

TÚSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

**EARLY
YEARS**
INSPECTORATE

**Activity
Report**



Our vision is for all services regulated by the Early Years Inspectorate to be safe and happy places for children to play, learn and develop.

2023

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1. Executive Summary

The Early Years Inspectorate, operating under the statutory authority of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, the Child Care Act 1991, (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016, the School Age Services Regulations 2018, the Early Years Services (Amendment) Regulations 2022, and the Children First Act 2015, is responsible for the regulation, inspection and enforcement of early years services in Ireland. Its vision is to ensure that all regulated services provide safe and happy places where children can play, learn and develop.

Throughout 2023, the Inspectorate maintained a strong focus on effective regulation across both pre-school and school-age services, while continuing to strengthen relationships with providers and stakeholders. The regulatory environment during the year was characterised by consolidation of systems, stabilisation following the pandemic period, and preparation for expanded responsibilities arising from forthcoming childminding legislation.

This Annual Activity Report provides a comprehensive overview of the Inspectorate's activity and performance in 2023, including registration, inspection, enforcement, quality assurance, and stakeholder engagement. A significant milestone was the achievement of ISO 9001 accreditation from the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI), confirming that the Inspectorate's Quality Management System meets internationally recognised standards for governance, risk management and continuous improvement.

At the end of December 2023, the national register contained **6,570 regulated services**:

- **4,044 pre-school services**
- **2,535 school-age services**

During the year, the Inspectorate undertook **2,391 inspections** of pre-school services meeting targets to inspect all high-risk services and all services due within the three-year inspection cycle. Compliance levels remained consistently high, with quarterly compliance rates ranging from **91% to 95%**, and an overall annual average of **92%**. Approximately 92% of services had achieved compliance by the time inspection reports were published, demonstrating the effectiveness of corrective and preventive actions (CAPA) in addressing non-compliance at an early stage. Inspection of school-age services continued in 2023 on a risk-based basis, with inspections undertaken primarily in response to concerns, notifications of incident, or identified safeguarding risks. A total of **32 school-age** service inspections were completed during the year, with all inspection reports published to support transparency and public assurance.

Registration and certification activity continued at scale, with **6,729 certificates of registration** issued during 2023. The streamlined renewal process introduced under S.I. No. 195/2022 supported a **98% renewal success rate** for the relevant cohort. Project 903, initiated to address outstanding 2019 registration renewals, reached effective completion: of the 99 services outstanding at the start of 2023, **72 achieved compliance**, **13 ceased operating**, and **14 remained in enforcement** at year-end.

Enforcement and escalation remained essential components of the regulatory framework. In 2023:

- **28 services** were referred to the National Registration Enforcement Panel (NREP)
- **48 Regulatory Enforcement Meetings** were held
- **27 services** engaged in enforcement action
- **10 services** had conditions attached to their registration

Conditions were applied primarily in relation to building suitability, fire safety and governance. Unregistered services were required to cease operating or progress to registration, with warrants of entry and prosecution available where necessary.

Quality assurance and system improvement were further embedded in practice. The Inspectorate enhanced its inspection report templates, strengthened internal audit processes, and expanded guidance and eLearning supports for providers. These developments reflect the Inspectorate's commitment to transparency, consistency and continuous improvement across the sector.

Overall, 2023 was a year of consolidation, quality enhancement and strengthened regulatory oversight. The Inspectorate continued to balance proportionate enforcement with constructive engagement, ensuring that the regulatory system remains robust, fair and focused on safeguarding children's wellbeing.

Looking ahead, 2023 laid important foundations for the regulation of childminding services from 2024, with preparatory work undertaken to support system readiness, regulatory alignment, and the planned expansion of the Inspectorate's statutory functions.

2. Children's Services Regulation

CSR has a vision for all services regulated by Children's Services Regulation to be safe and happy places for children and young people to live, play, learn and develop

Children's Services Regulation (CSR) is a core function within Tusla's Quality and Regulation Directorate and is responsible for the effective operation, governance and performance management of the Agency's statutory regulatory responsibilities. CSR provides public assurance that Tusla's regulatory functions operate to the highest standards, are grounded in evidence-based practice, and are delivered in accordance with legislation.

Tusla – The Child and Family Agency, established in 2014 under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, has a statutory mandate to “support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children, and the effective functioning of families”. CSR contributes to this mandate by regulating services that provide care, education and developmental support to children and young people.

CSR's vision is that **all regulated services are safe and happy places for children and young people to live, play, learn and develop**. To achieve this, CSR implements a defined regulatory strategy built around four strategic goals, one of which is the delivery of effective regulation. This includes using the full range of enforcement powers available under legislation to ensure that services meet required standards and that risks to children are addressed promptly and proportionately.

2.1. Role of the Early Years Inspectorate within CSR

The Early Years Inspectorate is a key regulatory service within CSR and is the statutory regulator of early years services in Ireland. Its remit includes:

- **Registration** of pre-school and school-age services
- **Inspection** of services to assess compliance with legislation
- **Enforcement**, where necessary, to address significant or persistent non-compliance

The Inspectorate regulates two categories of early years services:

- **Pre-school services** (services for children aged 0–6 years)
- **School-age services** (services for children under 15 years outside of school hours)

The legal basis for this regulatory work is set out across several key instruments, including:

- Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (Part 12)

- Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016
- Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Registration of School Age Services) Regulations 2018
- Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2022
- Children First Act 2015

These instruments collectively establish the statutory authority for registration, inspection, enforcement and the maintenance of the national register of early years services.

2.2. Regulatory Approach

CSR and the Early Years Inspectorate apply a regulatory philosophy that balances robust oversight with proportionate support. The Inspectorate recognises that most non-compliance identified during inspection can be addressed through early corrective and preventive actions (CAPA) undertaken by providers. As the report notes, “non-compliance identified on inspection is, in the main, addressed through corrective and preventive actions... at an early stage”.

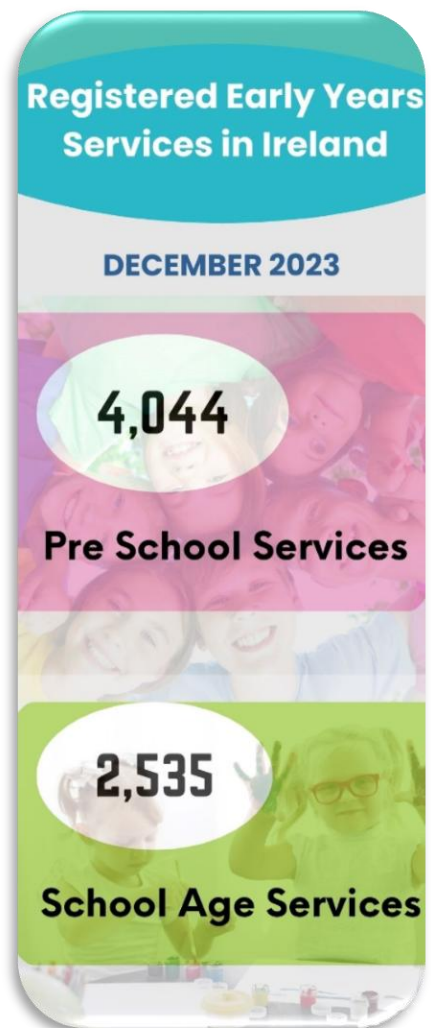
Where risks are more serious, persistent or systemic, the Inspectorate has statutory authority to:

- Refuse registration
- Remove a service from the register
- Attach conditions to registration
- Initiate prosecution

These decisions are considered by the **National Registration and Enforcement Panel (NREP)**, which provides independent oversight and ensures consistency and fairness in enforcement actions.

2.3. 2023 Context

In 2023, the work of Children’s Services Regulation and the Early Years Inspectorate was shaped by a period of consolidation following the pandemic, alongside continued system strengthening and quality enhancement. Regulatory activity focused on embedding consistent processes, strengthening quality assurance frameworks, and expanding enforcement capacity to ensure effective oversight of early years services. During the year, the Inspectorate continued to develop specialist guidance and sector supports to promote compliance and high-quality practice, while also strengthening engagement with providers and key stakeholders. In parallel, significant preparatory work was undertaken to support the introduction of statutory regulation of



childminding services from 2024, with a focus on system readiness, regulatory alignment, and organisational capacity to accommodate the planned expansion of statutory responsibilities.

The Inspectorate continued to implement its strategic approach to regulation, ensuring that services operate safely and in compliance with legislation, while supporting providers to sustain high-quality practice.

3. Key Achievements 2023

In 2023, the Early Years Inspectorate delivered a wide range of regulatory, quality assurance and stakeholder engagement activities. These achievements reflect the Inspectorate’s strategic commitment to effective regulation, continuous improvement, and sector support.

3.1. Data Overview

The following headline figures summarise the Inspectorate’s operational activity across the year.

| Category | Data item | 2023 figure |
|--|---|--------------|
| Register size (end December 2023) | Total regulated services on national register | 6,570 |
| | Pre-school services on national register | 4,044 |
| | School-age services on national register | 2,535 |
| Inspection activity | Pre-school inspections completed | 2,391 |
| | School-age inspections completed | 32 |
| Registration activity | Certificates of registration issued | 6,729 |
| | Registration renewals completed | 729 |
| | New pre-school services approved | 86 |
| | Pre-school services closed | 115 |
| | New school-age services approved | 298 |
| | School-age services closed | 107 |
| Concerns and notifications | Notifications of incident received | 1,040 |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|------------|
| | Notifications within Early Years Inspectorate remit | 855 |
| | Concerns submitted to the Inspectorate | 490 |
| | Concerns rated critical risk | 17 |
| | Concerns rated high risk | 171 |
| Enforcement and escalation | Immediate Action Notices issued | 282 |
| | Services referred to NREP | 28 |
| | Regulatory Enforcement Meetings held | 48 |
| | Services engaged in enforcement action | 27 |
| | Services with conditions attached to registration | 10 |

Figure 1 - Data at a glance

3.2. Quality Assurance Milestone

A major achievement in 2023 was the successful attainment of **ISO 9001 certification** from the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI). This external accreditation confirms that the Inspectorate's Quality Management System (QMS) meets internationally recognised standards for:

- Risk management
- Document management
- Process consistency
- Continuous improvement
- Regulatory governance

The certification followed a rigorous two-stage assessment process conducted by NSAI in early 2023.

3.3. Registration Renewal

The streamlined registration renewal process introduced under S.I. No. 195/2022 continued to deliver efficiencies for providers and the Inspectorate. In 2023:

- **729 services** successfully completed registration renewal
- The renewal success rate for the relevant cohort was **98%**
- Garda Vetting Declarations were required within 36 months of submission
- Support documentation and eLearning modules were provided to assist providers

3.4. Project 903 Completion

Project 903, initiated in 2022 to address 903 services with outstanding 2019 registration renewal requirements, reached effective closure in 2023:



Figure 2 - Project 903 outcomes

This outcome reflects the effectiveness of targeted regulatory engagement and escalation pathways.

3.5. Enforcement and Escalation

Enforcement activity remained proportionate and targeted, with the National Registration Enforcement Panel (NREP) playing a central role in addressing serious or persistent non-compliance.

2023 Enforcement Activity



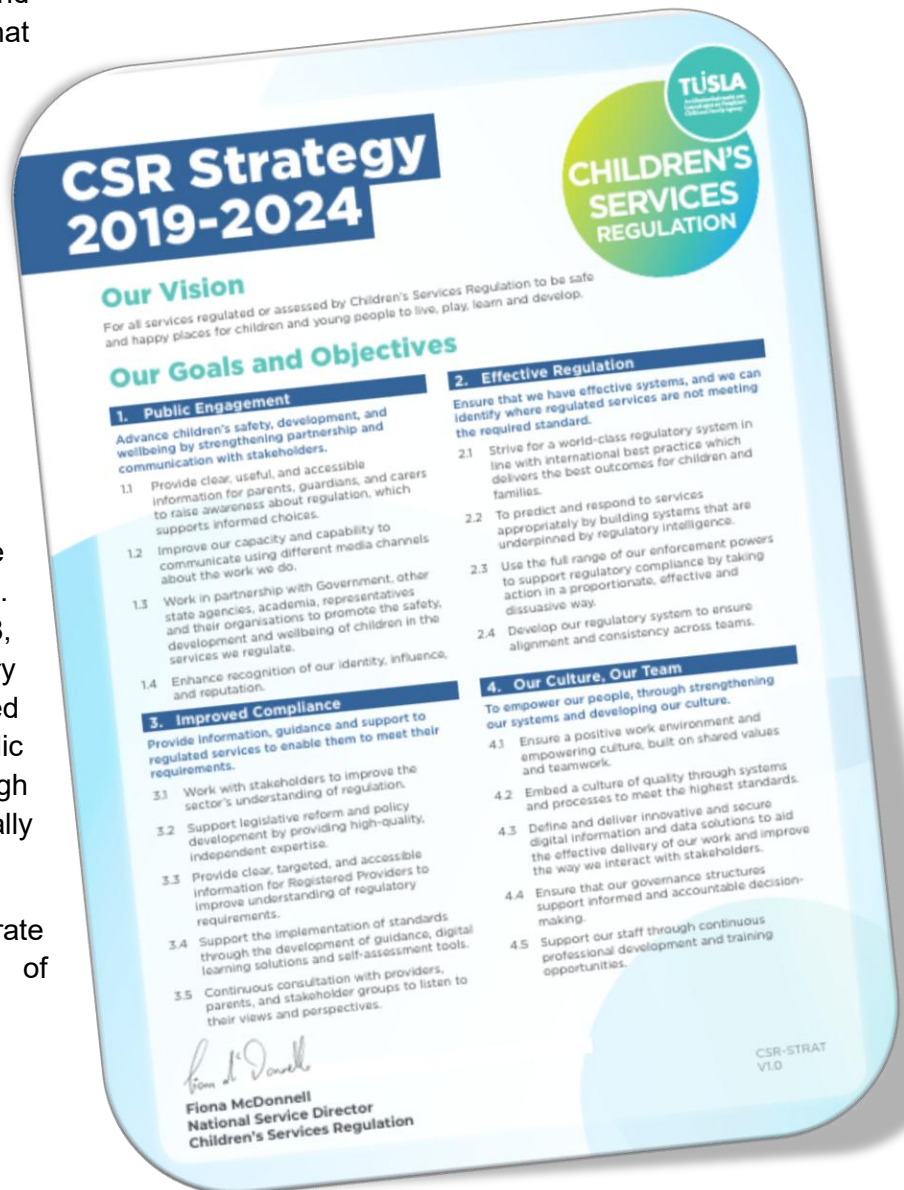
Figure 3 - NREP outcomes

4. Introduction

The Early Years Inspectorate operates as a statutory regulator within Tusla – The Child and Family Agency, under the governance of the Children’s Services Regulation (CSR) directorate. Its core function is to regulate early years services in Ireland through registration, inspection, and enforcement, ensuring that services are safe, high-quality environments where children can play, learn and develop.

Tusla was established in 2014 under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, with a statutory mandate to “support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children, and the effective functioning of families”. CSR, formed in 2018, oversees Tusla’s regulatory functions and is committed to delivering public assurance through evidence-based, legally grounded practice.

The Early Years Inspectorate regulates two categories of services:



- **Pre-school services:** including crèches, day nurseries, play groups and similar services for children aged 0–6 years.
- **School-age services:** providing care and developmental activities for children under 15 years outside of school hours.

The legal framework underpinning this work includes:

Child Care Act 1991, Section 58 as amended by Part 12 of the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013 (No 40 of 2013)

This Act established the role and function of Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate and set out the legal basis for the regulation, registration and inspection of all Early Years Services

Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 (S.I. No. 221/2016)

These regulations set out the specific requirements that Early Years (pre-school) services must legally adhere to. Inspections of services measure compliance against these regulations.

Child Care Regulations (The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Amendments) Regulations 2016. (S.I. No. 632/2016)

These regulations specifically clarified the employment status of people employed under the Access and Inclusion

Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2022 (S.I. No. 195/2022)

This enabled a streamlined process for the renewal of registration of Early Years (pre-school) Services and introduced a requirement for certificates of registration to be issued and displayed

Figure 4 - Pre-school legislation

In 2023, the Inspectorate continued to implement its strategic regulatory approach, balancing robust enforcement with proportionate support. The year was marked by:

- Consolidation of regulatory systems and quality assurance frameworks
- Attainment of ISO 9001 certification for its Quality Management System
- Expansion of enforcement capacity via the National Registration Enforcement Panel (NREP)
- Development of specialist guidance and eLearning supports
- Enhanced stakeholder engagement and sector partnerships

Preparatory work for the regulation of childminding services

The Inspectorate's philosophy emphasises early intervention and corrective action. As noted in the report, "non-compliance identified on inspection is, in the main, addressed through corrective and preventive actions... at an early stage". Where risks are significant or persistent, statutory powers are used to refuse registration, remove services from the

register, attach conditions, or initiate prosecution. These decisions are considered by the NREP to ensure consistency and fairness.

This report presents a detailed account of the Inspectorate's activity in 2023, structured to reflect its operational pillars: registration, inspection, enforcement, quality assurance, and stakeholder engagement. It provides transparency on performance, highlights areas of progress, and outlines the regulatory landscape as it evolves to meet emerging needs.

5. Pre-School Services

Pre-school services form the largest component of the early years sector and include crèches, day nurseries, play groups and similar settings catering for children aged 0–6 years. These services operate under the Child Care Act 1991 (as amended) and the Early Years Services Regulations 2016, with the 2022 amendments streamlining aspects of the registration renewal process. The Early Years Inspectorate oversees the registration, inspection and enforcement of these services, ensuring that children experience safe, developmentally appropriate environments.

5.1. Registration

Initial registration is a statutory requirement for all pre-school services before they can operate. The purpose of initial registration is to ensure that a service is suitable, safe and compliant from the outset. The process involves several defined stages, beginning with the submission of an application through the Tusla Portal. Providers must upload all required documentation, including governance information, policies and procedures, premises details, staffing information and evidence of compliance with relevant legislation.

Once an application is received, the Registration Office conducts a detailed assessment to confirm that all required documents have been submitted and that the information provided is complete. Following this, a Fit for Purpose (FFP) inspection is carried out. During the FFP inspection, an inspector visits the premises to assess the physical environment, governance arrangements, policies, procedures and staffing. The inspection ensures that the premises are safe, suitable and appropriately equipped, and that the service has the capacity to meet regulatory requirements.

After the inspection, the Inspectorate reviews all documentation and inspection findings before making a regulatory decision. If the service meets the requirements for registration, a certificate of registration is issued. This certificate confirms the service's legal status and outlines any conditions attached to the registration.

Throughout 2023, this process continued to operate effectively. A total of **86 new pre-school services** were approved for registration, while **115 services closed**, resulting in a slight net reduction in the overall number of registered services. At the end of December 2023, **4,044 pre-school services** were listed on the national register.

To support providers, the Inspectorate expanded its suite of eLearning modules, including guidance on **registration applications**, **Change in Circumstance (CIC) submissions** and the **use of the Tusla Portal**. These supports contributed to improved application

quality and reduced administrative burden. Providers were also directed to the relevant guidance documents, including:

- [Registration Policy: New Applications](#)
- [A Guide to Building Safety - Fire and Planning Requirements](#)

These documents were made available through the [Tusla website](#) and the provider portal. In 2023, all new registration applications were processed by the registration team within regulatory timeframes.

To support the sector, the Inspectorate developed and launched eLearning programmes for:

- **Registration applications** (completed and launched Q1 2023)
- **Change in Circumstances requests** (completed and launched Q1 2023)
- **Registration Renewal** - Making a submission on the Tusla Portal (completed Q4 2022)

These eLearning programmes provide accessible guidance to service providers and support improved application quality, reducing the need for multiple submission iterations.

At the end of 2022 there were 4,044 registered pre-school services. This figure was a small decrease from the 4,074 services that were registered in 2022.

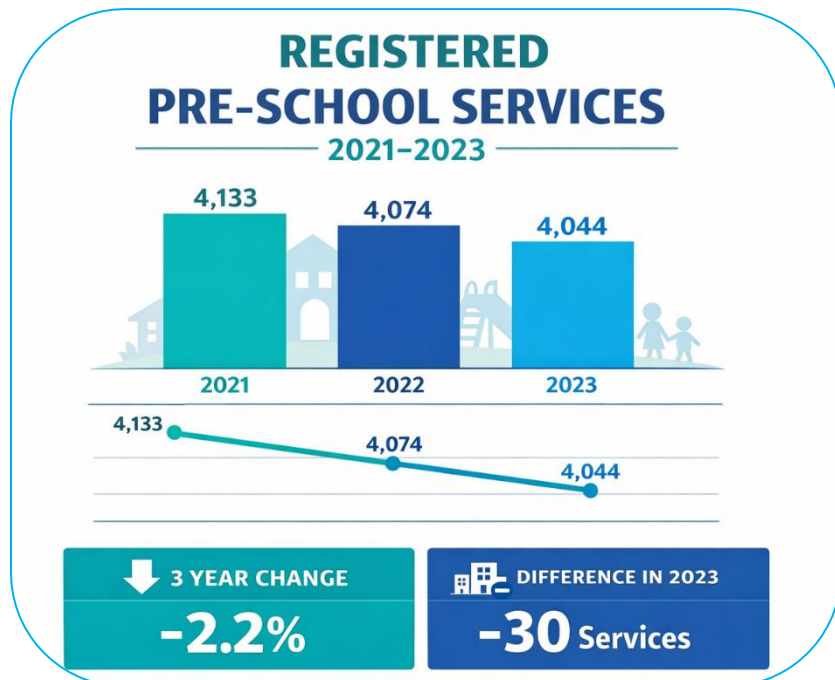


Figure 5 - Registered pre-school services

There were 86 approved applications for a new pre-school service. In 2022 83 applications were approved. No services were refused registration.

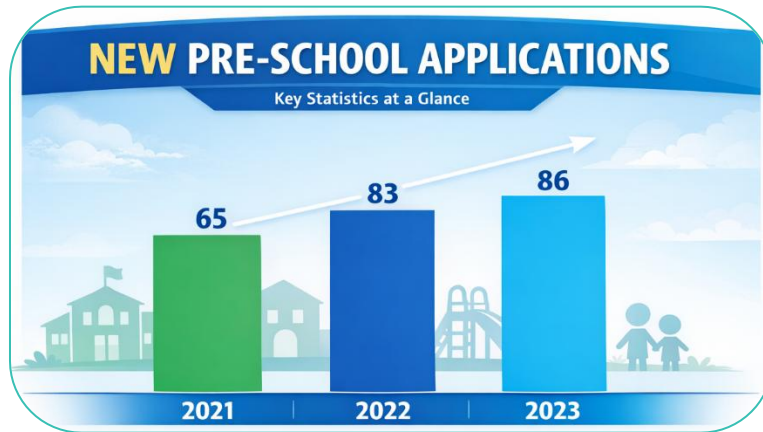


Figure 6 - New pre-school services

Whilst **86** new services were approved to open in 2023, **115** pre-schools closed.

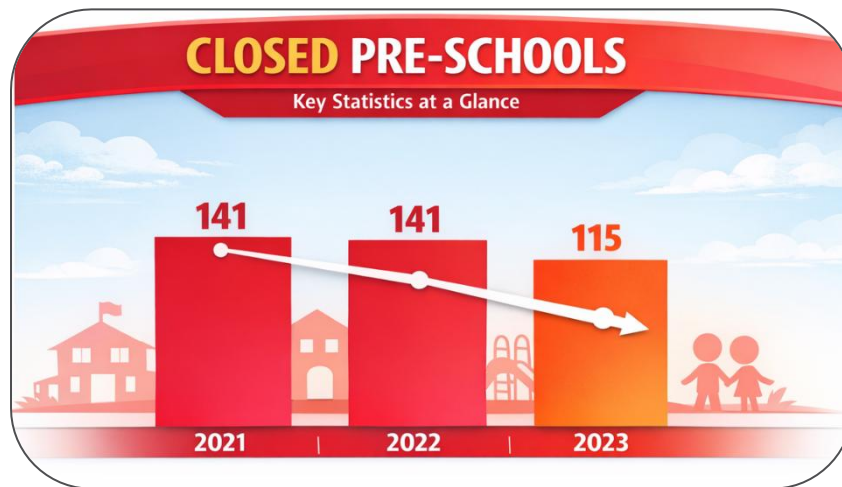


Figure 7 - Closed pre-school services

5.2. Registration Renewal

All Early Years Services are legally required to renew registration every three years. This requirement is set out in Child Care Act 1991, Section 58D(4) as amended by Part 12 of the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013.

Registration renewal is an integral part of the ongoing regulation of Early Years Services which serves to provide assurance to parents, government and the general public, that Registered Providers have taken all necessary actions to ensure the safety and welfare of the children who attend them.

During 2022, the Government introduced new legislation to streamline the renewal of registration process for early years providers with a considerable reduction of administrative burden to the applicant. These provisions are available only to those who have completed full application for registration, those who have not are ineligible to avail of this process.

2022 saw the first tranche of providers of both preschool, and school age settings that were required to renew their registration under the revised legislation. The process requires that an application is accompanied by Garda Vetting Declarations for relevant persons dated within 36 months of the date of application submission.

The inspectorate developed support documentation to support services with registration renewal requirements.

In 2023 **729** early years services successfully completed registration renewal. In addition, **Project 903**, which was a targeted piece of work aimed at supporting providers who needed to renew their registration under the previous legislation was brought to a successful conclusion. More information in relation to **Project 903** activity in 2023 can be found in the [Enforcement and Escalation Activity](#) section of this report.

5.2.1. Stakeholder Satisfaction

In April a stakeholder satisfaction survey was undertaken to increase understanding of how registered providers found the new registration renewal process and to identify potential improvements to the system. **1,534** registered providers responded

Note – Only providers who utilised registration office support responded to the last question

Key feedback areas identified for improvement:

- Portal technical issues and user interface enhancements
- Increased telephone access to registration staff
- Process simplification and reduced administrative burden

All of these areas have been addressed by the Registration Office Team

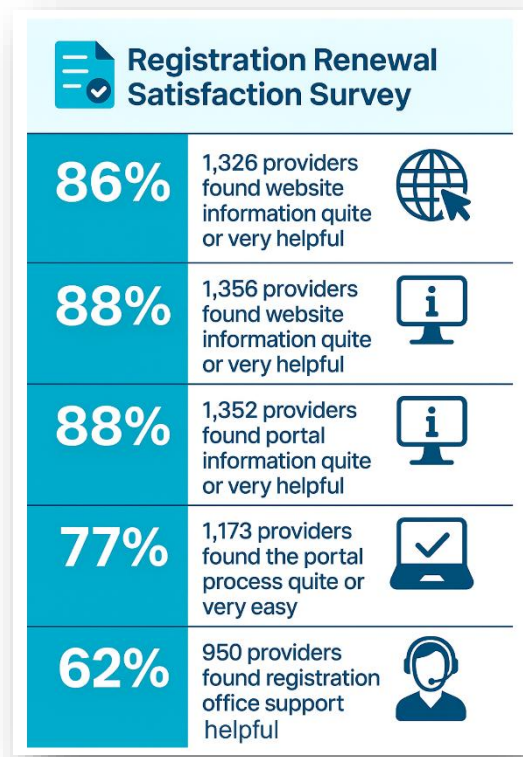


Figure 8 - Registration renewal survey

5.3. Change in Circumstance Applications

All Service providers are required to notify the Early Years Inspectorate of any changes in circumstances affecting their registration, including:

- Changes in staffing or key personnel
- Changes in premises or facilities
- Changes in service provision or hours of operation

- Changes in ownership or management
- Changes affecting child safeguarding or welfare arrangements

All Changes in Circumstances requests are processed within regulatory timeframes. The request is assessed to determine whether any regulatory conditions or restrictions are required prior to changes taking effect. Providers must submit supporting documentation as required by the Regulations.

There are two types of requests; **Category 1 Requests** are minor administrative changes, such as updates to email address or phone number. They undergo a desk-based assessment only, without needing a Fit for Purpose (FFP) inspection, and are approved faster for publication on the service register. **Category 2 Requests** involve more substantive changes, like alterations in service type or increases in the number of children. They require supporting documents (e.g., planning permission, fire safety certificates) and a Fit for Purpose inspection before approval.

For each application there may be a number of specific requests. This is demonstrated in the infographic.

In 2023 there were **1,933 applications** for changes in circumstances from pre-school services. **1,967 applications** were processed including a small number from the end of 2022. This amounted to a total of **3,322 individual change requests**.

Of these **there** were 2,466 category 1 requests and 876 category 2 requests.

During 2023, all Changes in Circumstances applications from registered pre-school and school age services were processed and determined within regulatory timeframes, supporting service providers to adapt their operations in response to evolving circumstances.



Figure 9 - Pre-school CICs

5.4. Help Desk Function

In May, the Registration Office introduced a dedicated helpdesk function to support Registered Providers with queries related to new applications, change in circumstance application and registration renewal. There was a high level of demand throughout the year

The Help Desk, operational since May 2023, managed significant demand; there were **2,117 calls** which took **5,843 minutes** to process.



Figure 10 - Help Desk calls

5.5. Inspection

Inspection is a core regulatory function of the Early Years Inspectorate. It provides assurance that services are operating in compliance with the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 and that children are cared for in safe and appropriate environments. Inspections are carried out by authorised persons appointed under the Act and are conducted in accordance with the Inspectorate's national inspection framework.

During 2023, the Inspectorate undertook **2,391 inspections** of pre-school services. This ensured that all services due for inspection were visited and that all identified high-risk services were inspected at least once. Inspections continued to focus on verifying compliance with statutory requirements and supporting providers to address non-compliance through corrective and preventive actions.

The inspection process includes:

- **Notification of inspection** and provision of guidance materials to the provider.
- **On-site inspection**, during which inspectors assess the premises, governance, staffing, policies and procedures, and interactions with children.
- **Feedback to the provider**, including verbal feedback on the day and a written inspection report.
- **Issuance of a draft inspection report**, allowing the provider to respond to findings.
- **Finalisation of the inspection report**, incorporating provider feedback where appropriate.
- **Publication of the report** on the [Tusla website](#).

The most frequently identified areas of non-compliance included safeguarding, health and safety, premises suitability, record-keeping and aspects of governance. Regulation 23 (Safeguarding, Health, Safety and Welfare) accounted for the highest proportion of

non-compliances at **21.61%**, followed by Regulation 29 (Premises) and Regulation 19 (Health, Welfare and Development of the Child).

Inspection reports continued to be published on the [Tusla website](#), providing public access to findings and supporting transparency in the regulation of early years services.

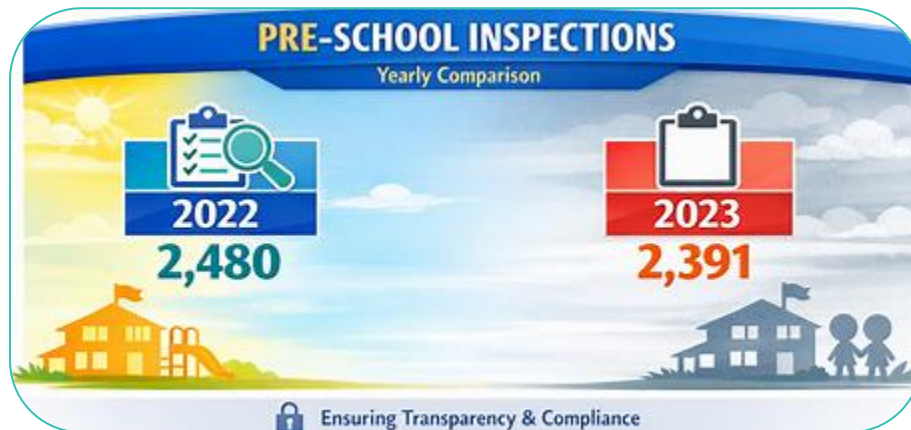


Figure 11 - Pre-school inspections

5.5.1. Compliance on inspection

Overall compliance levels following inspection remained consistently high throughout 2023, demonstrating the effectiveness of the Early Years Inspectorate’s regulatory and corrective framework. A total of **2,391** inspections were undertaken across pre-school and school-age services, with quarterly compliance rates ranging from **91% to 95%** and an overall annual average compliance rate of **92%**. The majority of non-compliance identified during inspection was addressed through timely corrective and preventive actions (CAPA), with approximately **92%** of services achieving compliance by the time inspection reports were published. This reflects the Inspectorate’s emphasis on early intervention, proportionate regulation, and provider engagement. Where non-compliance was more serious or persistent, escalation pathways were applied, including follow-up inspections, Regulatory Compliance Meetings, and enforcement action where necessary. The consistently high compliance outcomes indicate that inspection activity, supported by clear reporting, guidance, and quality assurance processes, continues to be effective in safeguarding children’s health, safety, and wellbeing across the early years sector.

Where non-compliance was identified during inspections it reflected recurring themes that informed regulatory focus and sector support. The most frequently cited areas of non-compliance related to safeguarding, health and safety, premises suitability, record-keeping, and governance arrangements. Regulation 23 (Safeguarding, Health, Safety and Welfare) accounted for the highest proportion of findings, followed by Regulation 29 (Premises) and Regulation 19 (Health, Welfare and Development of the Child). In the majority of cases, non-compliance did not present an immediate risk and was addressed through the Corrective and Preventive Action (CAPA) process, supported by

guidance, evidence review, and follow-up where required. Where non-compliance was serious, persistent, or posed an increased risk to children, the Inspectorate applied escalation pathways including Immediate Action Notices, Regulatory Compliance Meetings, conditions on registration, and referral to the National Registration Enforcement Panel. This graduated approach ensured that risks were addressed proportionately while supporting services to achieve and sustain compliance.

The following regulations most frequently triggered non-compliance findings:

| Regulation | Percentage |
|---|---------------|
| Regulation 23 - Safeguarding, Health, Safety and Welfare | 21.61% |
| Regulation 29 - Premises | 8.46% |
| Regulation 19 - Health, Welfare and Development of Child | 7.89% |
| Regulation 16 - Records in Relation to Pre-School Service | 6.63% |
| Regulation 09 - Management and Recruitment | 5.80% |
| Regulation 25 - First Aid | 5.66% |
| Regulation 26 - Fire Safety Measures | 5.21% |
| Regulation 09 (2ab) - References and Vetting | 5.07% |
| Regulation 09 (4) - Police Vetting | 4.12% |
| Other Regulations (23 categories) | 29.55% |

Figure 12 - Inspection non-compliance

During 2023 **282** services were issued with Immediate Action Notices.

5.5.2. Inspection Developments

During 2023, the Inspectorate undertook a comprehensive review and enhancement of its **inspection report templates**, focusing on achieving greater clarity and consistency in reporting. This initiative aimed to ensure that inspection outcomes are communicated in a clear and standardised manner, benefiting both service providers and regulatory staff. Alongside this, the **inspection notes templates** were also improved, supporting inspectors in documenting their findings more effectively and ensuring that records are both thorough and accessible. Recognising the value of stakeholder input, the Inspectorate completed an **external consultation** on the new report design, gathering feedback to refine and validate the changes.

The updated templates now play a crucial role in facilitating better communication with service providers. They enable clearer identification of **regulatory requirements**, helping

providers understand expectations and address any areas of non-compliance more efficiently. Overall, these improvements reflect the Inspectorate's commitment to transparency, quality, and collaborative engagement within the sector.

6. School-Age Services

A 'school age service' is any early years service, play group, day nursery, crèche, day-care or other similar service which:

- Caters for children under the age of 15 years enrolled in a school providing primary or post primary education.
- Provides a range of activities that are developmental, educational and recreational in manner, which take place outside of school hours, the primary purpose of which is to care for children where their parents are unavailable.
- The basis for access to which is made publicly known to the parents and guardians of the children.

In February 2019, the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Registration of School Age Services) Regulations 2018 came into effect. Through the enactment of the regulations, services who cater for School Age children are required to register with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency before commencing.

Child Care Act 1991, Section 22 as amended by Childcare Support Act 2018

This Act defined a 'School Age Service' for the purposes of regulation

Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Registration of School Age Services) Regulations 2018 (S.I. No. 575/2018)

These regulations established the requirement for services which cater specifically for school age children to register with Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate.

Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Registration of School Age Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2022 (S.I. No. 196/2022)

These regulations specifically clarified the employment status of people employed under the Access and Inclusion

Figure 13 - School age legislation

During 2023, the Early Years Inspectorate maintained oversight of school age care (SAC) services. The **school age services team** was established with defined roles and responsibilities to manage regulation of this service type.

6.1. Registration

Initial registration of school age services involves a structured process: proposed providers submit applications, which are reviewed alongside supporting documentation. The Early Years Inspectorate then makes decisions and communicated outcomes to applicants. Requirements for initial registrations continued to be clearly set out in official documents published on the [Early Years Inspectorate webpages](#).

In 2023, the Inspectorate processed a substantial number of new applications for school age services, with **298 applications approved** during the year. By the end of December 2023, the national register included **2,535 registered school age services**, reflecting a notable increase from the previous year's total of 2,350. This growth demonstrates ongoing demand and expansion in the sector, supported by clear regulatory guidance and efficient registration processes.

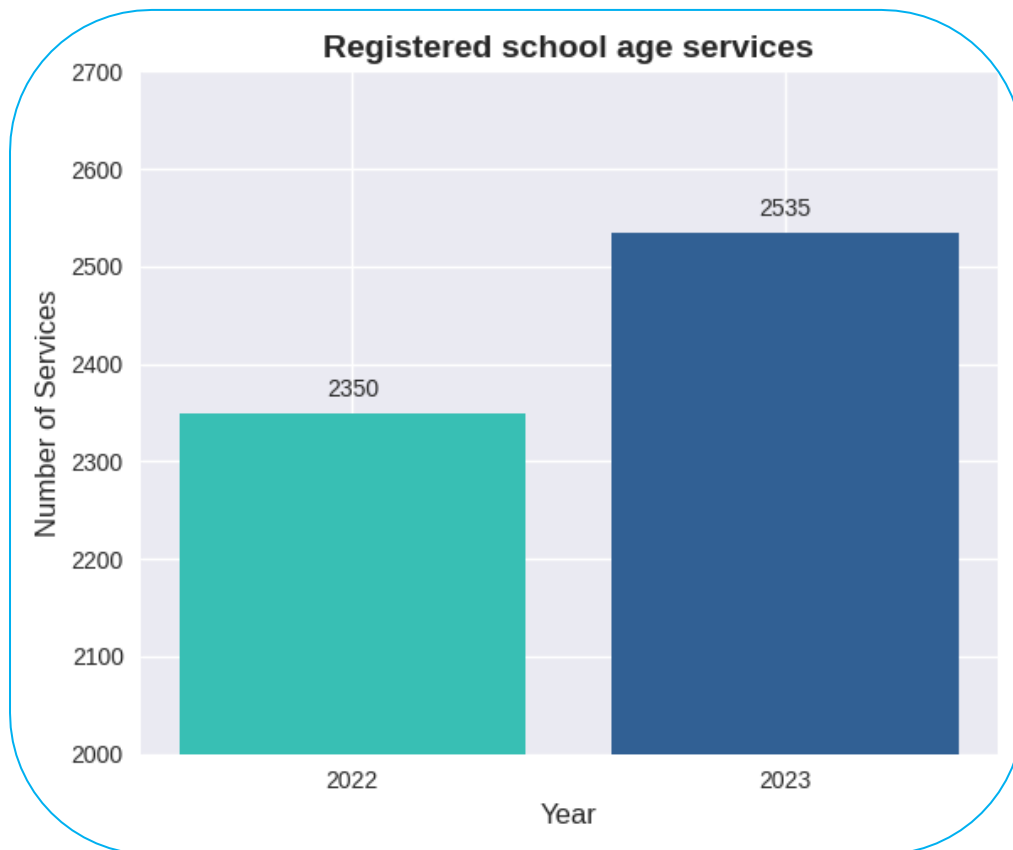


Figure 14 - School-age services

There were **298** approved applications for a new school age service, a small increase on the **285** approved in 2022.

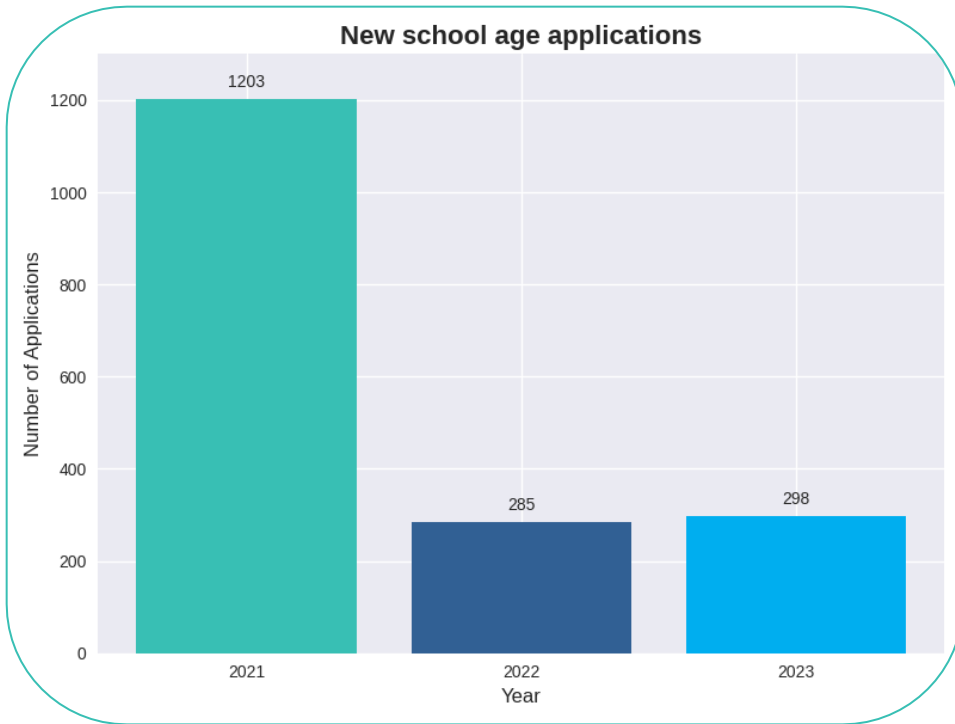


Figure 15 - New school age services

Whilst **298** new services were approved to open in 2023, **107** school age services closed.

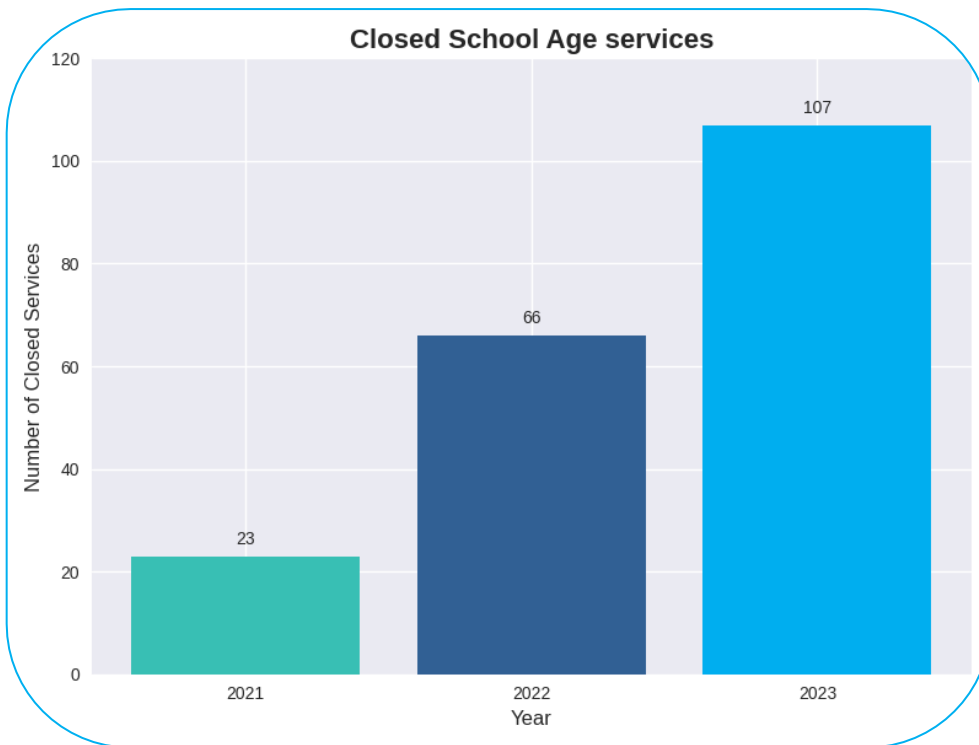


Figure 16- Closed school age services

6.2. Change in Circumstance Applications

Registered Providers of school age services are required to notify the Early Years Inspectorate of any changes in circumstances affecting their registration.

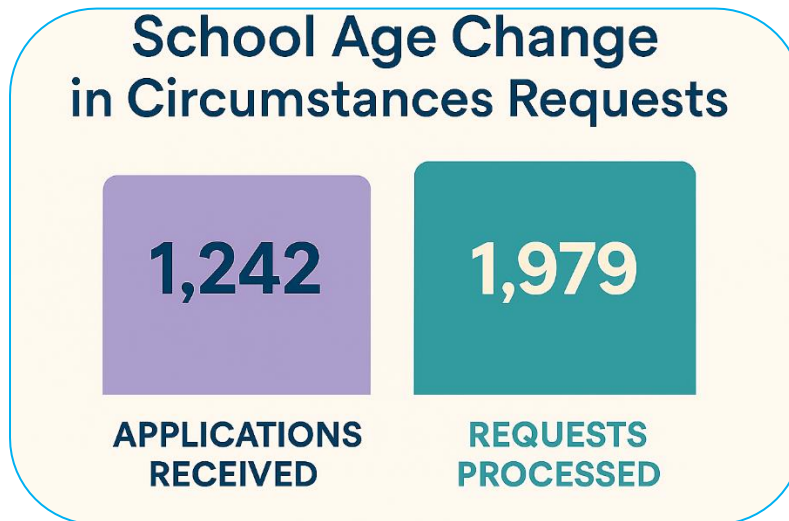


Figure 17-School age changes in circumstances

During 2023, all Changes in Circumstances applications from registered school age services were processed and determined within regulatory timeframes, supporting service providers to adapt their operations in response to evolving circumstances.

6.3. Inspection

As the statutory regulator, the Early Years Inspectorate undertakes inspections of school age services in accordance with legislation. The majority of inspections of school age services in 2023 were triggered by identified risk such as a concern being submitted. Details of the legislative background which establishes the basis for inspections of school age services is set out above.

The purpose of inspection is to verify that the registered provider is delivering a service that meets the requirements of Child Care Act 1991, Section 58 as amended by Part 12 of the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013 and Registration of School age services) Regulations 2018.

School age services inspections were undertaken 2023 in response to:

- Concerns (unsolicited information) received regarding potential non-compliance or risks
- Specific risks identified through safeguarding or feedback pathways
- Follow-up to previous concerns or notifications of incident

All school age services inspection reports were published on the Tusla website to provide transparency to stakeholders and the sector.

In 2023 a total of **32** inspections of school-age services were undertaken, a comparable number to the **27** undertaken in 2022.

7. Certificates of Registration

During 2023, a total of **6,729** certificates of registration were issued to pre-school and school age services in accordance with legislation. This process included new service registrations, updated certificates reflecting approved Changes in Circumstances, renewal of registration certificates, and services transitioning to updated registration conditions. All registered services received updated certification in line with their registration status and any conditions attached to their registration.

This certification process was underpinned by the introduction of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2022 (S.I. No. 195/2022), which came into effect to streamline and formalise the renewal of registration for early years services. The statutory instrument specifically mandated that certificates of registration must be issued and displayed by all registered services, ensuring greater transparency and compliance across the sector. The streamlined renewal process, enabled by this legislation, reduced the administrative burden on providers and supported the efficient management of registration data. As a result, the Inspectorate was able to process high volumes of applications and renewals within regulatory timeframes, maintaining the integrity and accuracy of the national register throughout 2023

8. Notifications of Incident

Registered Providers are required by the Early Years Services Regulations 2016 to notify the Inspectorate of:

- Any incidents occurring in the service
- Accidents or injuries to children
- Safeguarding or child protection concerns
- Allegations made against staff or persons in authority
- Concerns regarding non-compliance with regulations

In 2023, **1,040** notifications were received of which **855** were considered to be within the remit of the Early Years Inspectorate

All notifications are formally recorded, risk-assessed, and investigated to determine the appropriate response. Where risk is identified, incidents are escalated to inspection or enforcement. These notifications inform ongoing oversight and help maintain compliance across the sector.

This systematic approach to feedback, concerns, and incident notifications ensures that the Inspectorate can respond promptly to risks, uphold standards, and protect children's welfare.

9. Feedback and Concerns

9.1. Parent / Guardian Feedback

The Early Years Inspectorate greatly values parental engagement as an important part of supporting high-quality early years services across Ireland. By welcoming input from parents and guardians, we aim to better reflect families' experiences and contribute positively to children's safety, wellbeing, and development.

9.1.1. Our Approach to Engagement

In the last few years we have introduced a range of measures to encourage and support parental involvement in a welcoming way. These include

- Updating our [inspection report webpages](#) to share clear, accessible details about inspection dates and any conditions on a service's registration.
- Creating a dedicated [Parent / Guardian section of the website](#)
- Creating [three parent-friendly information leaflets](#)
- Developing a [joint leaflet for parents](#) with Department of Education and Youth colleagues
- Establishing a [straightforward procedure within our Feedback and Concerns process](#), so parents can share positive experiences or gentle suggestions at any time.

During inspections, a poster is displayed in services, kindly inviting parents to provide their feedback with simple instructions. Our Early Years Inspectorate website now has a dedicated area just for parents, offering gentle guidance on choosing a service, what to look for, how inspections work, ways to give feedback, and steps for raising any concerns.

9.1.2. Sharing Feedback via the Form

At the heart of this is our Parent/Guardian Feedback Form, thoughtfully designed to capture parents' views on everyday aspects of service life. It includes gentle prompts about things like your child's happiness, the welcoming atmosphere, how issues are handled, safety features (from secure sign-in to play areas), warm relationships between staff, children, and families, supportive management, well-kept premises, and enriching play and learning moments.

Parents can simply tick options from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree', add thoughts if they'd like, and include contact details optionally. Forms are easily emailed to parents.feedback@tusla.ie, shared supportively with the service provider, and used thoughtfully to shape our inspections and ongoing work with services.

9.1.3. Looking Ahead

The process for feedback forms was introduced last year and in 2023 the number of forms submitted has been low, which may reflect various factors. The Inspectorate is reviewing ways to build on this, exploring steps to raise awareness of the poster, website, leaflets, and form and/or to consider alternative ways of obtaining feedback.

9.2. Concerns

Where a parent or other interested party wishes to raise concerns about the welfare and safety of children who attend a service these should first, where possible, be brought to the attention of the registered provider. Where concerns need to be escalated to the Early Years Inspectorate they are submitted through the [Concerns about an early years service process](#).

Concerns received by the Early Years Inspectorate which relate to the operation of an early years service, will be reviewed and assessed for the risk associated with the concern to determine if they relate to the health, welfare and safety of children and if they fall within the remit of the Early Years Services Regulations (2016).

Where concerns fall within the remit of the Early Years Services Regulations (2016), the Early Years Inspectorate will ask the early years service to prepare a response to the concern received which may include a report and outcomes of the service's investigation, risk assessment and any other actions taken to address the concern. The Early Years Inspectorate will have oversight of how the service manages this process.

In all cases, the registered provider will be given an opportunity to respond to the concerns and to any inspection reports that are subsequently produced. The Early Years Inspectorate does not conduct investigations. The level of intervention and action taken including the focus and timing of inspections, will reflect the level of risk and its potential impact on children in the service.

The person providing the information will be advised that feedback/the outcome of the Early years inspectorate will not be given, however all inspections undertaken in response to concerns will be published on the website in due course.

The Early Years Inspectorate operates a dedicated **Feedback and Concerns Office**. This office is responsible for receiving and processing:

- Unsolicited information about early years services
- Concerns raised by parents, guardians, or members of the public
- Notifications of incident from service providers
- Information regarding potential non-compliance or safeguarding concerns

In 2023 **490** Concerns were submitted to the Inspectorate, an increase from the 432 received in 2022. Of these, **17** were rated as critical and **171** as high risk.

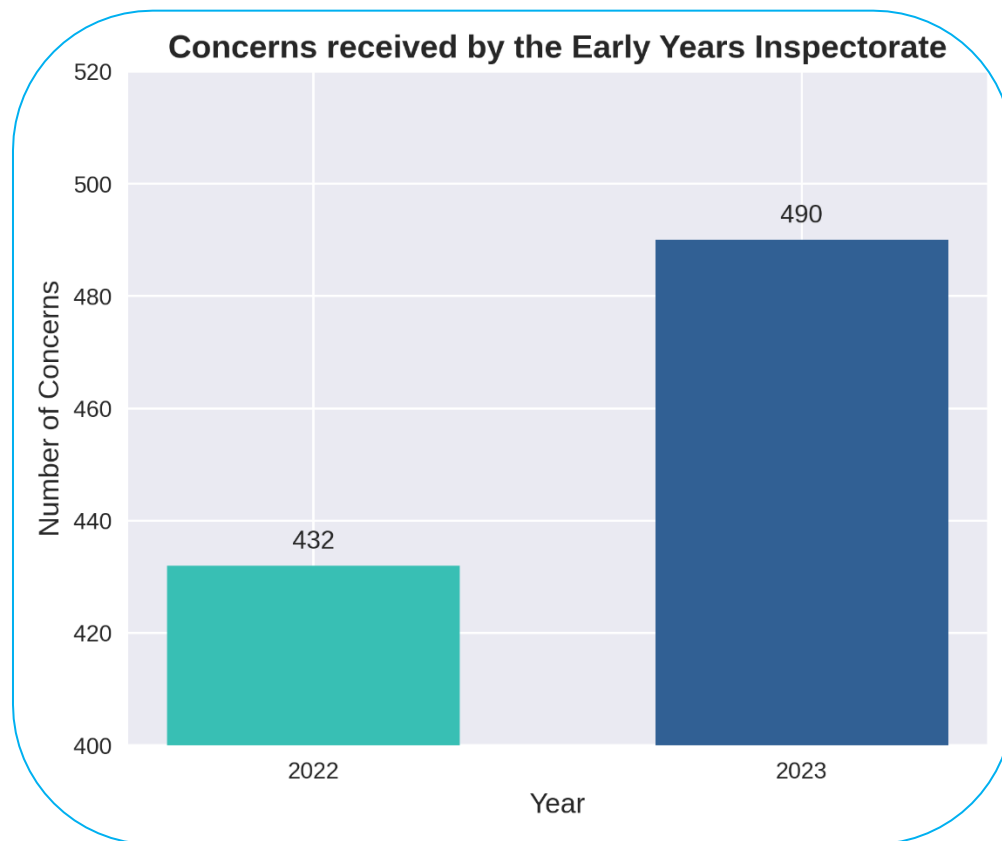


Figure 18 - Concerns received by the Early Years Inspectorate

All concerns received are formally recorded, logged, and risk-assessed according to Inspectorate procedures. Allocation to appropriate action is based on the assessed risk level. High-risk concerns trigger inspection or follow-up activity. Every concern is acknowledged and processed, ensuring transparency and accountability in regulatory oversight. Risks continue to be identified and followed up as business-as-usual activity

10. Enforcement and Escalation Activity

Following inspection of an Early Years service, Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate takes a range of follow-up and enforcement actions which are proportionate to the level of compliance and the degree of risk to children identified on the day of inspection and over time. The overall approach is to safeguard children, promote sustained compliance and improvement, and to escalate only as far as is necessary and justified in each individual case. There are number of steps that form part of the enforcement and escalation pathway.

Closing meeting and immediate feedback

At the end of an on-site inspection, the inspector(s) holds a closing meeting with the registered provider to give immediate verbal feedback on key areas of compliance and non-compliance. Any immediate risks to children's safety, health or welfare are clearly highlighted, and the provider is required to implement controls straight away; these immediate risks and actions are then reflected in the written inspection report and any Immediate Action Notice (IAN) issued.

Information on how inspection reports feed into enforcement is set out in the Inspectorate's [Guide to Regulatory Enforcement in Early Years Settings](#)

Corrective and Preventive Action (CAPA)

Where regulations are not met, the inspectorate initiates a structured Corrective and Preventive Action (CAPA) process as the primary, proportionate response to non-compliance in most cases. This involves:

- Issuing a draft inspection report and CAPA/response form, asking the provider to set out corrective actions for each non-compliance, how recurrence will be prevented, and to submit supporting evidence within defined timeframes.
- Reviewing the CAPA and evidence at inspector and Inspection and Registration Manager (IRM) level, requesting further information or scheduling follow-up inspection where responses are incomplete, not evidenced, or not sustained.
- General information on inspection, improvement and provider responses is available via the [preschool services section](#):

Enforcement actions and escalation

Where non-compliance is significant, persistent, or poses a higher level of risk, the Inspectorate moves up a graduated enforcement pathway, always aiming to match the sanction to the seriousness and persistence of the issues. Actions include:

- **Immediate Action Notices (IANs):** Are used when there is an immediate, tangible risk to children; they direct the provider to take specified actions within very short timescales (often by the next working day), including safety-related and Garda-vetting-related IANs governed by dedicated SOPs.
- **Regulatory Compliance Meetings (RCMs):** Are convened where there is significant and/or persistent risk, limited CAPA engagement, or continuing non-compliance; they clarify the nature of the non-compliance, required actions, and timescales, and inform decisions on whether further escalation is proportionate.
- **Conditions of registration:** Are applied or amended to reduce ongoing risk (for example, limiting numbers, age ranges, rooms, or requiring specific evidence), with rights of representation and appeal to the District Court.
- **Regulatory Enforcement Meetings (REMs):** Offer a final opportunity for services to address non-compliance concerns. The meetings enable services to provide written representations prior to and after the meeting and provide clear guidance on why previous representations have not addressed non-compliance. The meetings have proven to be beneficial for services, improving quality of representations and frequently resulting in successful registration outcomes.

In 2023, **48** Regulatory Enforcement Meetings were conducted with services escalated for enforcement consideration. These meetings provided services with

an opportunity to demonstrate progress toward compliance and to make final representations to the Inspectorate regarding their circumstances.

10.1. National Registration Enforcement Panel (NREP)

For unresolved or serious cases, a referral to the **National Registration Enforcement Panel (NREP)** may be made. NREP considers higher-level actions, including conditions, removal from the register, or prosecution, taking into account risk to children, inspection history and provider response. The Inspectorate has the powers to refuse to register services, to remove services from the register, to add conditions to their registration or to prosecute services for significant breaches of regulation and or other prescribed parts of the legislation. Consideration of these actions are undertaken by the NREP. The purpose of the panel is to consider appropriate and proportionate enforcement pathways for any early years services that are escalated from inspection area teams or the registration department. The work of the panel is coordinated and actioned by the National Registration Manager for escalation and overseen by the Head of Registration and Regulatory Enforcement.

Removal from the register is considered only where compliance cannot be achieved or sustained and significant or persistent risk to children remains. A proposal to remove is issued with rights of representation and appeal, and the NREP may decide to remove the service from the register if it is not assured of children's safety

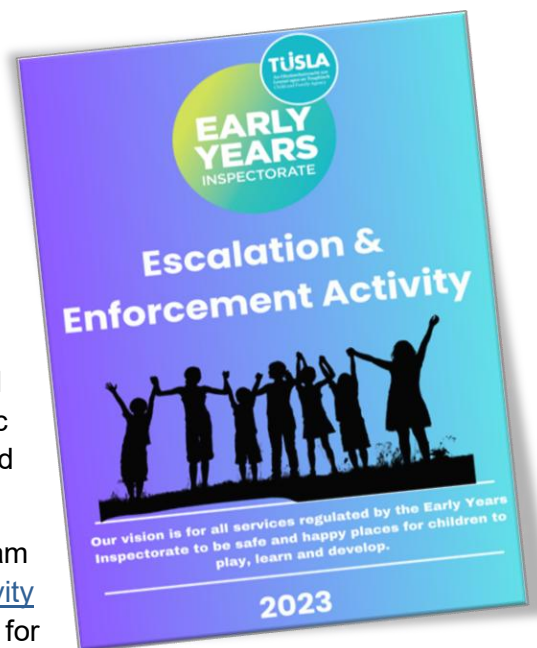
Prosecution is reserved for serious offences such as refusal of inspection, obstruction, breach of conditions, or operating without registration. Decisions follow a legal review pathway and are guided by child welfare, public interest, the existence of a prima facie case and proportionality.

In 2023 the Inspectorate's Enforcement and Escalation team published a detailed [Escalation and Enforcement Activity report](#) presenting an analysis of those services escalated for enforcement actions and the outcomes of escalation.

In 2023, referrals to the National Registration Enforcement Panel (NREP) represented a critical escalation pathway within the Early Years Inspectorate's enforcement framework.

10.2. Referrals to NREP

A total of **28** services were referred to the NREP for enforcement consideration, spanning full day care, sessional, part-time, and unregistered services. The primary reasons for referral included



- **Consistent and Persistent Non-Compliance:** Continued failure to comply after inspection and corrective action requests (largest category).
- **Immediate Action Notices:** Significant breaches requiring urgent intervention.
- **Failure to Implement Required Actions:** Non-implementation of corrective actions.
- **Operation Without Registration:** Services operating unregistered or contrary to registration (6 services in 2023).
- **Critical or High-Risk Concerns:** Unacceptable risk to children after inspection.
- **Non-Compliance with Building and Fire Safety:** Especially in Project 903 services.
- **Safeguarding and Welfare Concerns:** Unresolved child welfare/protection issues.

The NREP assessed each case to determine proportionate enforcement actions, which could include attaching conditions to registration, requiring services to cease operation, or initiating prosecution. These referrals ensured that serious risks to children’s safety and welfare were addressed through robust regulatory oversight, while also providing opportunities for services to achieve compliance through targeted support and guidance. The process reflects the Inspectorate’s commitment to balancing enforcement with sector engagement and improvement.

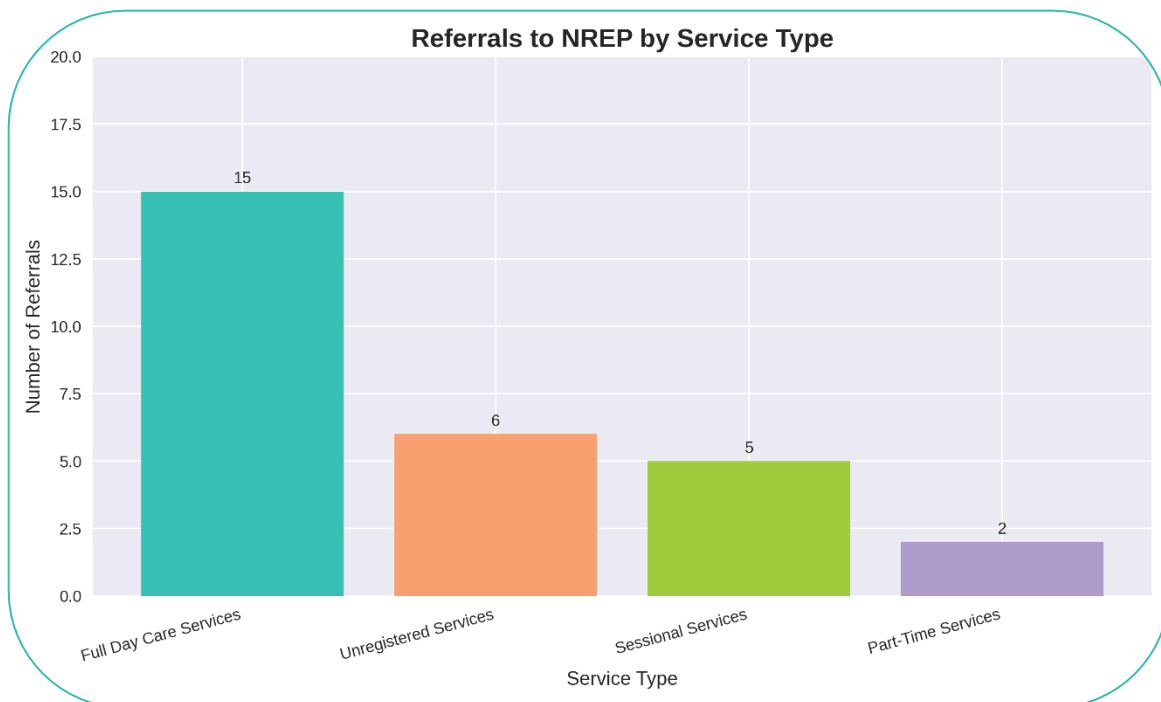


Figure 19 - Referrals to NREP by Service Type

10.3. NREP Activity and Outcomes

There were a range of outcomes and other activities led by NREP during the year,

NREP Outcomes



Figure 20 - NREP Outcomes

10.4. Project 903 – 2019 Registration Renewal Completion

Project 903 commenced in January 2022 to address 903 pre-school services that had failed to complete their 2019 registration renewal applications. Throughout 2022, 804 services submitted outstanding documents and achieved compliance.

In January 2023, 99 remaining non-compliant services were examined in relation to outstanding registration renewal requirements under Regulations 23 and 29 (Building Suitability and Fire Safety Documentation).

Primary Areas of Non-Compliance:

Project 903 services were primarily non-compliant in relation to:

- **Fire Safety Documentation:** Lack of up-to-date fire safety certificates, fire safety risk assessments, or fire evacuation procedures
- **Building Suitability and Premises Standards:** Premises not meeting statutory requirements for suitability and safety
- **Health and Safety Compliance:** Missing health and safety documentation, risk assessments, or safety procedures

Services in the escalation process received support and guidance to achieve compliance. Conditions were attached to registrations where necessary to adequately mitigate identified risks to children. The Enforcement and Escalation Team will continue to work with the remaining 14 services in 2024 to support them achieving full compliance, where the Inspectorate is satisfied that operation of the service does not pose a risk to children



Figure 21 – Project 903 Outcomes

11. Quality Assurance and Improvement

11.1. Quality Management System ISO 9001 Accreditation

The Early Years Inspectorate successfully achieved **NSAI ISO 9001 certification** for its comprehensive Quality Management System (QMS) in 2023.

A Quality Management System (QMS) is a framework for quality management that sets out documented and clearly defined policies, business processes, and procedures necessary to create and deliver services to a consistently high standard. It is a formalised system that documents responsibilities for achieving quality policies and objectives. The inspectorate’s QMS helps coordinate and direct our activities to meet customer and regulatory requirements and improve its effectiveness and efficiency on a continuous basis.

A key objective for CSR is to embed a culture of quality through systems and processes that meet the highest standards. A key project to deliver on this objective has been the implementation of the QMS across the Early Years Inspectorate to ensure processes, systems and structures across the department are robust and effective.



The key elements of the QMS are:

- Robust document control
- Annual management Review
- An internal audit process and corrective action follow up
- Stakeholder engagement
- Communication mechanisms
- Competency and training of staff
- Design and Development of new Services

A number of key documents have been developed or revised to support the QMS. These include;

- A Quality Policy
- A Quality Manual – which defines processes and procedures and how we adhere to the requirements of the QMS



This significant achievement of **NSAI certification** was accomplished through:

- Stage 1 assessment (preliminary audit) completed and passed in early 2023
- Stage 2 full accreditation assessment completed in May 2023
- Successful achievement of ISO 9001 standard certification
- Validation of quality management processes across all regulatory functions

The ISO 9001 accreditation confirms the Inspectorate's commitment to:

- Systematic and documented regulatory processes
- Quality assurance and continuous improvement
- Customer focus and stakeholder engagement
- Effective resource management
- Compliance with relevant legislation and regulations

11.2. Internal Quality Assurance Audit Programme

The Inspectorate established an internal quality assurance audit programme in 2023:

- 10 audits completed or commenced during the year
- Audits focused on adherence to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
- Corrective Actions (CAs) and Opportunities for Improvement (OFIs) were identified from each audit
- Progress against CA and OFI was tracked and monitored.

12. Stakeholder Engagement

12.1. Outdoor Early Learning and Care Services: Mapping and Survey

In early 2023, the Early Years Inspectorate initiated a national mapping exercise to better understand the scale, characteristics, and operational models of outdoor early learning and care (ELC) services in Ireland. This work continued throughout 2023, gradually building a detailed national profile of outdoor provision.

A total of **57 outdoor ELC services** were identified. Of these, **17 operated fully outdoors** (29.8%) and **40 operated substantially outdoors** (70.2%). Services were located across all regions, with notable concentrations in **Galway** and **Donegal**. An online survey issued to all identified providers received **27 responses**, representing a **47.4% response rate**.

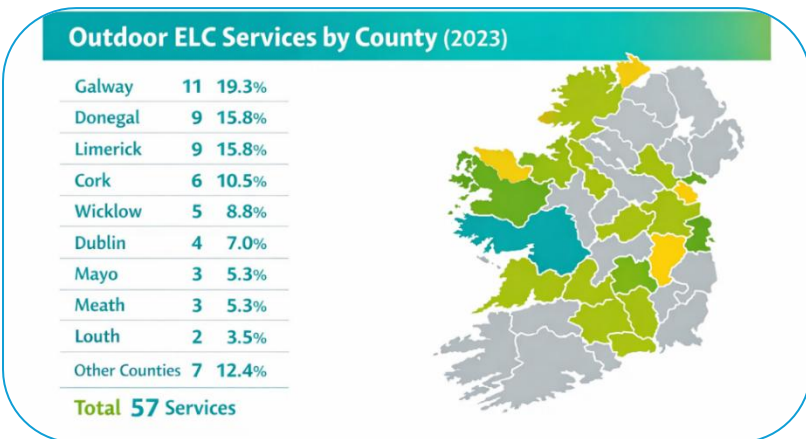


Figure 22 - Outdoor services by county

12.1.2. Geographic Distribution of Outdoor Services

Outdoor services were found nationwide, with the highest concentrations in Galway, Donegal, and Limerick.

12.1.3. Service Provision Models

Outdoor ELC provision varies significantly across the sector, ranging from fully outdoor environments to blended indoor–outdoor models.

12.1.4. Supports Used by Outdoor Services

Respondents identified a range of Tusla materials that supported their development, with the **Quality and Regulatory Framework** cited most frequently.

Providers also drew on external influences such as Montessori, Reggio Emilia, Steiner Waldorf, Forest School

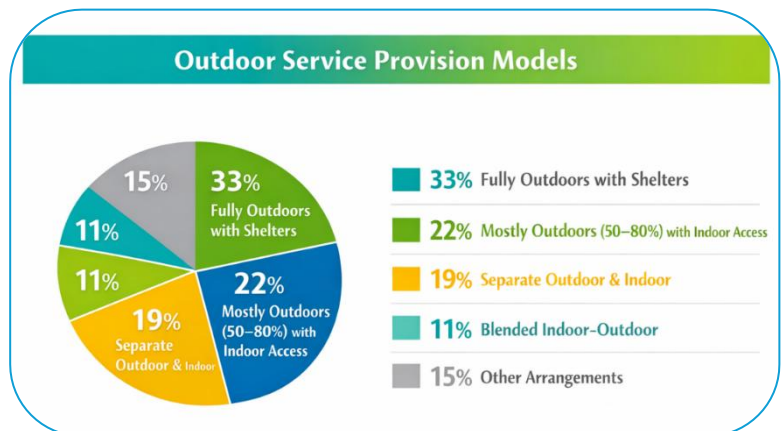


Figure 23 - Outdoor service models

training, Better Start mentors, Aistear–Síolta, Scandinavian research, and peer learning networks.

12.1.5. Sector Engagement and Key Findings

The survey provided detailed insights into operational models, registration patterns, age ranges served, and the supports and challenges experienced by outdoor providers.

Support Needs Identified

Providers highlighted the potential for:

- Registration categories that reflect outdoor provision
- Clarity on space requirements, ratios, and suitable structures
- Clearer processes for registration and change in circumstances
- Guidance on fire safety, risk management, and insurance
- Training in outdoor pedagogy
- Awareness-raising on the benefits of outdoor learning

12.1.6. Regulatory Challenges

Challenges included:

- Lack of outdoor-specific registration categories
- Uncertainty around outdoor space measurements
- Ambiguity regarding acceptable shelter structures
- Fire certification requirements for temporary structures
- Insurance complexities
- A perception that regulatory expectations remain indoor-focused.

12.1.7. Conclusion

The mapping and survey exercise has provided the Inspectorate with a comprehensive understanding of outdoor early learning and care provision in Ireland. In 2023 the Inspectorate published a guidance document for the sector - [When the Roof is the Sky - Guidance for the registration and inspection of early years services operating outdoors.](#)

Insights from the survey will directly inform the development of **policy, guidance, and regulatory processes to support outdoor services throughout 2024**. This work will focus on strengthening clarity, ensuring proportionate regulatory expectations, and enabling high-quality outdoor provision to continue to grow as a valued part of Ireland's early years landscape.

12.2. Publication of Specialist Guidance

During 2023, the Early Years Inspectorate strengthened its commitment to supporting high-quality practice and regulatory compliance by publishing two significant pieces of specialist guidance. Both documents were developed in direct response to sustained engagement with the sector and reflected the Inspectorate's ongoing focus on clarity, consistency, and practical support for providers.

12.2.1. When the Roof is the Sky – Guidance for Outdoor Services

As interest in outdoor-based early learning and care continued to grow, the Inspectorate published [When the Roof is the Sky: Guidance for the registration and inspection of early years services operating outdoors](#) - a comprehensive guidance document designed to support services operating primarily or exclusively outdoors. The publication consolidates the regulatory expectations for outdoor provision and translates them into clear, practical direction for providers.

The guidance outlines the core regulatory requirements that apply to outdoor services, with particular emphasis on Regulations 23 and 29. It explains how these regulations should be interpreted in outdoor contexts, offering detailed advice on fire safety considerations for outdoor and semi-outdoor structures, the provision of adequate space, and the availability of essential facilities.

In addition to regulatory interpretation, the document presents a strong suite of best-practice recommendations informed by national and international examples of high-quality outdoor provision. It includes practical tools for risk assessment and risk management, supporting providers in creating safe, engaging, and developmentally rich outdoor learning environments. Case studies from existing outdoor services illustrate how regulatory requirements can be met in innovative and context-responsive ways, giving providers tangible examples of effective implementation.

12.2.2. Safe Sleep Guidance for Children Under 24 Months

In parallel, the Inspectorate also published [Safe Sleep Guidance for children under 24 months](#). This document responds to ongoing sector queries and reflects the Inspectorate's commitment to promoting the highest standards of health, safety, and wellbeing for the youngest children in early years settings.





The guidance sets out clear expectations for safe sleep practices, including appropriate sleep positioning and the creation of safe, well-supervised sleep environments. It emphasises the importance of continuous supervision, staff training, and organisational awareness to ensure that safe sleep procedures are consistently implemented across all services.

Alongside regulatory clarity, the document provides accessible explanations of the health and safety considerations underpinning safe sleep practices, including information relevant to the prevention of Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI). By combining regulatory requirements with practical advice, the guidance supports services in embedding safe sleep routines that protect children’s wellbeing while meeting statutory obligations.

12.3. External Stakeholder Forums

During 2023, the Early Years Inspectorate continued to prioritise meaningful engagement with external stakeholders through a series of structured forums and collaborative meetings. These engagements provided essential opportunities for dialogue, shared learning, and the co-development of approaches to regulatory challenges.

The Early Years Inspectorate Stakeholder Consultative Forum remained a cornerstone of this engagement, bringing together more than 60 attendees from across the early years sector. Alongside this, the Regulatory Support Forum convened sector representatives to discuss operational issues, regulatory expectations, and emerging themes from inspection and enforcement activity.

Across these forums, the Inspectorate:

- Presented updates on National Registration and Enforcement Panel (NREP) reports and enforcement activity
- Communicated regulatory updates and forthcoming changes
- Incorporated sector feedback into the development of new and revised guidance
- Worked collaboratively with stakeholders to identify shared solutions to regulatory challenges

Engagement extended beyond early years providers. The Inspectorate also maintained strong links with the higher education sector through its Third Level Forum, which brought together approximately 100 attendees from early years education programmes nationwide. These discussions supported alignment between regulatory expectations and the preparation of future early years professionals.

12.4. Sector Communications and Support

The Inspectorate's communication and support activities during 2023 were extensive, reflecting a commitment to ensuring that providers had access to timely, accurate, and practical information.

Key areas of engagement included:

- Publication of annual reports and sectoral data
- Development and dissemination of eight new guidance documents
- Direct communication with services regarding inspection processes and regulatory expectations

Collaboration with Early Childhood Ireland, County Childcare Committees, and other support agencies ensured consistent messaging and multiple access points for providers seeking assistance.

To further enhance accessibility, the Inspectorate established a dedicated helpdesk for early years providers, managing 2,117 calls from May 2023 onwards. The introduction of a new telephone system improved responsiveness and streamlined communication pathways.

In addition to direct stakeholder engagement, the Early Years Inspectorate continued to strengthen system-based supports for providers through the expansion of eLearning resources and written guidance. During 2023, a suite of eLearning programmes was developed and made available to support registration applications, Change in Circumstance submissions, and registration renewal, providing clear, accessible guidance on regulatory requirements and use of the Tusla Portal. These resources were complemented by updated support documentation, including registration policies and guidance on building safety, fire safety, and planning requirements. Together, these tools contributed to improved application quality, reduced administrative burden for providers, and more efficient processing within the Registration Office. The availability of structured, self-service supports reflects the Inspectorate's commitment to transparency, consistency, and proportionate regulation, while enabling providers to better understand and meet their statutory obligations.

12.5. Joint Communications and Publications

The Inspectorate collaborated with colleagues in the Department of Education Inspectorate to deliver a joint leaflet for parents - [Inspections in Early Learning and Care settings-Information leaflet](#) to provide clear, unified information on inspections within the Early Learning and Care sector.



More information about the Inspectorate's engagement with parents can be found in the [Parent / Guardian Feedback](#) section above.

Website and Publications

All Early Years Inspectorate reports, guidance documents, and regulatory information are published on the Tusla website, supporting transparency and ease of access for providers, parents, and the wider public.

They can be accessed at: www.tusla.ie/services/preschool-services/general-information/publications-and-forms

13. Conclusion

In 2023, the Early Years Inspectorate continued to fulfil its statutory role within Children's Services Regulation by delivering a comprehensive programme of registration, inspection, enforcement and quality assurance activity across the early years sector. Throughout the year, the Inspectorate maintained a strong focus on safeguarding children's health, safety and wellbeing, while supporting services to achieve and sustain compliance with legislative requirements. This work provided ongoing public assurance that regulated early years services operate as safe and nurturing environments for children and young people.

The year was characterised by consolidation and system strengthening following the pandemic period, with regulatory activity delivered at scale across both pre-school and school-age services. Inspection and enforcement activity remained proportionate and risk-based, enabling the Inspectorate to respond effectively to concerns, notifications of incident and identified safeguarding risks, while also supporting early corrective and preventive action by providers. The continued publication of inspection reports further enhanced transparency and accountability within the regulatory system.

A significant achievement in 2023 was the successful attainment of ISO 9001 certification for the Inspectorate's Quality Management System. This external accreditation provides independent assurance that regulatory processes are governed by robust systems, consistent decision-making, effective risk management and a culture of continuous improvement. It reflects the Inspectorate's commitment to quality, evidence-based practice and strong regulatory governance.

Alongside the delivery of core regulatory functions, 2023 also involved substantial preparatory work for the expansion of statutory regulation to include childminding services from 2024. This forward-looking work focused on system readiness, regulatory alignment and cross-directorate engagement to ensure that the Inspectorate is well positioned to implement the forthcoming legislation effectively and proportionately.

Overall, the activity undertaken during 2023 demonstrates the Early Years Inspectorate's continued commitment to fair, consistent and effective regulation. By balancing robust oversight with constructive engagement, the Inspectorate supports improvement across the sector while maintaining a clear focus on safeguarding children's wellbeing. This approach ensures that services regulated by Children's Services Regulation remain safe

and happy places where children and young people can live, play, learn and develop, both now and into the future

14. Appendix 1 – Data

14.1 Number of pre-school services

| Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | YTD |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 4,024 | 4,052 | 4,062 | 4,064 | 4,064 | 4,049 | 4,028 | 4,033 | 4,042 | 4,036 | 4,041 | 4,044 | 4,044 |

14.2 New pre-schools

| Month | No. |
|-------|-----|
| Jan | 5 |
| Feb | 1 |
| Mar | 5 |
| Apr | 1 |
| May | 3 |
| Jun | 3 |
| Jul | 5 |
| Aug | 25 |
| Sep | 24 |
| Oct | 2 |
| Nov | 8 |
| Dec | 4 |
| YTD | 86 |

14.3 Closed pre-schools

| Month | No. |
|-------|-----|
| Jan | 8 |
| Feb | 7 |
| Mar | 3 |
| Apr | 2 |
| May | 3 |
| Jun | 18 |
| Jul | 27 |
| Aug | 18 |
| Sep | 16 |
| Oct | 7 |
| Nov | 5 |
| Dec | 1 |
| YTD | 115 |

14.4 Number of school age services

| Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | YTD |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 2,342 | 2,346 | 2,368 | 2,367 | 2,386 | 2,404 | 2,432 | 2,508 | 2,527 | 2,543 | 2,536 | 2,535 | 2,535 |

14.5 New school age services

| Month | No. |
|-------|-----|
| Jan | 3 |
| Feb | 14 |
| Mar | 23 |
| Apr | 8 |
| May | 21 |
| Jun | 23 |
| Jul | 55 |
| Aug | 86 |
| Sep | 30 |
| Oct | 21 |
| Nov | 9 |
| Dec | 5 |
| YTD | 298 |

14.6 Closed school age services

| Month | No. |
|-------|-----|
| Jan | 5 |
| Feb | 7 |
| Mar | 2 |
| Apr | 11 |
| May | 3 |
| Jun | 5 |
| Jul | 27 |
| Aug | 10 |
| Sep | 9 |
| Oct | 7 |
| Nov | 15 |
| Dec | 6 |
| YTD | 107 |

14.7 Pre-School Change in Circumstances

| Metric Item | Jan | Feb | Mar | Q1 | Apr | May | Jun | Q2 | Jul | Aug | Sep | Q3 | Oct | Nov | Dec | Q4 | YTD |
|------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Applications received | 168 | 143 | 180 | 491 | 158 | 193 | 251 | 602 | 175 | 144 | 145 | 464 | 149 | 130 | 97 | 376 | 1,933 |
| Applications processed | 160 | 162 | 198 | 520 | 132 | 179 | 145 | 456 | 230 | 211 | 161 | 602 | 145 | 136 | 108 | 389 | 1,967 |
| Change requests processed | 214 | 261 | 299 | 774 | 230 | 339 | 285 | 854 | 466 | 341 | 260 | 1,067 | 218 | 224 | 185 | 627 | 3,322 |
| Category 1 notifications processed | 161 | 167 | 216 | 544 | 166 | 247 | 196 | 609 | 354 | 234 | 202 | 790 | 177 | 174 | 152 | 503 | 2,446 |
| Category 2 notifications processed | 53 | 94 | 83 | 230 | 64 | 92 | 89 | 245 | 112 | 107 | 58 | 277 | 41 | 50 | 33 | 124 | 876 |
| Applications closed as incomplete. | 13 | 62 | 46 | 121 | 37 | 52 | 18 | 107 | 28 | 39 | 14 | 81 | 3 | 12 | 14 | 29 | 338 |

14.8 School Age Change in Circumstances

| Metric Item | Jan | Feb | Mar | Q1 | Apr | May | Jun | Q2 | Jul | Aug | Sep | Q3 | Oct | Nov | Dec | Q4 | YTD |
|-----------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Applications received | 79 | 81 | 113 | 273 | 51 | 100 | 171 | 322 | 108 | 136 | 123 | 367 | 119 | 107 | 54 | 280 | 1,242 |
| Applications processed | 44 | 124 | 103 | 271 | 58 | 74 | 144 | 276 | 117 | 155 | 149 | 421 | 99 | 107 | 79 | 285 | 1,253 |
| Change requests processed | 65 | 169 | 150 | 384 | 111 | 109 | 216 | 436 | 214 | 258 | 224 | 696 | 172 | 156 | 135 | 463 | 1,979 |
| Applications closed as incomplete | 0 | 10 | 4 | 14 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 14 | 2 | 10 | 2 | 14 | 1 | 12 | 0 | 13 | 55 |

14.9 Concerns Received

| Metric Item | Jan | Feb | Mar | Q1 | Apr | May | Jun | Q2 | Jul | Aug | Sep | Q3 | Oct | Nov | Dec | Q4 | YTD |
|------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Concerns received | 28 | 30 | 57 | 115 | 33 | 61 | 42 | 136 | 36 | 52 | 47 | 135 | 40 | 44 | 20 | 104 | 490 |
| Critical risk Concerns | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 17 |
| High risk Concerns | 15 | 13 | 14 | 42 | 11 | 21 | 14 | 46 | 13 | 3 | 16 | 32 | 22 | 25 | 4 | 51 | 171 |

14.10

Notifications of Incident

| Metric Item | Jan | Feb | Mar | Q1 | Apr | May | Jun | Q2 | Jul | Aug | Sep | Q3 | Oct | Nov | Dec | Q4 | YTD |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| NOI received | 167 | 91 | 108 | 366 | 68 | 116 | 73 | 257 | 39 | 67 | 97 | 203 | 91 | 70 | 53 | 214 | 1,040 |
| NOI received within Early Years Inspectorate remit | 122 | 82 | 93 | 297 | 58 | 100 | 56 | 214 | 33 | 60 | 83 | 176 | 74 | 50 | 44 | 168 | 855 |

14.11 NREP outcomes

| Action | Number |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| Services referred to NREP | 28 |
| Regulatory Enforcement Meetings | 48 |
| Services engaged in enforcement | 27 |
| Services involved in Project 903 | 21 |
| Services with conditions attached | 10 |

| | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| QMS Reference | 03/2024 EYI-REP |
| Version | V1.0 |
| Date | 17/07/2024 |