inspections. We are going to work on this over 2025 and 2026, as listening to your experiences is very important to us.

Our inspections have shown that there have been improvements across children's services, but there is still work to do if children are to get better, more child-centred care services. Inspectors will continue to carry out inspections to ensure that children receive a safe service that provides good care and is run in line with national standards, rules and regulations. Keeping children safe is important to us, so we are going to look at how children were safeguarded in children's residential centres throughout 2025, we are going to go back to child protection and welfare and foster care services where we had worries in 2024, and we are going to look at how services make sure that your rights are protected when restrictive practices are used in special care and Oberstown Children Detention Campus.

## Conclusion

We have met with many children and listened to their experiences of care to find out what is working well and what could be better. While many parts of children's services are working well and have improved, there are still big challenges that are having an impact on some children. For example, not all children get a social worker when they need one, but it is good that more children are being allocated to social care staff. The management systems in children's services also need to be stronger to make sure children are safe and receiving good-quality care. The use of restrictive practices, such as single separation (this is when a young person is locked in their bedroom or another room, due to their behaviour putting them or others in danger) in some services were not in line with guidance or policy, and services need to have enough staff to meet the needs of children. We will continue to work with Tusla and Oberstown Children Detention Campus to address these challenges to make sure that children are receiving the best possible service.

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**For further information please contact:**

Health Information and Quality Authority  
George's Court  
George's Lane  
Smithfield  
Dublin 7  
D07 E98Y

Phone: +353 (0) 1 814 7400

Email: [info@hiqa.ie](mailto:info@hiqa.ie)

[www.hiqa.ie](http://www.hiqa.ie)

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