TUSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

CHILDREN'S SERVICES REGULATION

Children's Services Regulation

Annual Report 2025

TUSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

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Acronyms and abbreviations

Acronym	Meaning
ACIMS	Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service
AEARS	Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service
AIM	Access and Inclusion Model
CAPA	Corrective and Preventive Action
CFIAO	Children First Information and Advice Officer
CSR	Children's Services Regulation
CSSCU	Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit
DCDE	Department of Children, Disability and Equality (from May 2025)
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (until May 2025)
DE	Department of Education (until May 2025)
DEY	Department of Education and Youth (from May 2025)
eQMS	Electronic Quality Management System
EPSO	European Partnership for Supervisory Organisations in Health and Social Care
EYI	Early Years Inspectorate
FFP	Fit-for-Purpose (inspection)
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDIG	Children First Inter-Departmental Implementation Group

Acronym	Meaning
IPAS	International Protection Accommodation Service
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
NREP	National Registration Enforcement Panel
NSAI	National Standards Authority of Ireland
ONSD	Office of the National Service Director
PESTLE	Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental (analysis)
PRA	Pre-Registration Assessment
PRI	Pre-Registration Inspection
QAA	Quality Assurance Audit
QMS	Quality Management System
SCDL	Share, Collaborate, Decide, Learn (Group)
SEA	Special Emergency Accommodation
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SOORS	Services Operating Outside of Registration Status
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TCM	Tusla Case Management (system)
TESS	Tusla Education Support Service

1. Foreword

I am pleased to present the Children's Services Regulation (CSR) Annual Report 2025. It reflects the professionalism, commitment and adaptability of CSR staff during a demanding year. Across CSR, colleagues continued to provide public assurance that services regulated or assessed by Tusla are safe, well governed and focused on the rights, needs, safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

The year was shaped by the implementation of the CSR Strategy 2025–2030 and by strengthening governance, quality, data and assurance arrangements. The CSR Programme Office brought a more systematic approach to cross-CSR project delivery, supporting more consistent decision-making and closer alignment between strategy, risk and operational practice.

The scale of regulatory activity in 2025 was substantial. Across our four services, CSR progressed inspection, registration, assessment, monitoring, safeguarding compliance, enforcement and quality improvement. We are proud that CSR achieved NSAI ISO 9001:2015 certification across 30 geographical sites and advanced its data management and digital transformation work. We continued with our proportionate enforcement and escalation approach to ensure that serious or persistent non-compliance was addressed through fair, evidence-based and timely decisions.

Partnership and culture remained central to our work. CSR worked with Government departments, statutory partners, sector bodies, providers and international regulators to promote understanding of regulatory requirements and shared learning. Internally, our focus on staff engagement, wellbeing and development supported the CSR Strategy theme of "Our Culture, Our Team".

Our staff are our most valuable resource and central to CSR's performance. The Senior Leadership Team will continue to support staff to carry out their duties safely and with confidence. In turn, CSR staff deliver for children and young people by helping to keep them safe and protected, operating within the scope of CSR's statutory powers.

> *"It matters to the CSR Senior Leadership Team that staff work in an environment where they feel respected, connected and supported, and where every voice is heard and valued.*

I want to thank all our CSR colleagues for their professionalism and commitment throughout 2025, and to acknowledge the contribution of our many partners and stakeholders. I also acknowledge the support of the Director of Quality and Regulation, the Tusla Executive and their wider teams. In 2026, CSR will continue to build on this progress, always acting in the best interests of children and young people.



Fiona McDonnell
National Service Director of Children's Services Regulation

2. Executive Summary

2025 was a year of major delivery, growth and consolidation for Children's Services Regulation (CSR). Across early years, alternative care, alternative education and child safeguarding compliance, CSR strengthened public assurance that services regulated or assessed by Tusla are safe, well governed and focused on children's rights, needs and wellbeing. The year saw increased demand, wider regulatory reach, stronger governance and continued preparation for a more complex regulatory environment.

2025 at a glance

Key figures from across Children's Services Regulation

3,948
pre-school services on the register
EARLY YEARS INSPECTORATE

2,514
pre-school inspections completed
EARLY YEARS INSPECTORATE

243
non-statutory residential centres registered (196 in 2024)
ACIMS

264
ACIMS inspections and reviews completed
ACIMS

2,592
children on the home education register
AEARS

1,492
home education assessments completed
AEARS

491
Child Safeguarding Statements received
CSSCU

30
geographical sites with ISO 9001:2015 certification
QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The CSR Strategy 2025–2030 provided the framework for this work, with priorities focused on public engagement, effective regulation, improved compliance and CSR's culture and team. Delivery of the annual Business Plan advanced key reforms, including early years Garda Vetting processes, Tusla Case Management and Portal 3 development, engagement on the Single Quality Framework and Single Inspectorate, implementation of childminding regulations, digital development in the Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service (AEARS) and publication of the Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit (CSSCU) Strategy 2025–2027.

CSR also strengthened the systems that underpin consistent regulation. The new CSR Governance Framework clarified decision-making, reporting, escalation and oversight arrangements across CSR. The Data Governance Committee strengthened oversight of data quality, validation, metrics and publication controls. Together, these developments supported clearer accountability, better evidence for decision-making and stronger assurance across CSR's regulatory functions.

The Quality Management System continued to mature as a core mechanism for consistency, accountability and improvement. A major milestone was the extension of ISO 9001:2015 certification to 30 geographical sites, providing independent assurance that CSR's quality management arrangements meet an internationally recognised standard. Internal audit,

management review, controlled documentation and corrective-action follow-up strengthened the link between strategy, risk and day-to-day regulatory practice.

Operational delivery was substantial. The Early Years Inspectorate (EYI) maintained oversight of 3,948 pre-school services, 3,013 school-age services and 158 childminding services on the National Register. It completed 2,514 pre-school inspections and 85 childminding Pre-Registration Assessments. It also managed increased concerns activity, Notifications of Incident, registration renewals, change in circumstance applications and preparation for new statutory enforcement powers.

The Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service (ACIMS) operated in a growing and increasingly complex non-statutory care environment. At year end, 243 non-statutory children's residential centres were registered, compared with 196 in 2024. ACIMS completed 264 inspections and reviews, including new registration inspection visits, thematic inspections and risk response activity. Monitoring visits were completed at all five non-statutory foster care agencies. ACIMS also supported the transition of Special Emergency Accommodation towards regulated provision and progressed work on a revised inspection model, risk-rated inspection planning, provider engagement and publication of foster care agency monitoring reports.

AEARS improved access and timeliness: 2,592 children were on the home education register, 1,492 home education assessments were completed, and the number of children waiting for assessment or allocation fell to 350. AEARS also strengthened independent school oversight, with 63 assessed independent schools, 6,381 children enrolled and 5,351 children on the Section 14 Register.

The Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit (CSSCU) expanded its reach and enforcement profile in 2025. The CSSCU Strategy 2025–2027 provided a renewed framework across governance, risk, services of concern and enforcement, supported by thematic safeguarding priorities relating to child and youth mental health, children and youth in migration, and children and youth in online spaces. The unit received 491 Child Safeguarding Statements, reviewed statements for 448 relevant services and received 216 unsolicited information referrals. Enforcement activity increased through Failure to Furnish notices, Advance Notices, regulatory enforcement meetings and escalations to the National Registration Enforcement Panel (NREP).

Enforcement and escalation became more structured across CSR. NREP arrangements, Regulatory Enforcement Meetings, processes for Services Operating Outside of Registration Status (SOORS) and unregistered services, Garda Vetting escalation and Positive Disclosure Review Panel activity supported proportionate responses where non-compliance, safeguarding concerns, suitability issues or failure to engage required formal regulatory action. This strengthened the connection between inspection, registration, assessment, safeguarding intelligence and enforcement decision-making.

Stakeholder engagement remained central to CSR's approach. In 2025, CSR worked with Government departments, statutory partners, sector bodies, providers, representative organisations, education partners and international regulators. This engagement supported clearer understanding of regulatory requirements, improved compliance, shared learning and public confidence in regulation.

The CSR Programme Office, established in 2025, strengthened delivery of cross-departmental change. It introduced a more consistent project-management approach, supported by governance structures, auditable documentation, risk management and defined decision-making and escalation routes. Its portfolio included new Tusla Case Management applications, management of concerns, CCTV procedures, Special Emergency Accommodation procedures, the ACIMS risk-based framework and preparations for new enforcement powers.

Culture and staff support were also central to delivery. As CSR's remit, demand and complexity grew, staff professionalism, adaptability and commitment remained critical. The Culture Committee, Learning and Development Committee and wider governance structures supported staff connection, wellbeing, learning and the CSR Strategy theme of "Our Culture, Our Team".

Looking ahead to 2026

In 2026, CSR will focus on:

1
Embedding new enforcement powers

2
Strengthening data governance and digital assurance

3
Progressing Tusla Case Management and business intelligence reporting

4
Developing inspection and assessment models

5
Supporting school-age and childminding regulation

6
Sustaining ACIMS and AEARS improvement activity

7
Implementing the CSSCU Strategy

8
Maintaining ISO certification

9
Progressing eQMS development

Overall, the 2025 Annual Report shows a regulatory system that is broader, stronger and more mature. CSR expanded its operational reach, strengthened governance and assurance, improved oversight of key risks and continued to support services to understand and meet their responsibilities. The work completed in 2025 provides a strong platform for 2026 as CSR continues to develop as a coherent, accountable, learning and child-centred regulatory system.

3. Introduction

OUR VISION

For all services regulated or assessed by Children's Services Regulation to be safe and happy places for children and young people to live, play, learn and develop.

Tusla – The Child and Family Agency

Tusla was established in 2014 and is responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children in Ireland. It operates under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, which states that the agency's function is to support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children, and the effective functioning of families. Tusla is governed by a board responsible for setting the agency's strategic direction and ensuring that appropriate financial, operational and compliance controls and risk management procedures are in place.

Children's Services Regulation

Children's Services Regulation (CSR) was established in 2018 and is part of Tusla's Quality and Regulation Directorate. CSR is responsible for the effective operation and performance management of the agency's regulatory functions. Its role is to provide public assurance and confidence that Tusla's regulatory functions operate to the highest standards, using evidence-based practice and in accordance with legislation.

Governance of Children's Services Regulation

The National Service Director of CSR leads and centrally coordinates a targeted, consistent, transparent and proportionate approach to regulation and monitoring across CSR's regulatory areas. Each regulatory function operates within its own statutory framework, while CSR provides oversight, coordination and assurance across these distinct areas of activity.

Children's Services Regulation Areas



The Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service (ACIMS) is a national service responsible for inspecting and registering non-statutory children's residential centres managed by voluntary organisations or private providers, in accordance with Part 8 of the Child Care Act 1991. It is also responsible for monitoring non-statutory foster care agencies.



The Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service (AEARS) is responsible for the regulation of education provided in places other than recognised schools, in accordance with section 14(1) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.



The Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit (CSSCU) is a dedicated unit responsible for supporting and enforcing the legal requirement for relevant service providers to have a Child Safeguarding Statement in place. The unit operates and maintains the Register of Non-Compliance under sections 12 and 13 of the Children First Act 2015, receives and assesses concerns about statements in relevant children's services, and carries out sectoral compliance projects.



The Early Years Inspectorate (EYI) is the statutory regulator of early years services in Ireland. Its regulatory framework includes requirements for registration, inspection and, where necessary, enforcement for the following service types:

- Pre-school services
- School-age services
- Childminding services (from September 2024)



Section 4

Governance and Responsibilities

This section contains:

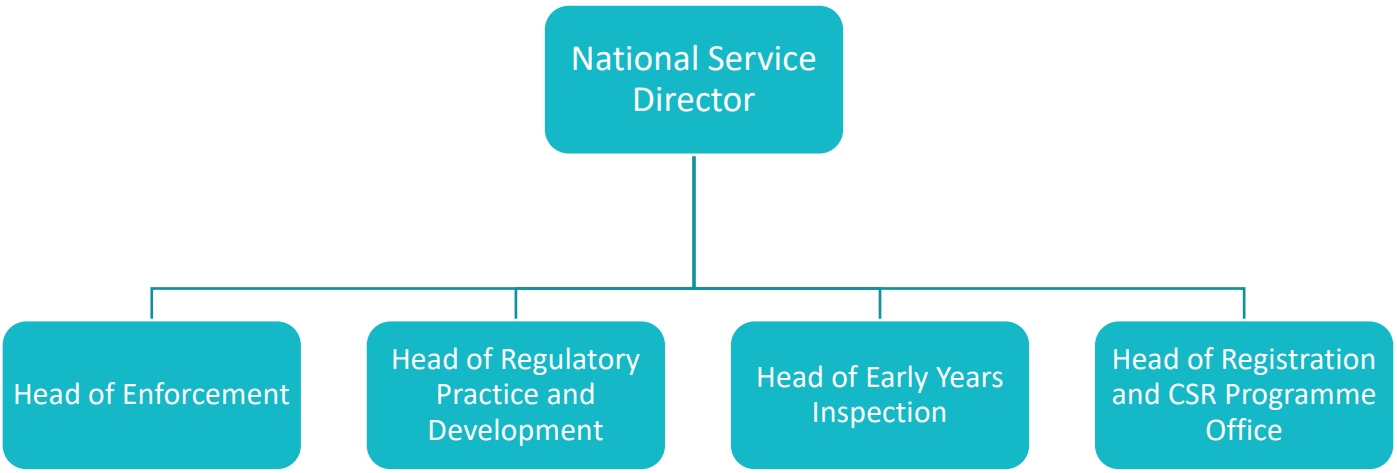
4.1 Children's Services Regulation Strategy 2025–2030

4.2 Annual Business Plan

4.3 Strengthening CSR Governance

4.4 Inter-Agency Collaboration

4. Governance and Responsibilities



CSR is led by the National Service Director, supported by four Heads of Service. In 2025, CSR's governance was significantly strengthened in response to the growth in its regulatory functions. This section sets out the strategy and business plan that directed CSR's work, how CSR is governed and how it works with other agencies.

4.1. Children's Services Regulation Strategy 2025–2030

During 2025, CSR updated its strategic framework by developing the CSR Strategy 2025–2030. The strategy builds on the achievements and learning of the previous strategic period and sets a refreshed direction for CSR as its regulatory responsibilities continue to grow in scale and complexity. It reaffirms CSR's vision: "For all services regulated or assessed by Children's Services Regulation to be safe and happy places for children and young people to live, play, learn and develop." It is built around four strategic priorities.


CSR Strategy 2025-2030

Our Vision

For all services regulated or assessed by Children's Services Regulation to be safe and happy places for children and young people to live, play, learn, and develop.

Our Goals and Objectives

1. Public Engagement

Advance children's safety, development, and wellbeing by strengthening partnership and communication with stakeholders.

1.1. Provide clear, useful, and accessible information for parents, guardians, and carers to raise awareness about regulation, which supports informed choices.

1.2. Improve our capacity and capability to communicate and engage using different communication channels.

1.3. Work in partnership with Government departments, other state agencies, academia, representatives and support organisations to promote the safety, development and wellbeing of children in the services we regulate.

1.4. Strengthen awareness of our identity, values, influence, and reputation.

2. Effective Regulation

Ensure that we have effective systems, and we can identify where regulated services are not meeting the required standard.

2.1. Strive for a world-class regulatory system in line with international best practice which delivers the best outcomes for children and families.

2.2. Predict and respond to services appropriately by building systems that are underpinned by regulatory intelligence.

2.3. Use the full range of our enforcement powers to support regulatory compliance by taking action in a proportionate and effective way.

2.4. Enhance our regulatory systems to promote alignment and consistency across teams.

3. Improved Compliance

Provide information, guidance and support to regulated services to enable them to meet their requirements.

3.1. Work with stakeholders to improve the sector's understanding of regulatory requirements.

3.2. Support legislative reform and policy development by providing high-quality, independent expertise.

3.3. Provide clear, targeted, and accessible information for service providers to improve understanding of regulatory requirements.

3.4. Support the implementation of standards through the development of guidance, digital learning solutions and self-assessment tools.

3.5. Consult with providers, children, young people, parents, and stakeholder groups to ensure their views and perspectives are heard.

4. Our Culture, Our Team

Empower our people, through strengthening our systems and adhering to our culture statement.

4.1. Ensure a positive work environment and empowering culture, built on shared values, and participatory teamwork.

4.2. Embed a culture of quality through systems and processes that meet the highest standards.

4.3. Define and deliver innovative and secure digital information and data solutions to aid the effective delivery of our work and improve the way we interact with stakeholders.

4.4. Ensure our governance structures support informed and accountable decision-making.

4.5. Support our staff through continuous professional development and training opportunities.

Fiona McDonnell
National Service Director
Children's Services Regulation

The strategy was developed in consultation with staff across CSR, so that their experience and perspectives are reflected and its priorities are practical and grounded in the realities of regulatory work.

CSR Strategy 2025–2030

Four strategic priorities

1

Public Engagement: strengthening communication and partnership with parents, guardians, carers, children, young people, providers, government departments, agencies, academia and representative organisations, so that regulation is better understood and supports informed choices.

2

Effective Regulation: continuing to develop regulatory systems that are consistent, proportionate, evidence-informed and aligned with international best practice, including the use of regulatory intelligence and the full range of enforcement powers where required.

3

Improved Compliance: supporting regulated and assessed services to understand and meet their statutory responsibilities through clear guidance, accessible information, digital learning, self-assessment tools and meaningful consultation.

4

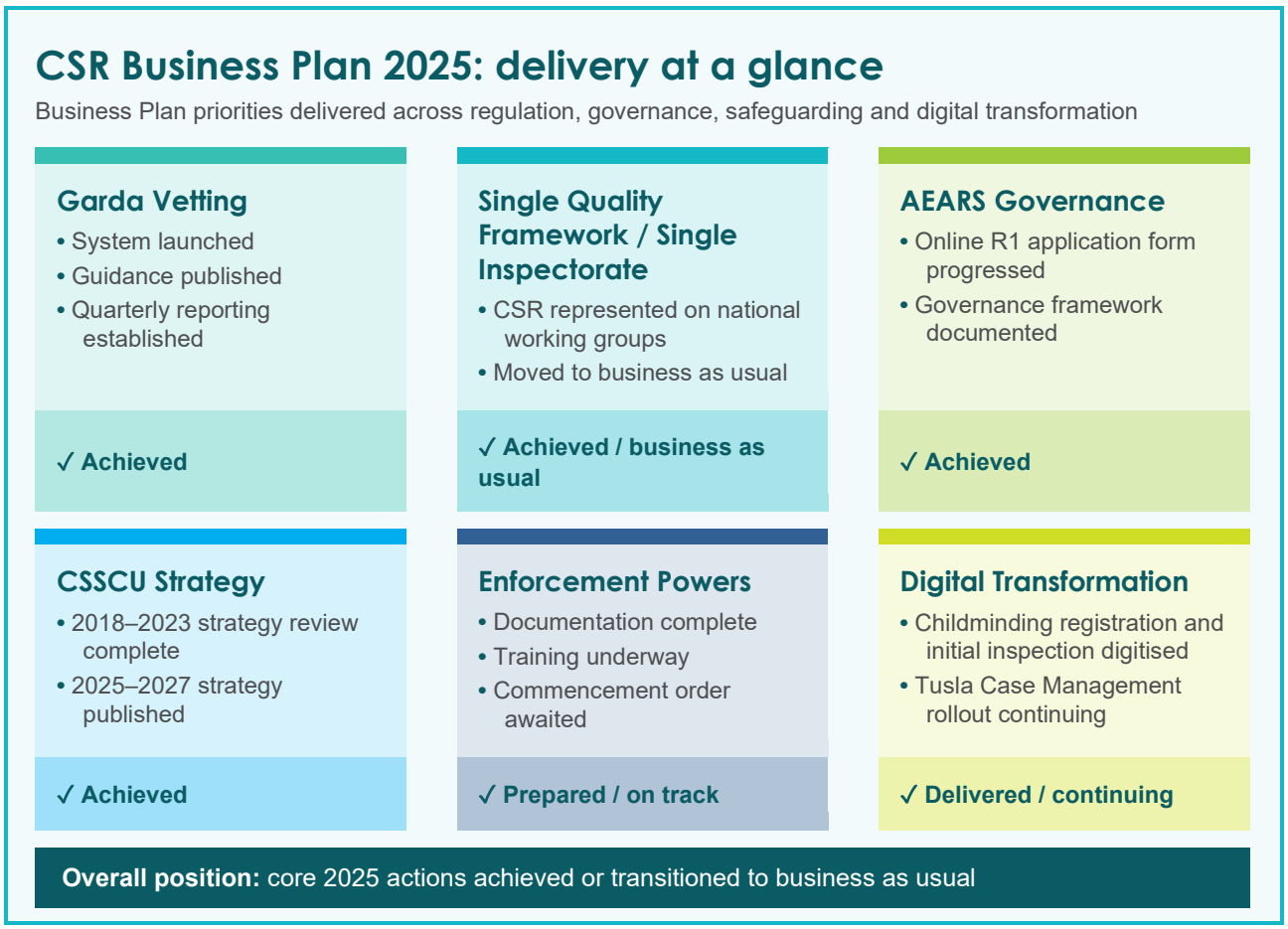
Our Culture, Our Team: empowering staff through a positive working culture, high-quality systems, strong governance, secure digital and data solutions, and ongoing professional development.

4.2. Annual Business Plan

In 2025, CSR made strong progress across the priorities set out in its annual Business Plan. The year saw major developments in regulatory practice, service governance, digital transformation and organisational systems, all aligned with Tusla's Corporate Plan 2024–2026 and the priorities of the Quality and Regulation Directorate.

A key achievement was the implementation of the Garda Vetting application and process system for early years registered providers, which began in February 2025. Supporting documentation, guidance and frequently asked questions were published on the Early Years Inspectorate website, and the ICT system became fully operational during the year. CSR also supported wider Tusla planning for Garda Vetting processes arising from the Review of the Child Care Act 1991.

Progress was also made on several strategic reform priorities. CSR participated in governance structures led by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) supporting the development of a Single Quality Framework and Single Inspectorate for early learning and care, school-age care and childminding. Delegates were appointed to the relevant working groups, and this work moved into business-as-usual engagement when national timelines were extended. In parallel, the Early Years Inspectorate prepared to implement extended enforcement powers, completing draft documentation and training while awaiting the relevant commencement order.



Progress was equally strong across individual services. AEARS progressed the online R1 application form (the prescribed form used to apply to register a child for education in a place other than a recognised school) following publication of S.I. No. 758/2024 and documented its governance framework. The CSSCU completed the review of its 2018–2023 strategy and published the CSSCU Strategy 2025–2027. In the Early Years Inspectorate, childminding registration and initial inspection processes were digitised and the rollout of Tusla Case Management continued.

4.3. Strengthening CSR Governance

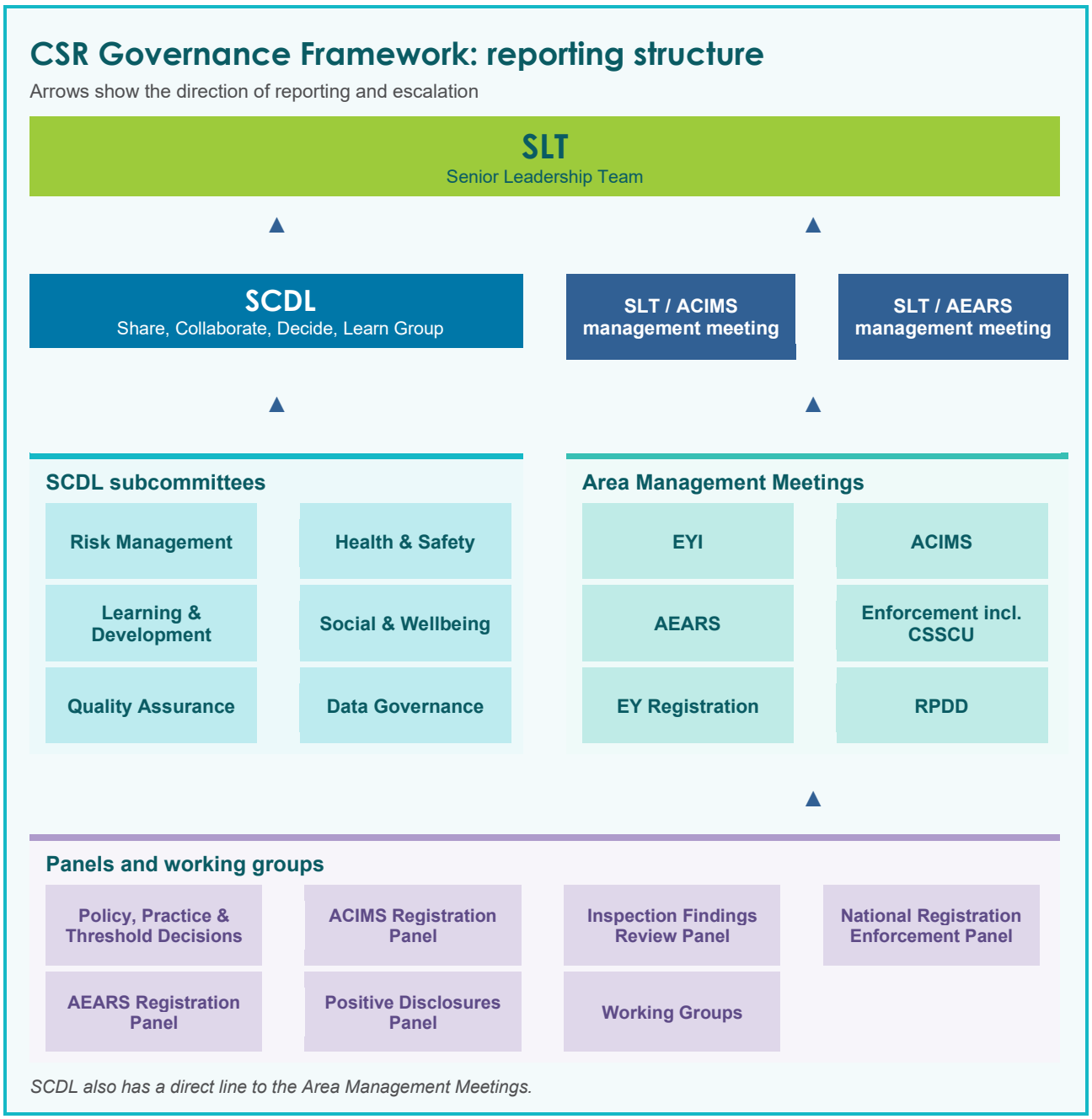
In 2025, CSR strengthened its governance arrangements by developing a formal CSR Governance Framework. The framework provides clearer structures for decision-making, reporting, escalation and assurance across CSR, supporting a consistent and accountable approach to regulation as the scale and complexity of CSR's functions continued to grow.

The framework sets out the structure of committees and meetings within CSR, including the relationship between the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the Share, Collaborate, Decide, Learn (SCDL) Group. It clarifies roles, responsibilities, terms of reference, approval routes and escalation pathways, so that decisions are made transparently and risks, actions and operational issues are managed through defined governance channels.

A central feature of the framework is the reporting structure into SCDL. Committees, subcommittees and operational departments report to SCDL on a regular basis through agreed minutes, action logs, summary reports and escalation updates. This provides SCDL with a consistent view of activity, risk, performance, quality assurance and emerging issues across CSR, while enabling matters requiring senior decision-making to be escalated to SLT in a timely and

structured way.

The Governance Framework is underpinned by the principles of integrity, fairness, transparent decision-making, clear reporting and escalation, and compliance with relevant legislation and best practice guidance. Each committee, meeting and panel has Terms of Reference setting out its purpose, membership, decision-making arrangements, reporting relationships, chair, quorum and meeting schedule, with annual review built in. Common meeting disciplines, such as advance circulation of papers, action logs, rolling agendas and SharePoint-based management of committee materials, support consistency and follow-through.



In 2025, CSR also established a Data Governance Committee to strengthen oversight of data management, data integrity and performance reporting. The committee provided a structured forum for data owners, reporters and senior leaders to review data processes, validation arrangements, metrics development and publication controls, supporting a more consistent and evidence-informed approach to decision-making across CSR.

The Governance Framework is closely aligned with CSR's Quality Management System (QMS), Tusla's corporate and business planning processes and CSR's strategic priorities. This gives a clear line of sight from strategy and policy to day-to-day regulatory practice, and supports consistent decision-making, clearer oversight of risk and performance, and stronger follow-through on actions across all four CSR services.

4.4. Inter-Agency Collaboration

In 2025, CSR continued to place strong emphasis on high-level inter-agency collaboration as a core element of effective regulation, stakeholder engagement and public assurance. This work supported clearer communication of regulatory requirements, strengthened alignment with national policy developments and provided structured opportunities for statutory, sectoral and representative organisations to contribute to the development of regulatory practice.

A central feature of this collaboration was the ongoing engagement between the Early Years Inspectorate, Government departments and national sector partners through the Early Years Regulatory Consultative Forum and Regulatory Support Forum. These forums brought together representatives from DCDE, national childcare and early years organisations, childminding bodies, education partners and Tusla staff to support shared understanding of key regulatory developments, including childminding registration, Garda Vetting, registration renewal, policy guidance, school-age service matters and wider implementation issues.



SPOTLIGHT

Co-hosting the EPSO symposium

At international level, CSR contributed to wider regulatory learning by jointly hosting the European Partnership for Supervisory Organisations in Health and Social Care (EPSO) symposium with the Mental Health Commission in September 2025. The event provided an opportunity to share learning on compliance, enforcement, standards, governance and quality improvement with regulators from a range of jurisdictions, reinforcing CSR's commitment to proportionate, risk-informed and trust-based regulation.

CSR also engaged with higher and further education providers to support alignment between regulatory requirements and professional education pathways. This included engagement on safeguarding concerns arising in student placements and clarification of Garda Vetting requirements for students undertaking practice placements in early years services. This work supported a more consistent understanding of responsibilities across education providers and early years settings.

Collaboration with national and local support structures was particularly important for the registration renewal process and the phased implementation of childminding regulation. CSR worked with County Childcare Committees, DCDE, Pobal and other partners to support sector communications, share renewal status updates, coordinate follow-up activity and provide practical support to registered providers and childminders. This included targeted communication, information sessions and direct engagement to help services understand and meet regulatory requirements.



Section 5

Children's Services Regulation – 2025

This section contains:

5.1 Data at a glance

5. Children's Services Regulation – 2025

5.1. Data at a glance

Activity increased across most areas of CSR's work in 2025. The figures below compare 2025 with 2024 for each of CSR's four services.

5.1.1. Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service

264
Total inspections and reviews undertaken
▲ 21% on 2024

243
Non-statutory residential centres
▲ 24% on 2024

55
New registration inspection visits
▲ 34% on 2024

Data item	2025	2024	Change
Total inspections and reviews undertaken	**264**	218	▲ 21%
New registration inspection visits	**55**	41	▲ 34%
Thematic inspections undertaken	**119**	177	▼ 33%
Non-statutory residential centres	**243**	196	▲ 24%
Residential services with conditions attached	**1**	1	no change
Non-statutory foster care services	**5**	5	no change
Monitoring visits to non-statutory foster care services	**5**	2	▲ 150%

5.1.2. Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service

Data item	2025	2024	Change
Children on the home education register	**2,592**	2,325	▲ 11%
Home education R1 applications received	**1,889**	1,266	▲ 49%
Home education assessments carried out	**1,492**	1,303	▲ 15%
Independent schools assessed / with children on the Section 14 Register	**63**	59	▲ 7%
Children enrolled in independent schools	**6,381**	6,464	▼ 1%
Children on the Section 14 Register in independent schools	**5,351**	4,628	▲ 16%
R1 applications received for independent schools	**2,174**	2,077	▲ 5%
Independent school assessments carried out	**21**	29	▼ 28%

2,592
Children on the home education register
▲ 11% on 2024

1,889
Home education R1 applications received
▲ 49% on 2024

1,492
Home education assessments carried out
▲ 15% on 2024

5.1.3. Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit

491
Child Safeguarding Statements received
264 in 2024 ▲ 86%

448
Relevant services with Child Safeguarding Statements reviewed
327 in 2024 ▲ 37%

216
Unsolicited information referrals received
66 in 2024 ▲ 227%

5.1.4. Early Years Inspectorate

Data item	2025	2024	Change
Pre-school services on the National Register	**3,948**	4,045	▼ 2%
School-age services on the National Register	**3,013**	2,724	▲ 11%
Childminding services on the National Register	**158**	7*	—
Pre-school inspections carried out	**2,514**	2,316	▲ 9%
Total pre-school and school-age inspections carried out	**2,574**	2,473	▲ 4%
School-age inspections undertaken	**60**	157	▼ 62%
Immediate Action Notices issued to early years services	**305**	227	▲ 34%
Concerns received relating to pre-school services	**506**	360	▲ 41%
Concerns received relating to school-age services	**177**	100	▲ 77%
Concerns received relating to childminding services	**21**	N/A	**new**

* Childminding services registered under the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Childminding Services) Regulations 2024.

WHAT ARE CONCERNS?

Concerns are unsolicited information or notifications received by the Early Years Inspectorate about a pre-school, school-age or childminding service.

Each concern is recorded, assessed for regulatory remit and risk rated. The rating decides the response, from engagement with the provider to inspection or referral (see section 11.2).



Section 6

Summary of key achievements across CSR in 2025

This section contains:

6.1 Alternative Care Inspection & Monitoring Service (ACIMS)

6.2 Alternative Education Assessment & Registration Service (AEARS)

6.3 Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit (CSSCU)

6.4 Early Years Inspectorate (EYI)

6.5 Spotlight on the Early Years Vetting Unit

6.6 CSR Programme Office

6.7 CSR-wide achievements

6. Summary of key achievements across CSR in 2025

2025 was a year of growth for all four CSR services. Each service increased its regulatory activity while improving how it works.

6.1. Alternative Care Inspection & Monitoring Service (ACIMS)

ACIMS operated in a context of continued growth in the non-statutory children's residential sector during 2025, requiring increased and sustained regulatory oversight across residential and foster care services. At year end, there were 243 non-statutory residential centres registered with ACIMS, compared with 196 in 2024. This reflected continued expansion in the sector and the need for proportionate, risk-informed regulatory oversight.

Inspection activity also increased during 2025. ACIMS completed 264 inspections and reviews, compared with 218 in 2024. This included 55 new registration inspection visits and 119 thematic inspections, supporting continued assurance of compliance, governance and care practice across non-statutory residential services.

243
non-statutory residential centres registered (196 in 2024)

264
inspections and reviews completed (218 in 2024)

5 of 5
non-statutory foster care agencies received monitoring visits

ACIMS maintained oversight of five non-statutory foster care agencies in 2025 and completed monitoring visits to all five agencies. The service also progressed stronger systems for registration, inspection planning and risk response, including preparations for a revised inspection model and the first publication of non-statutory foster care agency monitoring reports to support transparency and public assurance.

6.2. Alternative Education Assessment & Registration Service (AEARS)

During 2025, AEARS made measurable improvements in access, timeliness and transparency across both home education and independent school regulation. A central achievement was the continued reduction of home education waiting lists. The total number of children waiting for assessment or allocation reduced to 350 by year end, compared with 639 in 2024, while the number of children waiting twelve months or more reduced to 6, compared with 143 in 2024. This

improvement was supported by increased assessment activity, with 1,492 home education assessments completed during 2025, compared with 1,303 in 2024.

51%
reduction in children awaiting preliminary assessment since the 2021 peak

89%
reduction in children awaiting review assessment, enabling a two-year review cycle

350
children waiting for assessment or allocation at year end (639 in 2024)

Demand for AEARS services also increased during the year. At year end, 2,592 children were recorded on the home education register, compared with 2,325 in 2024. AEARS received 1,889 home education R1 applications in 2025, compared with 1,266 in 2024. The service also progressed implementation of the amended S.I. No. 758/2024, which updated the prescribed R1 application form and supported improved engagement with children as part of the assessment process, strengthening both child-centred practice and safeguarding assurance.

In respect of independent schools, AEARS maintained oversight of 63 independent schools, with 6,381 children enrolled and 5,351 children recorded on the Section 14 Register at year end. AEARS received 2,174 R1 applications relating to independent schools and completed 21 independent school assessments during 2025. The service also continued to publish independent school assessment reports, strengthening transparency and public assurance.

6.3. Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit (CSSCU)

The CSSCU's work in 2025 was shaped by the development of the CSSCU Strategy 2025–2027 and a strengthened focus on governance, risk, services of concern and enforcement. The strategy was endorsed by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality and sets out three cross-cutting safeguarding themes: child and youth mental health, children and youth in migration, and children and youth in online spaces.

CSSCU STRATEGY 2025–2027

Three cross-cutting safeguarding themes

- Child and youth mental health
- Children and youth in migration
- Children and youth in online spaces

CSSCU activity increased during the year. The unit received 491 Child Safeguarding Statements in 2025, compared with 264 in 2024, and reviewed Child Safeguarding Statements for 448 relevant services, compared with 327 in 2024. Unsolicited information referrals also increased, with 216 referrals received in 2025 compared with 66 in 2024, reflecting the expanding reach and visibility of the unit's safeguarding compliance role.

The CSSCU continued to build strategic partnerships and sector engagement throughout 2025, working with national partners including the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), the Health Service

Executive (HSE), the Department of Education and Youth, Children First Information and Advice Service, Tusla Commissioning, the National Youth Council, the Early Years Inspectorate and ACIMS. In addition, the unit expanded its engagement with the Children First Inter-Departmental Implementation Group (IDIG). This partnership approach supported the implementation of the new strategy and reinforced the unit's preventative safeguarding focus under the Children First Act 2015.

6.4. Early Years Inspectorate (EYI)

The Early Years Inspectorate continued to deliver a substantial inspection and regulatory programme during 2025 across pre-school, school-age and childminding services. At year end, there were 3,948 pre-school services, 3,013 school-age services and 158 childminding services on the National Register. The Inspectorate also registered 66 new pre-school services and 381 new school-age services, and completed significant childminding registration and assessment activity under the 2024 childminding regulations.

8 → 12
regional inspection areas after the teams were reconfigured

381
new school-age services registered

66
new pre-school services registered

Inspection activity remained a core part of the Inspectorate's work. In 2025, the Inspectorate completed 2,514 pre-school inspections, compared with 2,316 in 2024, and 2,574 pre-school and school-age inspections combined. The number of school-age inspections reduced to 60, reflecting a more targeted approach in 2025, while 305 Immediate Action Notices were issued to early years services where immediate action was required to address identified risk.

The Inspectorate also strengthened its operating model during the year. Inspection teams were reconfigured from eight to twelve regional areas, a dedicated Inspection Department Business Unit was established, and key processes were developed or revised, including concerns panels, Notification of Incident arrangements, childminding pre-registration assessment processes on Tusla Case Management, Inspection Findings Review processes and preparations for new enforcement powers. These developments supported greater consistency, oversight and responsiveness across a growing regulatory function.

The Inspectorate also progressed significant Tusla Case Management (TCM) development during the year, including work on the new applications module for pre-school and school-age services and retrospective improvements to the childminding registration module, which had gone live in 2024 and was nominated for a Tusla Excellence Award.

6.5. Spotlight on the Early Years Vetting Unit

SPOTLIGHT

Early Years Vetting Unit

A new unit, established in February 2025

The Early Years Vetting Unit commenced in February 2025 as a new function supporting the regulatory requirement to secure Garda Vetting for self-employed early years registered providers and childminders. The unit has a dual role: supporting the operational processing of vetting applications and identity certification, and identifying matters that may require escalation where vetting disclosures or suitability issues raise safeguarding or registration concerns.

1,674 calls managed

5,525 emails managed

230 walk-in queries

2,908 identity certifications reviewed

1,949 valid certifications submitted to the Tusla Connect Vetting Bureau

1,746 Garda Vetting disclosures received

959 certifications with errors requiring follow-up

The establishment of the unit strengthened CSR's capacity to provide clear guidance to applicants and registered providers, improve consistency in the handling of vetting documentation, and ensure that Garda Vetting outcomes are appropriately connected to registration, childminding suitability and escalation pathways. Positive disclosure activity arising from this work is addressed in section 12.6 as part of the wider enforcement and escalation arrangements.

6.6. CSR Programme Office

The CSR Programme Office was developed during 2025 to support a more systematic approach to managing projects across Children's Services Regulation. It provides structured oversight from project initiation to closure, supporting consistency, clear documentation, defined governance, risk management and alignment with CSR methodologies.

The function also supported CSR's wider strategic objective to embed a culture of quality through robust systems and processes. Its work aligned with the Quality Management System and ISO 9001 requirements for the design and development of services, including the management of CSR projects from initiation to completion. This provided an important link between strategic priorities, operational delivery, controlled documentation and continuous improvement.

During 2025, the Programme Office contributed to a diverse project portfolio across CSR. This included projects under full Programme Office control, projects supported through tailored

guidance, projects preparing for initiation and completed projects that provided opportunities for reflection and learning. Areas of activity included:

Tusla Case Management: new applications	Management of concerns	CCTV Policy and Guidance
Special Emergency Accommodation procedures	ACIMS risk-based framework	Preparing to implement new Early Years enforcement powers

The Programme Office also supported cross-departmental learning by working across CSR areas and tailoring project management approaches to the needs of different teams and initiatives.

Overall, 2025 was a year of establishment, learning and consolidation for the CSR Programme Office. By strengthening project governance, supporting cross-departmental delivery and embedding structured project management practice, the function provided an important foundation for more consistent, transparent and effective delivery of CSR's change and improvement agenda in 2026.

6.7. CSR-wide achievements

2025 was a year of significant consolidation and strengthening across CSR. The CSR Strategy 2025–2030 provided a refreshed framework for public engagement, effective regulation, improved compliance and strengthening our culture and team, while the annual Business Plan supported delivery across regulatory practice, service governance, digital transformation and organisational systems.

CSR also strengthened its national and international regulatory profile by jointly hosting the European Partnership for Supervisory Organisations in Health and Social Care (EPSO) symposium with the Mental Health Commission in September 2025. The event brought together regulators from 16 countries and provided an opportunity to share learning on compliance, enforcement, standards, governance and quality improvement, with CSR contributing its experience in trust-based, risk-informed and proportionate regulatory models.

CSR continued to embed and mature its Quality Management System during 2025, supported by the new CSR Governance Framework, which clarified decision-making, reporting, escalation and assurance arrangements across CSR. A major achievement was the extension of ISO 9001:2015 certification across 30 geographical sites, demonstrating consistent national quality management arrangements. This milestone was marked at the QMS celebration event in December 2025 and further recognised through the QMS winning an Innovation in Service Delivery award at the Tusla Excellence and Innovation Awards 2025.

QUALITY MILESTONE

ISO 9001:2015 certification across 30 geographical sites

The Quality Management System also won an Innovation in Service Delivery award at the Tusla Excellence and Innovation Awards 2025.

CSR's Quality Assurance Audit (QAA) Programme also developed further during the year. Internal audit activity, assurance reporting and follow-up of corrective actions supported evidence-based improvement and reinforced the alignment between QMS, governance, risk, performance and operational regulatory practice.

Culture and staff engagement remained central to CSR's development in 2025. CSR continued to promote a collaborative, child-centred approach, supported by positive working culture, high-quality systems, secure digital and data solutions, strong governance and ongoing professional development.

Culture and staff engagement were supported by the CSR Culture Committee (formerly the Social and Wellbeing Committee), which promoted a positive, inclusive working environment across CSR units. A Staff Appreciation Day in September 2025 encouraged staff to connect through local team-based activities, supporting the CSR Strategy theme of "Our Culture, Our Team".





TUSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

ALTERNATIVE CARE INSPECTION & MONITORING

Section 7

Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service (ACIMS)

This section contains:

7.1 ACIMS in 2025
7.2 Non-statutory children's residential centres
7.3 Conditions of Registration
7.4 Inspections of non-statutory children's residential centres
7.5 Special Emergency Accommodation
7.6 Monitoring of private non-statutory foster care agencies
7.7 ACIMS Developments and Stakeholder Engagement
7.8 A Look Ahead

7. Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service (ACIMS)

ACIMS oversaw a growing residential sector of 243 registered centres in 2025, completing 264 inspections and reviews.

The Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service is responsible for regulating non-statutory children's residential services and monitoring non-statutory foster care agencies. Its role includes:

- The registration and inspection of non-statutory residential care centres in line with the provisions of Part 8 of the Child Care Act 1991.
- The monitoring of private non-statutory foster care agencies that provide services on behalf of Tusla in compliance with the foster care standards.

The Child Care (Standards in Children's Residential Centres) Regulations 1996 provide the framework against which registration decisions of children's residential centres are primarily made. The National Standards for Children's Residential Centres (2018) provide the framework against which inspections are carried out and the criteria against which centre structures and care practices are examined.

The inspection of centres is carried out to safeguard the wellbeing and interests of children and young people living in them and to ensure the proper conduct of the centres' operation. Statutory children's residential centres are regulated separately by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA).

7.1. ACIMS in 2025

2025 was a year of growth, consolidation and regulatory development for the Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service (ACIMS). The service operated in a context of continued expansion in the non-statutory children's residential sector, increasing complexity in children's placement needs, and ongoing reliance on emergency and emerging models of care. ACIMS continued to strengthen its registration, inspection and monitoring role as a core component of Children's Services Regulation.

The scale of ACIMS activity increased markedly during the year. By year end, 243 non-statutory children's residential centres were registered with ACIMS, compared with 196 in 2024 (see section 7.2). The continued growth of the sector required sustained attention to registration, inspection planning, provider engagement and risk-informed oversight.

Registration activity was supported by the introduction of a centralised approach to registration applications and the revision of application documentation for rollout in 2026. ACIMS progressed new applications and re-registrations that supported additional residential placement capacity while maintaining focus on statutory requirements, governance arrangements, staffing, safeguarding and the suitability of care environments. Conditions of registration continued to be used on a case-specific basis where necessary to mitigate identified risk or support compliance, with one non-statutory residential service having conditions attached at year end.

Inspection and monitoring activity remained central to ACIMS' regulatory role. During 2025, the service completed 264 inspections and reviews, compared with 218 in 2024 and 112 in 2020. This included 55 new registration inspection visits, 119 thematic inspections and risk response activity where escalations, concerns or other intelligence required additional regulatory review. Inspection practice continued to draw on multiple sources of evidence, including interviews with children, staff and managers, observation of care practice and the living environment, review of documentation and care records, and assessment of governance and safeguarding systems.

A strong focus was maintained on children's rights, welfare and lived experience. ACIMS inspections actively seek the views and experiences of children and young people, helping to ensure that their voices inform inspection findings, service improvement and regulatory decision-making. This child-centred approach remained central to ACIMS' work in safeguarding children and promoting safe, consistent and high-quality care environments.

> *"ACIMS inspections actively seek the views and experiences of children and young people, so that their voices inform inspection findings, service improvement and regulatory decision-making.*

Internal capacity and governance were also strengthened during the year. A revised management structure was developed, including a Deputy Head of ACIMS, an additional inspection manager post, new inspector posts and strengthened administrative support. A Practice, Policy and Threshold Decision forum was redeveloped for ACIMS, and work continued on Standard Operating Procedures and guidance to support consistency across registration, inspection, escalation and decision-making processes. These developments provide an important platform for the continued strengthening of regulatory practice in 2026.

ACIMS also progressed work on a revised model of resource allocation for implementation in 2026, including the development of risk-rated inspection planning. This work is intended to support more intelligence-led deployment of inspection resources, ensure inspection frequency and intensity are proportionate to assessed risk, and maintain appropriate oversight of all registered services within a growing and increasingly complex sector.

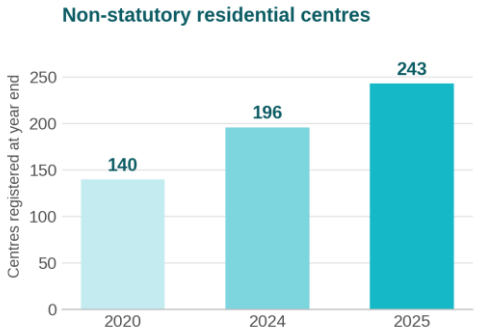
7.2. Non-statutory children's residential centres

Residential centres are designed to provide a safe and nurturing environment for individual children and young people who cannot live at home, or in an alternative family environment, such as foster care.

Proprietors are required to apply to ACIMS for registration to operate a children's residential centre, and it is an offence under legislation to operate without registration being secured.

The number of registered non-statutory children's residential centres increased significantly during 2025. At the end of 2025, there were 243 non-statutory residential centres registered with ACIMS, compared with 196 at the end of 2024 and 140 at the end of 2020. This represents an increase of 47 centres, or approximately 24%, since 2024, and an increase of 103 centres, or approximately 74%, since 2020. The data shows sustained growth in the non-statutory residential sector over the five-year period, with a corresponding need for continued regulatory oversight, inspection planning and risk-informed monitoring.

The number of non-statutory residential services with conditions attached remained low at year end. At the end of 2025, one service had conditions attached to its registration, the same as at the end of 2024. During 2025, conditions were used on a case-specific basis where required to mitigate identified risk or support compliance while regulatory oversight continued.



7.3. Conditions of Registration

WHAT ARE CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION?

ACIMS may attach specific conditions to the registration of non-statutory children's residential centres to ensure that services operate in line with the required regulations for the safety, welfare and development of children and young people.

These conditions are applied on a case-specific basis and are designed to address identified risks or areas where further improvement is required. They commonly relate to areas such as governance and management arrangements, staffing levels, safeguarding and child protection practices, care planning, and the suitability of premises.

Conditions may also require centres to undertake defined actions within specified timeframes, strengthen oversight arrangements, or provide additional assurances to ACIMS in order to demonstrate ongoing compliance with regulatory standards.

The application of conditions is an important regulatory enforcement mechanism, supporting risk-based decision-making and enabling ACIMS to ensure that services continue to operate in a safe and appropriate manner while improvements are being implemented.

At the end of 2025, one non-statutory residential service had conditions attached to its registration, the same as at the end of 2024. Conditions remained low relative to the overall number of registered centres. Conditions are intended to be applied for the least amount of time possible in order to meet the relevant regulation.

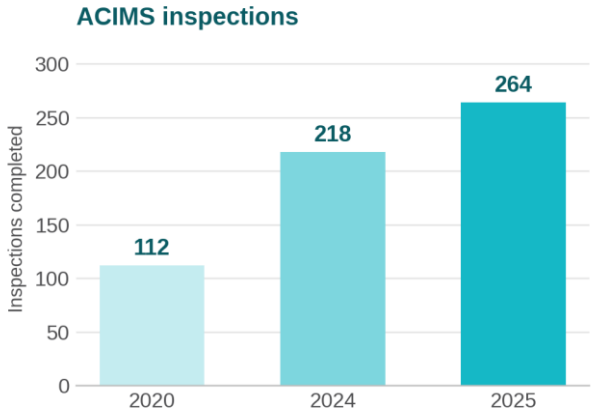
The number of services with conditions attached fluctuated during 2025, rising to two services in April before returning to one at year end. This reflects the case-specific nature of conditions and their use as a proportionate regulatory mechanism to address identified risks or areas requiring improvement while maintaining oversight of the service.

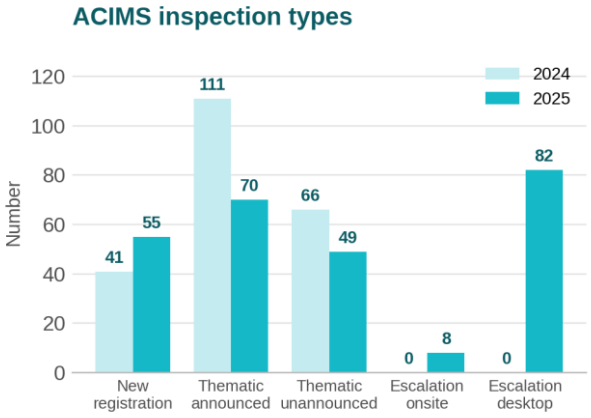
7.4. Inspections of non-statutory children's residential centres

Inspection is a core regulatory function of ACIMS and provides assurance that non-statutory children's residential centres are operating in line with statutory requirements and national standards. Inspections are undertaken against the Child Care (Standards in Children's Residential Centres) Regulations 1996 and the National Standards for Children's Residential Centres (2018), which provide the framework for assessing compliance, quality of care, governance and safeguarding arrangements.

Inspection practice emphasises the lived experience of children, with inspectors drawing on interviews, observation of practice and living environments, review of care records and engagement with relevant adults to inform findings and recommendations.

In 2025, ACIMS completed 264 inspections and reviews, compared with 218 in 2024 and 112 in 2020. This represents an increase of 46 inspections, or approximately 21%, since 2024, and an increase of 152 inspections, or approximately 136%, since 2020. The increase reflects the continued expansion of the non-statutory residential sector and the need for sustained regulatory oversight across a larger and more complex service base.





New registration inspection visits increased in 2025, with 55 visits completed compared with 41 in 2024. This reflects the level of new service development and the continued growth in registration activity during the year. Thematic onsite inspections remained a significant part of the inspection programme, with 70 announced and 49 unannounced thematic inspections completed in 2025, compared with 111 announced and 66 unannounced in 2024.

Risk response activity also formed an important part of the 2025 inspection programme. During the year, eight escalations were subject to onsite inspection, and 82 escalations were subject to desktop review. These activities supported timely and proportionate responses to concerns, notifications or other intelligence where additional regulatory review was required.

2025 IN NUMBERS

ACIMS inspection activity

55
new registration inspection visits

70
announced thematic inspections

49
unannounced thematic inspections

8
onsite escalation inspections

82
desktop escalation reviews

264
total inspections and reviews

INSPECTIONS BY QUARTER

64
Q1

71
Q2

66
Q3

63
Q4

Quarterly inspection activity was broadly sustained across 2025. Overall, the 2025 inspection programme demonstrates ACIMS' continued capacity to deliver a high volume of regulatory activity across registration, thematic inspection and risk response work.

7.5. Special Emergency Accommodation

WHAT IS SPECIAL EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION?

Special Emergency Accommodation (SEA) remained an important feature of the wider residential care system during 2025, providing emergency placements for children and young people where standard placement options were not immediately available. These arrangements continued to require careful regulatory attention because of the urgency and complexity of the circumstances in which they are used.

ACIMS maintained a strong focus on oversight of the transition of SEA arrangements towards regulated residential care provision where services met the threshold for registration. This work was aligned with the wider aim of reducing reliance on unregulated emergency arrangements and ensuring that children and young people are accommodated in settings that meet statutory requirements and national standards.

Provider engagement was central to this work. ACIMS continued to engage with providers on registration requirements, inspection expectations, purpose and function, staffing and governance arrangements. This supported providers to understand the steps required to progress towards registration and to align service delivery with the regulatory framework for children's residential centres.

The registration of new and emerging models of care remained relevant to SEA transition activity. ACIMS continued to apply registration protocols and regulatory pathways for services such as supported care accommodation and rapid access provision, helping to ensure that additional capacity was developed within a structured regulatory framework rather than through emergency arrangements alone. Collaboration with the Separated Children Seeking International Protection Team was a good example of a proactive approach to developing and applying protocols to help meet surges in capacity demand.

SEA-related oversight was also informed by risk. ACIMS' wider inspection and risk response arrangements supported timely consideration of notifications, concerns and emerging issues where children were placed in emergency or transitioning settings. This included use of inspection activity, desktop review and escalation routes where further regulatory assurance was required.

Overall, the continued focus on SEA transition in 2025 reflected ACIMS' commitment to safeguarding children through proportionate regulation, clear provider engagement and strengthened pathways into registered provision. This work remained important in supporting safer, more consistent and better governed care arrangements for children and young people with urgent or complex placement needs.

7.6. Monitoring of private non-statutory foster care agencies

ACIMS is responsible for the monitoring of private non-statutory foster care agencies operating in Ireland. This monitoring includes review of compliance with national standards, oversight of notifications and concerns, and engagement with agencies to support continuous improvement and safeguarding assurance.

This monitoring function is carried out in accordance with the National Standards for Foster Care (2003) and the Placement of Children in Foster Care Regulations 1995, with the objective of assuring the quality of care provided, promoting continuous improvement, and safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of children and young people in foster care.

Monitoring activities undertaken by ACIMS include:

- Processing approved provider applications from non-statutory foster care agencies
- Making recommendations on the approval of applications
- Conducting monitoring visits
- Responding to concerns or issues identified in service provision

Through these activities, ACIMS provides independent oversight of foster care agencies operating on behalf of Tusla, supporting accountability and ensuring that services meet required standards.

In 2025, there were five non-statutory foster care agencies operating, unchanged from 2024 and compared with six at the end of 2020. The number of agencies has therefore remained stable in recent years, following a reduction from the 2020 position.

ACIMS completed five monitoring visits to non-statutory foster care agencies during 2025, covering all five agencies and supporting stronger assurance of compliance with the National Standards for Foster Care and reinforcing ACIMS' support of Tusla operational oversight of agencies operating on its behalf.

Overall, the monitoring of private non-statutory foster care agencies forms an important component of ACIMS' regulatory role, contributing to the delivery of safe, consistent and high-quality care for children placed in foster care settings. The completion of monitoring visits to all five agencies in 2025 also supported increased transparency and public assurance, alongside the publication of non-statutory foster care agency monitoring reports.

7.7. ACIMS Developments and Stakeholder Engagement

Throughout 2025, ACIMS progressed a range of service developments aimed at strengthening regulatory oversight, improving consistency in registration and inspection practice, and supporting clearer engagement with providers, partner services and future social care professionals. This work reflected the continued expansion of the non-statutory residential sector and the need for proportionate, transparent and risk-informed regulation.

A central area of development was registration application processes. ACIMS introduced and implemented a more centralised application system for the registration of children's residential centres and progressed revised application documentation for rollout in 2026. These developments supported greater consistency in how applications and re-registrations are received, reviewed and progressed, and helped strengthen the registration pathway for new and existing providers.

ACIMS also progressed work on a revised model of inspection, scheduled for implementation in 2026. This included development of a risk-rated approach to inspection planning, designed to support more intelligence-led deployment of inspection resources and to ensure that inspection frequency is proportionate to the assessed level of risk and regulatory need.

HIGHLIGHTS

ACIMS developments in 2025

- Centralised registration application system introduced
- Revised, risk-rated inspection model prepared for 2026
- First foster care agency monitoring reports published
- Child sexual exploitation training for residential centres

Internal governance and consistency were strengthened through the redevelopment of the ACIMS Practice, Policy and Threshold Decision forum and continued development of Standard Operating Procedures and guidance. Training was delivered to the ACIMS team on interviewing and recording interviews during inspections and on the use of regulatory caution in children's regulated services, supporting consistent and legally robust inspection and regulatory practice.

Website and publication work also progressed. Non-statutory foster care agency monitoring reports were published for the first time, strengthening transparency and public assurance. New ACIMS children's residential centre application forms were also added to the website, improving access to information for providers and supporting clearer understanding of regulatory expectations.

Stakeholder engagement remained an important feature of ACIMS activity. ACIMS continued engagement with providers on registration requirements, inspection expectations and service development, including engagement with providers of Special Emergency Accommodation and other emerging models of care. This supported clearer communication of regulatory requirements and helped providers understand the pathway towards registration and compliance with statutory standards.

External engagement also extended to education and workforce development. ACIMS delivered presentations to social care students at Technological University Dublin and Munster Technological University on the role of ACIMS as regulator of non-statutory children's residential centres. This supported wider understanding of regulatory practice and provided an opportunity to engage future social care professionals on the role of inspection, safeguarding and quality assurance in residential care.

Safeguarding remained a key theme. Training on recognising the signs of child sexual exploitation and responding appropriately was delivered to children's residential centres during 2025. This supported sector awareness of risk indicators and strengthened the capacity of services to identify and respond to safeguarding concerns.

7.8. A Look Ahead

In 2026, ACIMS will continue to build its capacity and agility to deliver comprehensive, responsive and effective oversight across the growing non-statutory residential sector. Its priorities for the year are set out below.

LOOKING AHEAD

ACIMS priorities for 2026

1. Implement the revised inspection model, with risk-rated inspection planning
2. Roll out revised application documentation and refine centralised registration
3. Maintain close oversight of Special Emergency Accommodation transition
4. Sustain monitoring of non-statutory foster care agencies
5. Embed the Practice, Policy and Threshold Decision forum, Standard Operating Procedures, guidance and training
6. Develop QMS processes with Regulatory Practice and Development



Section 8

Alternative Education Assessment & Registration Service (AEARS)

This section contains:

8.1 AEARS in 2025

8.2 Home Education

8.3 Independent schools

8.4 AEARS Developments and Stakeholder Engagement

8.5 A Look Ahead

8. Alternative Education Assessment & Registration Service (AEARS)

AEARS reduced the number of children waiting or allocated for assessment by 45%, while the home education register grew to 2,592 children.

Under section 14(1) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, children who are educated at home or who attend a non-recognised (independent) school – that is, a school not funded by the Department of Education and Youth (known as the Department of Education until May 2025), such as a private primary school – must be registered with Tusla by their parents/guardians. The Alternative Education Assessment and Registration function in Tusla is responsible for the regulation of education provision in places other than recognised schools. Its function is to make an assessment of the educational provision for children against ministerial guidance, in order to determine if a child can be placed on the statutory register of children educated outside of a recognised school.

The service is managed by the Deputy Head of the Alternative Education Assessment & Registration Service, who reports to the Head of Regulatory Practice and Development.

There are two types of alternative education setting:

Home education

Children educated at home. Parents or guardians apply to register each child on the Section 14 Register.

Independent schools

Also known as non-recognised schools. Not recognised or funded by the Department of Education and Youth; each child attending must be registered.

8.1. AEARS in 2025

2025 was a year of consolidation and measurable improvement for the Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service (AEARS). The service continued to regulate education provision in places other than recognised schools under section 14 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, while responding to sustained demand across home education and independent school provision. The 2025 data show a larger home education register, broader independent school oversight, and stronger systems for assessment, registration compliance and stakeholder engagement.

2025 IN NUMBERS

AEARS at a glance

2,592
children on the home education register (2,325 in 2024)

1,889
home education applications received (1,266 in 2024)

1,492
home education assessments completed (1,303 in 2024)

350
children waiting or allocated at year end (639 in 2024)

63
assessed independent schools (59 in 2024)

5,351
children in independent schools on the Section 14 Register

Home education activity illustrates the scale of this change. At the end of 2025, 2,592 children were on the home education register, compared with 2,325 in 2024 and 1,648 at the end of 2020. Applications also remained high, with 1,889 R1 applications received in 2025, compared with 1,266 in 2024 and broadly in line with the elevated level recorded in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. This shows that home education continues to represent a substantial and sustained area of regulatory activity.

AEARS also increased assessment output and improved timeliness during the year. A total of 1,492 home education assessments were completed in 2025, compared with 1,303 in 2024 and 678 in 2020. At year end, the number of children waiting for assessment or allocation had reduced to 350, compared with 639 in 2024 and 1,435 at the end of 2020. This represents a substantial reduction in historical waiting pressures and provides a stronger basis for maintaining timely access to assessment in 2026.

This improvement included a headline 51% reduction, from the 2021 peak, in the number of children awaiting preliminary assessment and an 89% reduction in the number of children awaiting review assessment, enabling AEARS to move towards a sustainable two-year review cycle.

Independent school oversight also strengthened. At the end of 2025, AEARS had oversight of 63 assessed independent schools, compared with 59 in 2024 and 46 at the end of 2020. While the number of children enrolled in independent schools remained broadly stable at 6,381, the number recorded on the Section 14 Register increased to 5,351, compared with 4,628 in 2024. This indicates improved registration compliance and reflects sustained engagement with parents, guardians and independent school providers.

A key development during the year was the implementation of the amended S.I. No. 758/2024, including the revised prescribed R1 application form and updated guidance. This supported clearer application requirements and strengthened child-centred assessment practice by providing for engagement with the child as part of the assessment process. This direct engagement also strengthened safeguarding assurance by ensuring that the child's voice and experience are considered when assessing educational provision.

Stakeholder engagement and communication were further developed throughout 2025. AEARS issued dedicated newsletters to parents and guardians of children on the Section 14 Register, continued engagement with the Home Education Network, held structured engagement with

independent school providers, and developed clearer information resources including updated frequently asked questions (FAQs), application supports and information videos. This work supported improved understanding of statutory requirements and provided more accessible information for families and providers.

Cross-agency collaboration remained an important feature of AEARS' work. Engagement with the National Council for Special Education supported Assessment of Need referrals, while collaboration with HSE public health partners supported work to improve access to screening and immunisation information for children educated outside recognised schools. AEARS also continued engagement with the Department of Education and Youth, the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) and other partners on referral pathways, data-sharing and operational matters.

Taken together, the 2025 data and service developments demonstrate a maturing regulatory function with stronger assessment capacity, improved waiting list performance, enhanced safeguarding and child-centred practice, clearer compliance supports and more structured stakeholder engagement. AEARS enters 2026 with a stronger evidence base, more sustainable review arrangements and improved systems for supporting children, families and providers across alternative education settings.

8.2. Home Education

Home education is a core component of AEARS activity, focused on maintaining a consistent, child-centred approach to assessment while responding to a growing and increasingly diverse cohort. This section outlines the service's approach, alongside key data trends, providing insight into the scale, profile and oversight of home education provision.

8.2.1. Registration and assessment process

The registration process requires that an assessment of educational provision is undertaken to determine whether a child is receiving a *certain minimum education*, in line with the Department of Education (2003) Guidelines on the Assessment of Education in Places Other than Recognised Schools. The purpose of the assessment is to determine whether the educational provision in place, or proposed, meets the statutory requirement to provide a certain minimum education.

Parents or guardians make an application to AEARS for an assessment of the educational provision for their child. Following receipt of a valid application, a preliminary assessment is arranged and, where appropriate, this may be followed by a comprehensive assessment, depending on the circumstances of the case.

HOW IT WORKS

The home education assessment process

1 Preliminary assessment

As part of the registration process, AEARS arranges a preliminary assessment of the educational provision that is in place or proposed for the child. This assessment considers the education being provided, or intended to be provided, as well as the materials and approaches used. The assessment is carried out by an authorised person appointed by Tusla and typically involves engagement with the parent or guardian and, where appropriate, the person responsible for the child's education.

2 Comprehensive assessment

In some cases, a comprehensive assessment may be required at a later stage. This involves a more detailed evaluation of the educational provision, including observation of the education being provided, review of the premises, equipment and materials used, and assessment of the child's progress and development.

3 Review assessment

A review assessment is carried out on the ongoing provision of home education to a child already on the register of children being educated in a place other than a recognised school.

4 Report of assessment

Draft assessment reports are discussed with parents or guardians prior to finalisation. Families are given the opportunity to comment on the report before any decision is made by AEARS. The finalised report is then issued to the parent or guardian.

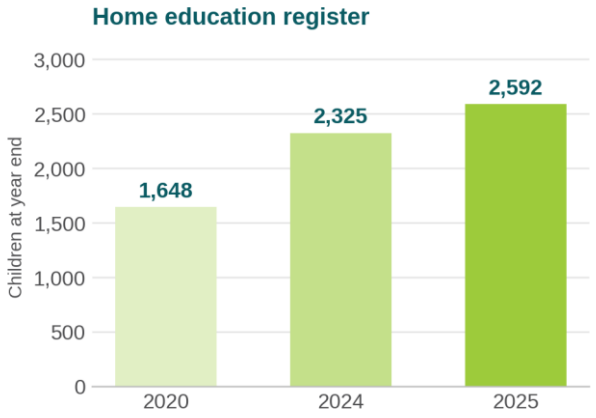
8.2.2. Home Education S14 Register and Applications

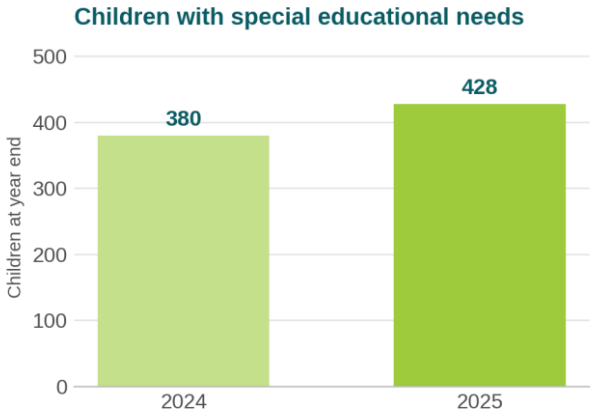
This section includes a five-year look back to 2020 where possible, providing context for current home education register and application trends. The 2020 data is an important comparator because that year saw a substantial rise in home education applications during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Register

At the end of 2025, 2,592 children were on the home education register, compared with 2,325 in 2024 and 1,648 at the end of 2020. This represents an increase of 267 children, or approximately 11%, since 2024, and an increase of 944 children, or approximately 57%, since 2020. The data shows continued growth in the number of children registered for home education over the five-year period.

The number of children with special educational needs on the home education register also increased, rising from 380 at the end of 2024 to 428 at the end of 2025, an increase of 48 children, or approximately 13%.



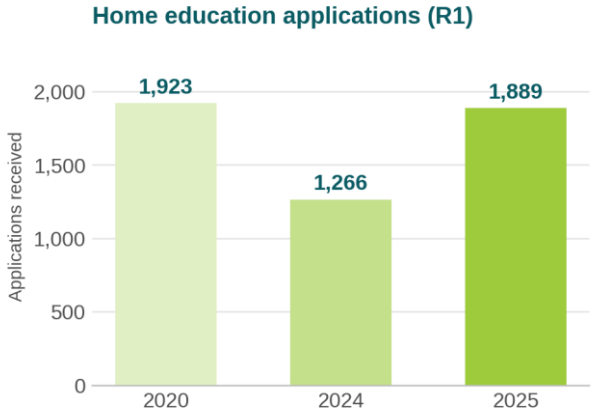


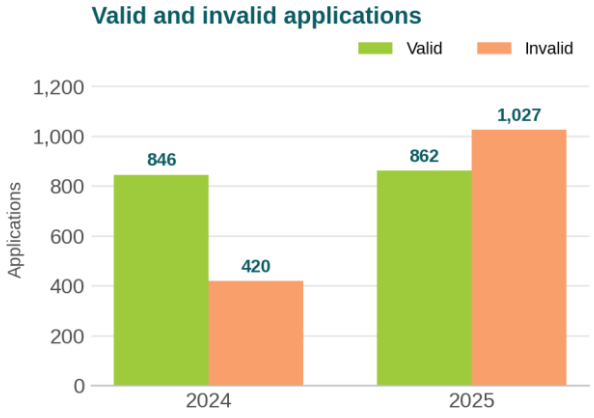
During Q4 2025, 190 children were removed from the home education register. Of these, 63 were removed because they were aged over 16, 101 returned to school, 23 left the jurisdiction and 3 were removed for other reasons. This activity should be read alongside the year-end register position and reflects ongoing maintenance of the Section 14 Register as children's circumstances change.

Applications

AEARS received 1,889 R1 applications for home education during 2025, compared with 1,266 applications in 2024 and 1,923 applications in 2020. Applications increased by 623, or approximately 49%, between 2024 and 2025. However, the 2025 figure was slightly below the 2020 level, with 34 fewer applications, representing a decrease of approximately 2%. This indicates that while demand increased significantly year on year, the overall volume of applications was broadly comparable to the high level recorded in 2020.

Of the applications received in 2025, 862 were valid and 1,027 were invalid. This compares with 846 valid and 420 invalid applications in 2024. While the number of valid applications remained broadly stable, the number of invalid applications more than doubled. This indicates that the increased application volume in 2025 was accompanied by a significant rise in applications requiring administrative follow-up, clarification or resubmission before assessment could progress.





Application volumes were highest in the second half of 2025. Quarter 4 recorded the highest number of applications, with 573 received, followed by Quarter 3 with 541. This pattern indicates a concentration of demand from September onwards and required continued coordination between

administrative and assessment teams to support screening, allocation and progression of applications.

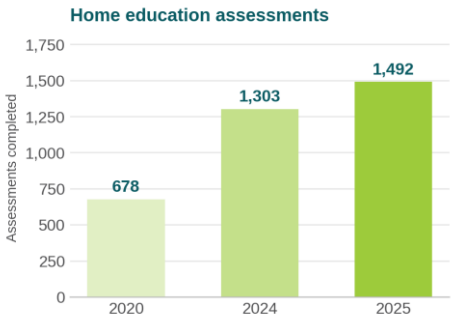
Applications relating to children with special educational needs remained a significant feature of home education demand. AEARS received 224 applications where special educational needs were identified in 2025, compared with 239 in 2024. This represented a slight decrease year on year despite the overall increase in applications. The continued identification of special educational needs within the application profile underlines the importance of a child-centred screening and assessment process.

All 862 valid applications received in 2025 were risk assessed or screened, consistent with the approach taken in 2024. Overall, the 2025 data show a larger home education register than both 2024 and 2020, while application volumes, although substantially higher than 2024, were broadly in line with the elevated level recorded in 2020. This places continued demand on screening, administration and assessment processes while reinforcing the need for timely progression of valid applications.

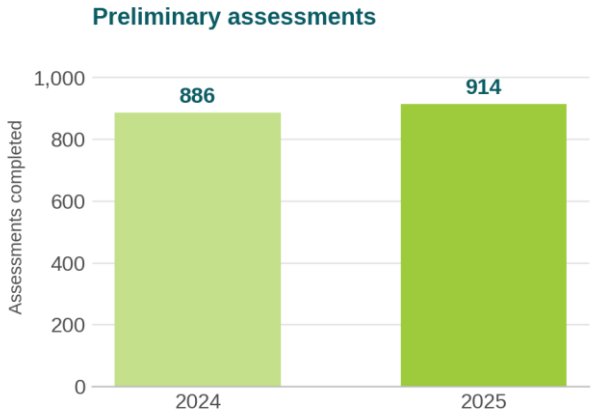
8.2.3. Assessments

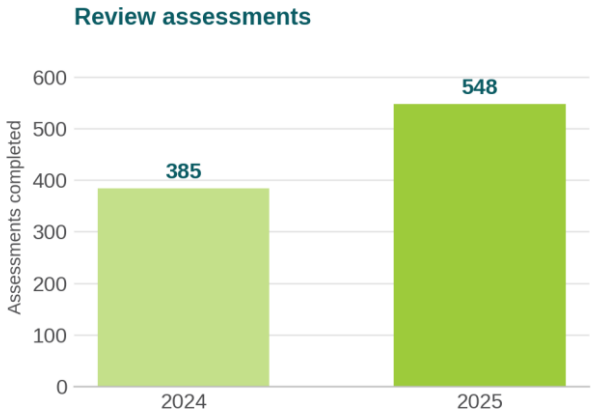
Assessment activity increased in 2025, with 1,492 assessments carried out across all home education assessment types. This compares with 1,303 assessments in 2024 and 678 assessments in 2020. The 2025 total represents an increase of 189 assessments, or approximately 15%, compared with 2024, and more than double the number completed in 2020. This demonstrates a sustained increase in assessment capacity and activity over the five-year period.

Preliminary assessments remained the largest category of assessment activity. In 2025, 914 preliminary assessments were completed, compared with 886 in 2024. This represents an increase of 28 assessments, or approximately 3%. Preliminary assessments continued to provide the primary route for assessing educational provision and supporting decisions on entry to the Section 14 Register.



Review assessment activity increased significantly in 2025. AEARS completed 548 review assessments, compared with 385 in 2024. This was an increase of 163 assessments, or approximately 42%, and reflects the service's continued focus on strengthening oversight of children already on the Section 14 Register and progressing towards a more sustainable review cycle.





Other assessment types accounted for a small proportion of overall activity. In 2025, 28 review of conditions assessments were completed, compared with 31 in 2024. Two comprehensive assessments were completed in 2025, compared with one in 2024.

2025 IN NUMBERS

1,492 home education assessments

914	548	28	2
preliminary	review	review of conditions	comprehensive

ASSESSMENTS BY QUARTER

357	391	361	383
Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4

Quarterly activity was broadly consistent in 2025. Activity in Q4 2025 was substantially higher than the same period in 2020, when 120 assessments were completed. Overall, the data indicates that AEARS maintained a higher and more consistent level of assessment output in 2025 than in both 2024 and 2020, supporting improved responsiveness for children and families awaiting assessment outcomes.

8.2.4. Conditions

WHAT ARE **CONDITIONS?**

Conditions are **case-specific requirements** that AEARS may attach to a registration to ensure that a child receives a *certain minimum education*. They are used where aspects of the educational provision need strengthening and are designed to support improvements in line with statutory expectations.

Conditions typically relate to areas such as broadening learning provision, supporting appropriate progression, monitoring the child's development, or facilitating follow-up review. They are not

intended as punitive measures but act as safeguards to bring educational provision into line with the required standard of moral, intellectual and social development.

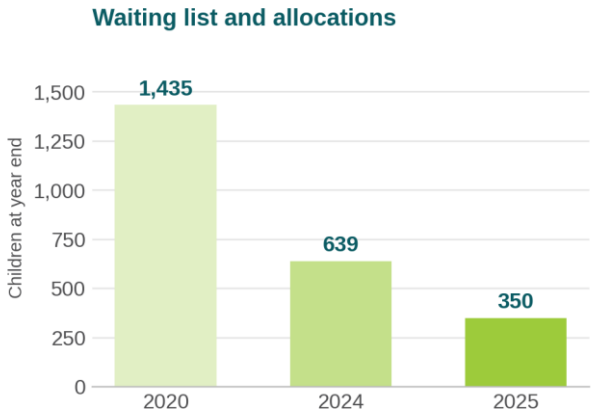
At the end of 2025, 37 registrations on the home education register had conditions attached, compared with 55 registrations at the end of 2024. This represents a reduction of 18 registrations, or approximately 33%, year on year. Conditions were attached to approximately 1% of home education registrations at the end of 2025, compared with approximately 2% in 2024.

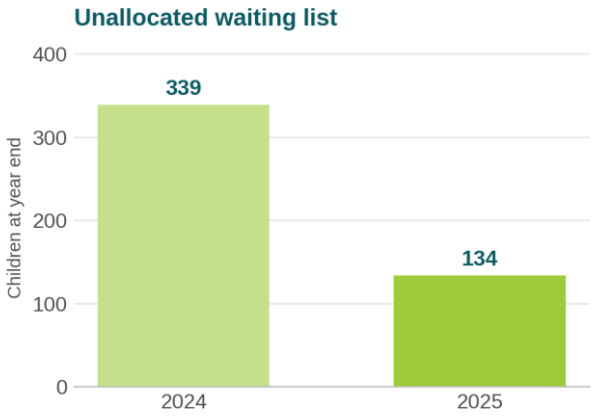


A conditions assessment is undertaken where a registration has been granted subject to conditions. This involves reviewing the educational provision in place, including the materials and approaches used, and assessing the child's progress and development to determine whether the required standard has been achieved.

In 2025, 28 review of conditions assessments were carried out, compared with 31 in 2024.

8.2.5. Waiting Lists

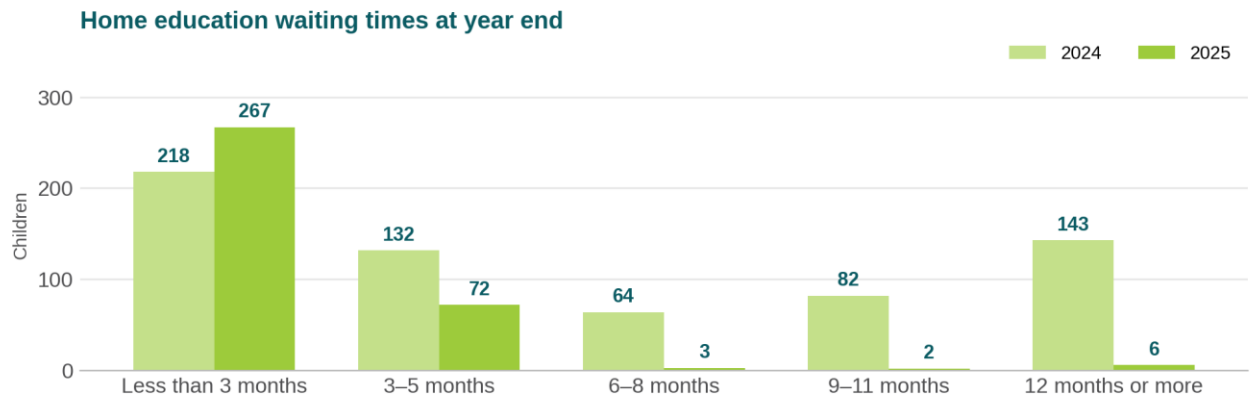




AEARS achieved a further substantial reduction in the number of children awaiting preliminary assessment during 2025. At the end of 2025, 350 children were either on the waiting list or allocated but not yet assessed, compared with 639 at the end of 2024 and 1,435 at the end of 2020. This represents a reduction of 289 children, or approximately 45%, since 2024, and a reduction of 1,085 children, or approximately 76%, since 2020.

The reduction was most evident in the number of children on the unallocated waiting list. At the end of 2025, 134 children were waiting and not yet allocated, compared with 339 at the end of 2024. This was a reduction of 205 children, or approximately 60%. The number of children who had been allocated but not yet assessed also reduced, from 300 at the end of 2024 to 216 at the end of 2025, a reduction of 84 children, or approximately 28%.

Waiting times also improved significantly during 2025. The number of children waiting twelve months or more reduced from 143 at the end of 2024 to 6 at the end of 2025, a reduction of 137 children, or approximately 96%. Children waiting less than three months increased from 218 in 2024 to 267 in 2025, indicating that the remaining waiting list was more heavily weighted towards shorter waiting periods.



This improvement reflects sustained work to address historical delays, strengthen allocation processes and increase assessment throughput. By the end of 2025, the combined waiting list and allocation position was substantially lower than both 2024 and 2020, with very few children waiting twelve months or more. This represents a significant improvement for children and families awaiting assessment outcomes and provides a stronger basis for maintaining timely access to preliminary assessment in 2026.

8.2.6. Refusals

Registration may be refused where AEARS is not satisfied that the child is receiving, or will receive, a certain minimum education, or where there is other non-compliance with registration requirements. In 2025, 22 children were refused registration, compared with 24 in 2024. This represents a small decrease of two refusals, or approximately 8%. Of the 2025 refusals, 13 related to non-compliance and nine related to cases where AEARS was not satisfied that a certain minimum education was being provided or would be provided. In 2024, refusals were more heavily concentrated in non-compliance, with 22 refusals recorded on that basis and two relating to certain minimum education. One parent appealed a decision to refuse registration in 2025.

8.3. Independent schools

The Irish Constitution recognises parents or guardians as the primary educators of their children and affirms their right to choose education in the home, in private settings, or in State-recognised schools. Recognised schools operate under the Education Act 1998, follow the national curriculum, and are subject to funding and oversight by the Department of Education and Youth.

Independent or non-recognised schools are not designated or funded by the Department of Education and Youth and are not subject to its curriculum, inspection or regulatory requirements. However, legislation under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 allows parents or guardians to choose this form of education, provided their children are registered.

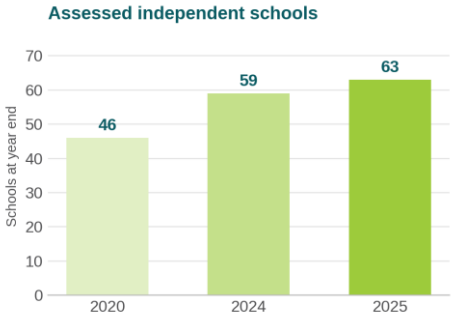
The Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service (AEARS) oversees this process. Parents or guardians must apply to register their child, and AEARS assesses the educational provision to ensure that a certain minimum education is being provided, alongside appropriate safeguarding arrangements.

AEARS also engages with independent school providers to support the development of appropriate educational provision and to promote compliance with statutory requirements. This includes ongoing communication, guidance and collaborative working with both parents or guardians and providers to strengthen educational standards and safeguarding practices.

Independent schools have flexibility in curriculum design and staffing; however, they must provide education appropriate to the child's age, aptitude and needs. Staff are required to be Garda vetted and trained in child protection requirements.

8.3.1. Number of Independent Schools

The number of assessed independent schools increased during 2025. At the end of 2025, there were 63 assessed independent schools, compared with 59 at the end of 2024 and 46 assessed independent schools at the end of 2020. This represents an increase of four schools, or approximately 7%, since 2024, and an increase of 17 schools, or approximately 37%, since 2020. The data shows continued growth in the number of assessed independent schools within AEARS oversight over the five-year period.



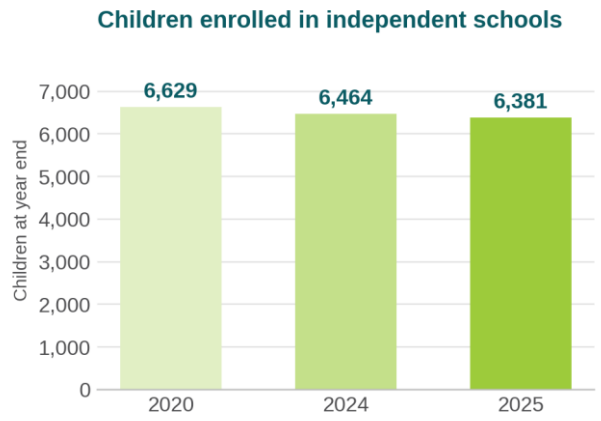
8.3.2. Children attending Independent Schools

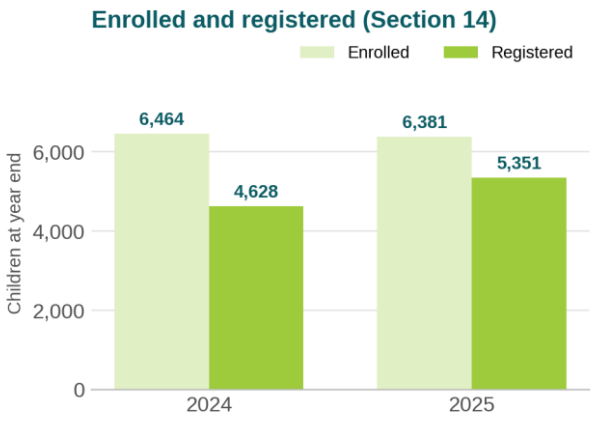
Children attending independent schools are required to be registered with AEARS under section 14 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. This involves the submission of a completed R1 application form, supported by the required documentation, and ongoing engagement between AEARS, parents or guardians and independent school providers to support registration compliance.

At the end of 2025, 6,381 children were enrolled in independent schools, compared with 6,464 at the end of 2024 and 6,629 attending assessed schools at the end of 2020. This represents a decrease of 83 children, or approximately 1%, since 2024, and a decrease of 248 children, or approximately 4%, since 2020. Enrolment therefore remained broadly stable, although slightly below both the 2024 and 2020 year-end positions.

The number of children in independent schools recorded on the Section 14 Register increased significantly in 2025. At year end, 5,351 children were registered, compared with 4,628 in 2024. This represents an increase of 723 children, or approximately 16%. As a result, the number of children enrolled in independent schools but not registered reduced from 1,836 in 2024 to 1,030 in 2025, a reduction of 806 children, or approximately 44%.

An ongoing area of work is the failure by some parents or guardians to submit a valid R1 application. This continues to create a discrepancy between the number of children enrolled in independent schools and the number recorded on the Section 14 Register. While this discrepancy reduced significantly in 2025, the year-end data shows that further engagement with parents, guardians and independent school providers is required to support timely submission of valid applications and completion of the registration process.





The number of unresolved cases requiring registration also reduced during 2025. At year end, 948 children in independent schools required registration and remained unresolved, compared with 1,635 in 2024. This represents a reduction of 687 children, or approximately 42%. The main unresolved reason in 2025 was that an R1 application had not been submitted, accounting for 608 children. Unresolved cases are children enrolled in an independent school whose registration on the Section 14 Register has not yet been completed.

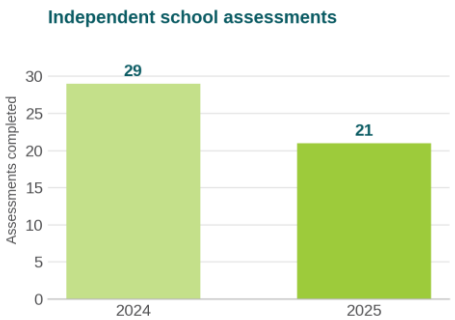
Overall, the 2025 data show that while the total number of children enrolled in independent schools remained broadly stable, there was a marked improvement in Section 14 registration compliance. A higher proportion of children attending independent schools were recorded on the Section 14 Register, and the number of unresolved registration cases reduced substantially compared with 2024.

8.3.3. Assessment of Independent Schools

AEARS undertakes assessments of the education provided by independent schools for children in attendance, in order to ensure that a certain minimum education is being delivered and that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place.
Assessment outputs are formally documented in independent school assessment reports, which include findings, recommendations and overall outcomes. These reports are issued to providers and, where applicable, are published to support transparency and public understanding of education provision outside recognised schools.

In 2025, 21 independent school assessments were carried out, compared with 29 in 2024. This represents a decrease of eight assessments, or approximately 28%. Assessment activity was concentrated in the second half of the year, with five assessments completed in Q3 and 13 in Q4.

At the end of Q4 2025, no independent school assessment was due. This provides an additional assurance point on the year-end assessment position and indicates that scheduled assessment activity had been progressed in line with the assessment cycle.



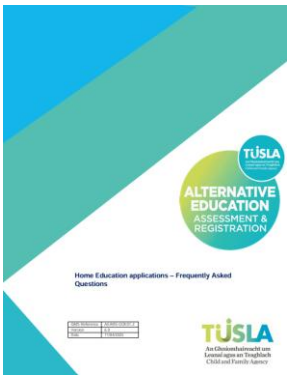
Ongoing monitoring review assessments accounted for the largest share of activity in 2025, with 14 assessments completed, compared with 25 in 2024. AEARS also completed four preliminary assessments of newly

engaged independent schools in both 2025 and 2024. In 2025, two priority review assessments and one comprehensive review assessment were completed. The data indicates a continued focus on monitoring and review of existing independent school provision, alongside assessment of newly engaged schools where required.

8.4. AEARS Developments and Stakeholder Engagement

In 2025, the Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service (AEARS) placed a strong emphasis on stakeholder engagement, clearer communication and accessible information for families, independent schools and partner agencies. Development activity focused on supporting parents and guardians to understand Section 14 requirements, improving the quality and accessibility of guidance, and strengthening relationships with representative groups, education providers and statutory partners.

A key development during the year was the implementation of the amended S.I. No. 758/2024, which introduced a revised prescribed R1 application form. The revised form supported clearer application requirements, provided for additional information where online education programmes are used, and strengthened the child-centred nature of assessment by supporting engagement with the child as part of the process. AEARS also updated related guidance and published a revised Home Education Frequently Asked Questions document in April to support parents and guardians to understand eligibility, consent, documentation, assessment, conditions, recommendations and registration requirements.



Direct engagement with children is an important safeguarding and child-centred practice. It ensures that the child's voice and experience are considered as part of the assessment process and supports AEARS to identify any concerns relevant to the child's wellbeing, educational provision or protection.

Communication with families was expanded through the publication of two dedicated AEARS newsletters during 2025. The summer newsletter introduced the amended R1 application form, changes to the assessment process, regional service developments, parent survey feedback, and work to support equitable access to health information for home-educated children. The winter newsletter provided further updates on a fillable R1 application form, planned electronic signatures, a new home education information video, improved email correspondence, conditions of registration, and engagement with families through the Home Education Network.

> *"Direct engagement with children ensures that the child's voice and experience are considered when assessing educational provision.*

AEARS also progressed a move towards email correspondence where possible, including verification of guardian contact details and password-protected assessment reports, to reduce postal delays and support more timely communication with families.

Service development activity supported this engagement focus. AEARS developed clearer information resources for parents and guardians, including information videos, updated application

supports and guidance material. Internal supports also progressed, including induction and training activity, assessor guidance and report-writing guidance, helping to support consistent communication and decision-making across the service.

Engagement with families and representative groups remained central to AEARS' approach. AEARS continued engagement with the Home Education Network and invited parents and guardians to participate in an annual service meeting to share experience, provide feedback and inform service improvement. Communication improvements, including the move towards email correspondence and the development of clearer digital resources, were progressed to reduce delays and make information more accessible for families.

Work with independent schools also advanced during 2025. School information forms and guidance were revised and made available online, safeguarding procedures were reviewed as part of independent school assessment activity, and independent school assessment reports continued to be published to support transparency and public assurance. AEARS also progressed a more structured approach to improving Section 14 registration compliance, including communications for schools to issue to parents and guardians where valid applications remained outstanding.

HIGHLIGHTS

AEARS developments in 2025

- Revised R1 application form and guidance under S.I. No. 758/2024
- Published two newsletters for parents and guardians
- Move to email correspondence and clearer digital resources
- Independent school forms, guidance and reports published online

Cross-agency collaboration remained an important feature of service development. AEARS worked with the National Council for Special Education to support Assessment of Need referrals, collaborated with HSE public health partners to improve access to screening and immunisation information for home-educated children, and continued engagement with the Department of Education and Youth, TESS and other partners on referral pathways, data-sharing and operational matters. In relation to independent schools, collaboration with the Children First Information and Advice Service was identified as a further support to strengthen safeguarding and sector understanding.

8.5. A Look Ahead

In 2026, AEARS will build on the improvements made in 2025. Its main priorities are:

LOOKING AHEAD

AEARS priorities for 2026

1. Maintain timely access to preliminary assessment
2. Embed a sustainable two-year review cycle for home education
3. Reduce invalid applications through clearer guidance and tracking
4. Move independent schools to a two-year assessment cycle
5. Strengthen Section 14 registration compliance
6. Progress collaboration with the Children First Information and Advice Service

AEARS will also prioritise strengthening Standard Operating Procedures, including in relation to attendance; continuing expansion of the Independent School Team; using survey feedback to refine assessment and returns processes; and further developing digital supports, email correspondence, information resources, induction, guidance and report-writing supports to promote consistency across the service.



TUSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

CHILD SAFEGUARDING STATEMENT COMPLIANCE UNIT

Section 9

Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit (CSSCU)

This section contains:

9.1 Social Work Liaison

9.2 CSSCU in 2025

9.3 CSSCU Developments and Stakeholder Engagement

9.4 A Look Ahead

9. Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit (CSSCU)

The CSSCU received 491 Child Safeguarding Statements in 2025, 86% more than in 2024, and made fuller use of its enforcement powers.

The Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit (CSSCU) is a service delivery unit within Children's Services Regulation. It supports and enforces compliance with the Child Safeguarding Statement requirements set out in the Children First Act 2015. These requirements are designed to help ensure that providers of relevant services take proactive steps to keep children safe from harm while availing of their services.

WHAT IS A CHILD SAFEGUARDING STATEMENT?

A Child Safeguarding Statement is a written statement that providers of relevant services must prepare under the Children First Act 2015. It sets out the service's assessment of any potential for harm to a child while availing of the service, and the procedures in place to manage the risks identified.

The unit's work centres on three connected functions, set out below. CSSCU also operates and maintains the statutory Register of Non-Compliance, in line with the relevant provisions of the Act.

Support
Helping relevant services to understand and meet their obligations

Assess
Reviewing Child Safeguarding Statements where required

Enforce
Taking proportionate action where statements are not furnished or compliance concerns remain unresolved

In practice, CSSCU combines supportive compliance with regulatory intervention. It engages with providers, reviews Child Safeguarding Statements, responds to unsolicited information and services of concern, works with partners to promote safeguarding awareness, and uses enforcement measures where necessary to support compliance and strengthen safeguarding assurance for children across relevant services.

9.1. Social Work Liaison

The Social Work Liaison role supports appropriate referral pathways and information sharing between Children's Services Regulation and Tusla Child Protection and Welfare services. The role provides an important safeguarding link where information arising through regulatory activity may indicate a child protection or welfare concern, or where information held by social work services may be relevant to regulatory oversight and decision-making.

During 2025, this liaison function supported closer working between CSSCU, Early Years concerns activity and Child Protection and Welfare services, including the consideration of services where

safeguarding information required careful review, clarification or onward referral. This strengthened the connection between regulatory compliance, safeguarding intelligence and child protection pathways, while supporting proportionate and timely responses to emerging concerns.

9.2. CSSCU in 2025

2025 was a year of significant growth, increased visibility and strengthened enforcement activity for the Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit (CSSCU). The unit's work was shaped by the publication and implementation of the CSSCU Strategy 2025–2027, with a renewed focus on governance, risk, services of concern and enforcement. This strategic direction supported a more targeted approach to identifying and responding to safeguarding compliance concerns, while continuing to promote the preventative purpose of Child Safeguarding Statements under the Children First Act 2015.

2025 IN NUMBERS

CSSCU at a glance

491
Child Safeguarding Statements received (264 in 2024)

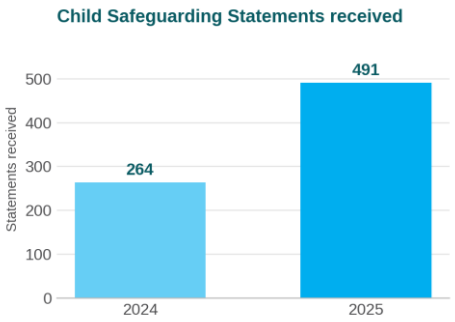
448
relevant services with statements reviewed (327 in 2024)

216
unsolicited information referrals (66 in 2024)

38
enforcement measures undertaken (6 in 2024)

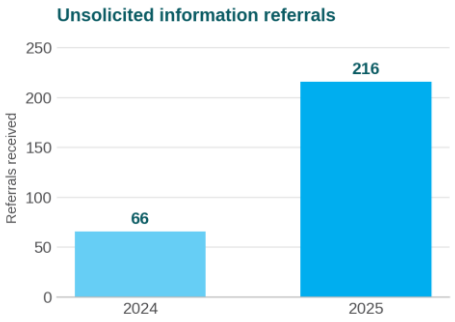
15
services referred by the Early Years Concerns Department

CSSCU activity increased substantially during 2025. The unit received 491 Child Safeguarding Statements during the year, compared with 264 in 2024, an increase of 227 statements, or approximately 86%. Of the statements received in 2025, 209 were deemed compliant on first review and 228 were deemed non-compliant on first review. In total, Child Safeguarding Statements for 448 relevant services were reviewed during 2025, compared with 327 in 2024. This represented an increase of 121 services, or approximately 37%, and reflected the growing reach of the unit's review and compliance activity.

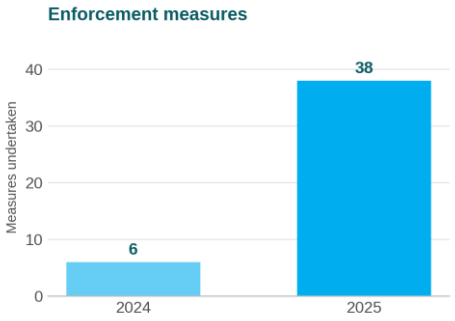


Unsolicited information referrals also increased significantly. CSSCU received 216 unsolicited information referrals in 2025, compared with 66 in 2024, an increase of 150 referrals. Of these, 209 were assessed as being within remit and progressed to a formal request for a Child Safeguarding Statement. The unit received 184 Child Safeguarding Statements in response to formal requests arising from unsolicited information, compared with 57 in 2024. Of those received in response to unsolicited information in 2025, 61 were compliant on first review and 118 were not.

The unit's work with services of concern was also supported by referrals from and collaboration with the Early Years Concerns Department. During the reporting period, 15 services were referred to CSSCU by the Early Years Concerns Department, with 3 services remaining non-compliant at the reporting point. This illustrates the practical link between concerns activity, Child Safeguarding Statement review and targeted compliance follow-up.



The rise in unsolicited information was accompanied by increased enforcement activity. In 2025, 27 unsolicited information cases were assessed and progressed to enforcement, compared with 6 in 2024. CSSCU issued 30 Failure to Furnish notices and recorded 4 escalations to the National Registration Enforcement Panel. The unit also issued 5 Advance Notices, held 5 regulatory enforcement meetings and issued 1 non-compliance notice. An Advance Notice is formal notification to a provider that Tusla intends to place the service on the public Register of Non-Compliance; the provider may appeal this decision to the District Court. Overall, 38 enforcement measures were undertaken by CSSCU in 2025, compared with 6 in 2024.



This increase in activity demonstrates the growing profile and impact of the CSSCU's safeguarding compliance role. It also reflects a more active response to services of concern, stronger use of statutory compliance tools and greater public and interagency awareness of the unit's remit. Alongside enforcement, CSSCU continued to support relevant services to understand and meet their obligations under the Children First Act, recognising that effective Child Safeguarding Statements are an important foundation for positive safeguarding culture and practice.

ENFORCEMENT

CSSCU enforcement activity in 2025

27
unsolicited information cases progressed to enforcement

30
Failure to Furnish notices

5
Advance Notices

5
regulatory enforcement meetings

4
escalations to the National Registration Enforcement Panel

1
non-compliance notice

Taken together, the 2025 data show a unit with increasing reach, stronger compliance visibility and a more developed enforcement profile. The CSSCU enters 2026 with a clearer strategic

framework, a stronger evidence base for prioritising risk and services of concern, and an enhanced capacity to support safeguarding assurance across relevant services.

9.3. CSSCU Developments and Stakeholder Engagement



In 2025, the Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit (CSSCU) moved from strategy development to strategy implementation through publication of a successor to its initial five-year strategy. The CSSCU Strategy 2025–2027, developed during 2024, was endorsed by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality and provides a renewed framework for the unit's work across four overlapping strands: governance, risk, services of concern and enforcement. It also identifies three cross-cutting safeguarding themes: child and youth mental health, children and youth in migration, and children and youth in online spaces.

Implementation of the strategy is being progressed through a programme delivery model, with emphasis on thematic priorities under each strategic strand and continued interagency partnership. The approach reflects CSSCU's preventative contextual safeguarding role under the Children First Act 2015, supporting relevant services not only to develop compliant Child Safeguarding Statements but to implement them in a way that strengthens safeguarding culture, governance and practice.

> *"Effective Child Safeguarding Statements are an important foundation for positive safeguarding culture and practice.*

CSSCU STRATEGY 2025–2027

Four strategic strands

1	2	3	4
Governance	Risk	Services of concern	Enforcement

THREE CROSS-CUTTING SAFEGUARDING THEMES

Child and youth mental health	Children and youth in migration	Children and youth in online spaces

Implementation of the CSSCU Strategy 2025–2027 was further supported by development of a business plan to translate the three-year strategy into practical delivery priorities. A strategic engagement plan was also identified for prioritisation, supporting a more structured approach to engagement with relevant services, statutory partners and national stakeholders as the unit moved from strategy publication to implementation.

Partnership and sector engagement were central to this work during 2025. CSSCU continued to build relationships with national partners within the IDIG and others including the GAA, HSE,

Department of Education and Youth, Children First Information and Advice Service, Tusla Commissioning, the National Youth Council, the Early Years Inspectorate and ACIMS. Additional engagement included partnership discussions with Independent Schools Commissioning, Children First Information and Advice Officers (CFIAOs) and the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS), supporting a broader and more practical engagement base for the unit's safeguarding compliance work. CSSCU also delivered presentations and workshops at the National Child Safeguarding Conference, supporting wider awareness of Child Safeguarding Statement requirements and the importance of implementation as the foundation for positive safeguarding practice.

The scale of CSSCU's remit remained significant relative to its staffing profile. With a small staff cohort comprising a Senior Compliance Officer, a Senior Regulatory Support Officer, three Compliance Officers and administrative support, the unit continued to support services reaching large numbers of children across Ireland. The 2025 increase in Child Safeguarding Statement reviews, unsolicited information referrals and enforcement activity demonstrates the growing reach and impact of the unit's safeguarding compliance role.

9.4. A Look Ahead

In 2026, CSSCU will continue to implement the CSSCU Strategy 2025–2027. Its main priorities are:

LOOKING AHEAD

CSSCU priorities for 2026

1. Implement the CSSCU Strategy 2025–2027 across its four strands
2. Use data from strategic partners to identify emerging patterns of concern
3. Develop the programme delivery model: planning, monitoring and reporting
4. Strengthen partnerships with national bodies, statutory partners and services
5. Improve the quality of Child Safeguarding Statements on first review
6. Respond to services of concern and use enforcement where required



Section 10

Early Years Inspectorate – Registration and Inspection

This section contains:

10.1 The Early Years Inspectorate in 2025
10.2 Pre-School Services – Registration
10.3 Pre-School Services – Inspection
10.4 School Age Services – The Register
10.5 School Age Services – Inspection
10.6 Childminding
10.7 Early Years Inspectorate Stakeholder Engagement

10. Early Years Inspectorate – Registration and Inspection

The Early Years Inspectorate regulated more than 7,000 services, completed 2,514 pre-school inspections and implemented the first full year of childminding regulation.

The Early Years Inspectorate is CSR's largest service and the statutory regulator of early years services in Ireland. The regulatory framework establishes requirements for registration, inspection and, where necessary, enforcement. The Inspectorate regulates three types of early years provision:

3,948
pre-school services on the National Register

3,013
school-age services on the National Register

158
childminding services on the National Register

During 2025, the Department responsible for early learning, care and childminding policy changed from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) to the Department of Children, Disability and Equality. Similarly, the Department of Education became the Department of Education and Youth in May 2025. References in this report reflect the name of each Department as it applied at the relevant point in time.

HOW WE REGULATE

The EYI core regulatory process model

1
Information, guidance and stakeholder engagement

2
Registration
including renewal of registration and change in circumstances

3
Inspection
including scheduled inspections and inspections triggered by information

4
Enforcement
proportionate and where required

Supported by regulatory intelligence, documented controls, data and performance monitoring, stakeholder engagement, risk management and continual improvement.

Childminding services were historically included within the pre-school regulatory framework, but the definition of childminding under the 2016 regulations was narrow and only a small number of childminders registered. In 2024, DCEDIY introduced new regulations for childminding services and redefined childminding. During 2025, the Early Years Inspectorate continued to work with DCDE, sector support organisations and childminders to embed the new regulatory arrangements and support the phased implementation of childminding registration.

The sections below provide more detail on regulatory activity across the three service types, including registration and renewal, change in circumstances and inspection. Processes that apply across all three service types – the Inspection Findings Review, concerns and Notifications of Incident – are set out in section 11. Each section includes 2025 data, with comparisons to 2024 and, where relevant, earlier years to provide a longer-term overview.

10.1. The Early Years Inspectorate in 2025

2025 was a year of significant delivery, consolidation and operational development for the Early Years Inspectorate. The Inspectorate continued to regulate pre-school and school-age services while embedding the new childminding regulatory framework introduced in 2024. At year end, there were 3,948 pre-school services, 3,013 school-age services and 158 childminding services on the National Register.

2025 IN NUMBERS

The Early Years Inspectorate at a glance

751 applications to register a new service (560 in 2024)

2,574 pre-school and school-age inspections

305 Immediate Action Notices issued

54 regulatory compliance meetings

704 concerns received about services

653 Notifications of Incident submitted

4,260 registration renewals in the 2025 cycle

7,546 helpdesk calls (3,689 in 2024)

Demand for new-service registration also increased in 2025. The Inspectorate received 751 applications to become a new service across pre-school, school-age and childminding services, compared with 560 in 2024. This total comprised 144 pre-school applications, 504 school-age applications and 103 childminding applications.

Service closures remained broadly in line with the previous year. In 2025, 186 services closed, compared with 185 in 2024. The 2025 total comprised 102 pre-school services, 77 school-age services and 7 childminding services.

> *A regulatory function managing increased volume, complexity and change while continuing to strengthen public assurance.*

Inspection activity remained central to the Inspectorate's assurance role. In 2025, 2,514 pre-school inspections were completed, compared with 2,316 in 2024, and 2,574 pre-school and school-age inspections were completed overall. School-age inspection activity reduced to 60 inspections during the year, reflecting a more targeted approach focused on concerns, Notifications of Incident

and priority follow-up activity, while preparations continued for a more proactive, risk-based school-age inspection programme in 2026. The Inspectorate also completed 85 childminding pre-registration assessments, supported by the development and implementation of end-to-end Tusla Case Management processes for childminding assessment.

The year was also marked by significant internal strengthening. The national inspection structure was reconfigured from eight to twelve operational areas, a dedicated Inspection Department Business Unit was established, and additional staff were inducted across management, inspector and administrative roles. These changes supported stronger operational oversight, more consistent practice, improved data reporting and enhanced coordination of key processes, including the Inspection Findings Review process, Notifications of Incident, inspection documentation, audit activity, training and business planning. The Business Unit also played an important role in supporting childminding implementation, process revision, quality assurance activity and preparations for the commencement of new enforcement powers.

Regulatory responsiveness was a strong feature of 2025. Concerns received by the Inspectorate increased, with 506 concerns relating to pre-school services, 177 relating to school-age services and 21 relating to childminding services. The Inspectorate participated in structured concerns case management arrangements throughout the year, supporting risk rating, prioritisation and timely regulatory response. A total of 653 Notifications of Incident were submitted, of which 600 were assessed as within remit. Critical and high-risk notifications informed inspection planning and follow-up activity, ensuring that regulatory attention was directed to services where additional assurance was required.

Enforcement readiness and escalation activity also progressed. The Inspectorate issued 305 Immediate Action Notices to early years services during 2025 and convened 54 regulatory compliance meetings where significant risk or persistent non-compliance required formal engagement with registered providers. Preparation for the commencement of new statutory enforcement powers was progressed jointly by the Inspection Department and the Enforcement Department, including the development of Standard Operating Procedures, templates, guidance and training for more than 90 staff. A significant amount of this work was undertaken within the Inspection Department Business Unit, particularly in relation to the inspection processes, documentation and operational supports required for enforcement notices. This strengthened the Inspectorate's capacity to respond proportionately and consistently where risks to children's safety, welfare or development are identified.

Registration and sector support activity remained substantial. The 2025 registration renewal cycle involved 4,260 renewals, supported through collaboration with County Childcare Committees, DCDE, Pobal and CSR colleagues. 98.8% of services successfully renewed their registration in time. Change in circumstances activity also increased and new SharePoint-based tracking arrangements were introduced to support improved oversight. Childminding registration continued to develop through a dedicated webpage, automated workflow and structured support for applicants, while preparations advanced for further Tusla Case Management development in 2026.

The Early Years Registration Helpdesk experienced a significant increase in demand with 7,546 calls received in 2025, compared with 3,689 in 2024. The operation of the helpdesk is an important element of the supportive compliance approach deployed for the early years sector.

Taken together, the Inspectorate's work in 2025 demonstrates a regulatory function managing increased volume, complexity and change while continuing to strengthen public assurance. These developments position the Inspectorate to continue improving consistency, responsiveness and risk-informed regulation across pre-school, school-age and childminding services in 2026.

10.1.1. Tusla Case Management System (TCM)

Tusla Case Management (TCM) remained an important enabler of Early Years Inspectorate reform during 2025, supporting the continued move from manual and legacy processes towards more consistent digital registration workflows. Significant progress was made on the design and development of the new applications module for pre-school and school-age services, including work to support application receipt, validation, assessment, decision-making, correspondence and management oversight within a more structured digital environment. This work was progressed alongside ongoing operational learning from the childminding registration module, which went live in 2024. During 2025, fixes and process improvements strengthened the childminding module, which was also nominated for a Tusla Excellence Award.

10.2. Pre-School Services – Registration

WHAT IS A PRE-SCHOOL SERVICE?

A pre-school service is an early childhood care and education service catering for children aged 0–6 years who are not attending school. A pre-school service may be delivered as a sessional service for up to 3.5 hours a day, as a part-time day-care service where children attend for up to 5 hours, or as full day care where children attend for longer. Pre-school services may also be based in a drop-in centre, operate as an overnight service, or operate on a temporary basis. They may be more commonly known as a playschool, naíonra or crèche. Childminders are not considered pre-school services.

The key legislation relating to pre-school services is set out below.

KEY LEGISLATION

Pre-school services

Child Care Act 1991, Section 58 As amended by Part 12 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (No. 40 of 2013)	Establishes the role and functions of Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate and the legal basis for the registration and inspection of all services in the early years sector.
Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 S.I. No. 221/2016	Set out the requirements that pre-school services must meet. Inspections measure compliance against these regulations.
Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 S.I. No. 632/2016	Clarified the employment status of people employed under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) in early years services.
Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2022 S.I. No. 195/2022	Streamlined the renewal of registration for pre-school services and introduced a requirement for certificates of registration to be issued and displayed.

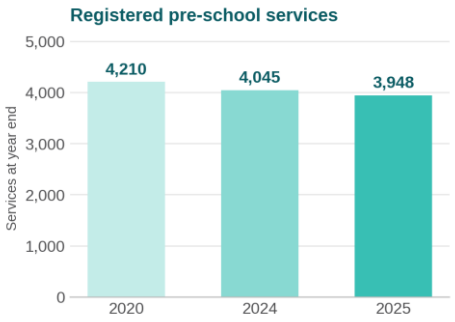
10.2.1. Pre-School Services – The Register

Initial registration of pre-school services covers the full process from application by a proposed registered provider through to review of documentation, fit-for-purpose inspection, decision-making and communication of the outcome to the applicant.

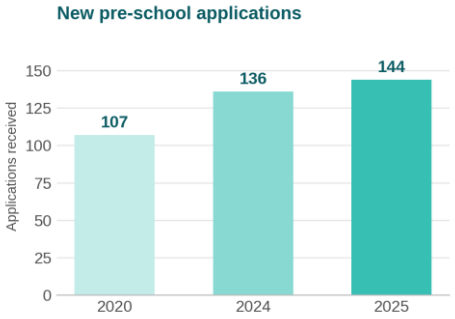
Requirements for initial registration are set out in guidance published on the Early Years Inspectorate webpages. These include:

- Registration Policy: New Applications
- New applications for registration – Supporting Documentation
- A Guide to Building Safety - Fire and Planning Requirements

At the end of 2025 there were 3,948 registered pre-school services on the National Register, compared with 4,045 at the end of 2024. This was a reduction of 97 services, or approximately 2%, year on year. Looking back to 2020, there were 4,210 pre-school services on the register nationally at the end of Q4 2020. The 2025 position was therefore 262 services lower than the Q4 2020 position, a reduction of approximately 6% over the five-year period.



The Early Years Inspectorate received 144 applications to register a new pre-school service in 2025, compared with 136 in 2024. This was an increase of 8 applications, or approximately 6%. Application activity was highest in Quarter 2, when 72 applications were received, followed by 40 in Quarter 3 and 16 in both Quarter 1 and Quarter 4. Compared with 2020, when 107 new applications were received, the 2025 figure was 37 applications higher, an increase of approximately 35%.



Of the new pre-school applications received in 2025, 61 were closed as incomplete, compared with 44 in 2024. This represented approximately 42% of all new pre-school applications received in 2025, compared with approximately 32% in 2024. The increase indicates that a greater proportion of applications required further documentation, clarification or follow-up before they could progress through the registration process.

Registration activity should also be read alongside new services opening and existing service closures. In 2025, 66 new pre-school services were registered and 102 services closed. In 2024, 96 new services were registered and 95 closed. The reduction in the pre-school register in 2025 therefore reflects both fewer new registrations and a higher number of closures than in 2024. Looking back to 2020, 91 new registration applications were approved, and 197 services were found to have closed. Activity in 2020 was significantly affected by Covid-19 restrictions, which provides important context for comparison. While closures in 2025 were well below the 2020 level, they exceeded new registrations and contributed to the overall reduction in registered pre-school services.



10.2.2. Pre-School Services Change in circumstance applications

In line with the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016, registered providers must notify the Early Years Inspectorate where there are significant changes to their pre-school service. These change in circumstance applications allow the Inspectorate to assess the impact of proposed or notified changes and to ensure that services continue to meet regulatory requirements.

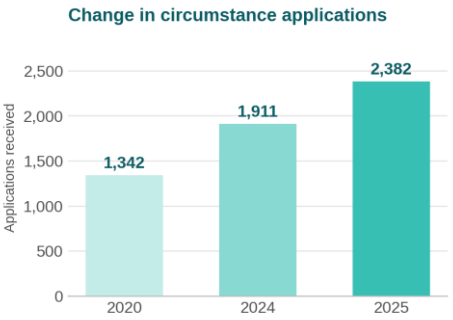
Changes that must be notified include alterations such as:

- **A change in the person carrying on the service (Regulation 8)**
- **A change in the person in charge of the service (Regulation 9)**

- **A change to the premises where the service operates (Regulation 14)**
- Changes to the number of children catered for, the type of service offered, or other material aspects of service delivery.

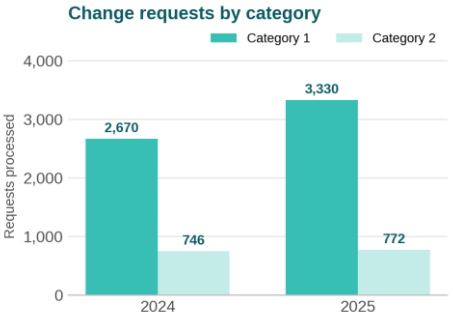
Timely notification and review of these changes are important to maintain the safety, welfare and development of children attending early years services. Where necessary, the Early Years Inspectorate may carry out a fit-for-purpose inspection following a change in circumstances to assess continued compliance with the 2016 Regulations.

Pre-school change in circumstance activity increased during 2025. The Early Years Inspectorate received 2,382 applications, compared with 1,911 in 2024, an increase of 471 applications, or approximately 25%.



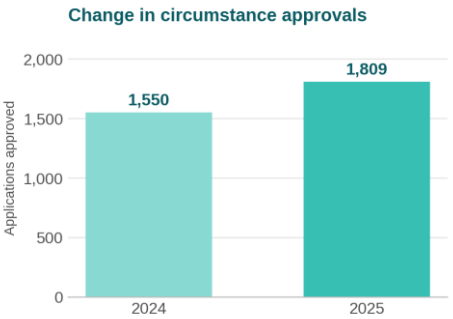
There are two types of change requests. Category 1 requests are generally minor administrative changes, such as updates to contact details, and are usually assessed through a desk-based process. Category 2 requests involve more substantive changes, such as changes to service type, premises or the number of children catered for, and may require supporting documentation and a fit-for-purpose inspection before approval.

Each application may contain more than one individual change request. In 2025, the 2,396 applications processed contained 4,102 individual change requests, compared with 3,416 requests in 2024. Of the 2025 requests, 3,330 were in Category 1 and 772 in Category 2. Category 1 requests accounted for approximately 81% of all requests processed in 2025.



The volume of applications closed as incomplete also increased. In 2025, 485 change in circumstance applications were closed as incomplete, compared with 293 in 2024. This represented an increase of 192 applications and indicates continued demand on administrative review, provider follow-up and documentation checks.

The number of pre-school change in circumstance applications approved increased from 1,550 in 2024 to 1,809 in 2025. Overall, the 2025 data show higher demand across applications received, applications processed, individual change requests and approvals. This reflects the scale of change being managed by registered pre-school services and the importance of timely regulatory review to support safe and compliant service adaptation.



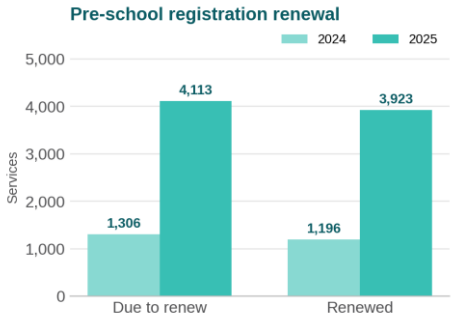
10.2.3. Early Years Services Registration Renewal

Pre-school and school-age services are required to renew their registration every three years under their respective regulatory frameworks. Registration renewal is an important regulatory

process as it confirms that services remain appropriately registered and enables the Early Years Inspectorate to maintain an accurate and up-to-date National Register across early years services.

Providers are required to submit renewal applications 60 days before their current registration expires, using the Tusla online portal. The renewal process includes review of required information and supporting documentation relevant to continued registration. Where a renewal application identifies changes to a service, such as changes to the premises, service type, registered provider, person in charge or number of children catered for, the Inspectorate may require further information or may direct the provider to submit a change in circumstance application.

Within the overall renewal cycle, pre-school renewal activity remained particularly significant. In 2025, 4,113 pre-school services were due to renew their registration, compared with 1,306 in 2024. Of these, 3,923 successfully completed registration renewal in 2025, compared with 1,196 in 2024. Renewal activity was heavily concentrated in Quarter 4, when 3,596 pre-school services were due to renew and 3,443 successfully completed renewal. This reflected the scale of the 2025 pre-school renewal cycle and required sustained provider engagement, administrative review and follow-up to support continuity of registration. The majority of services that did not renew had ceased operation in the period.

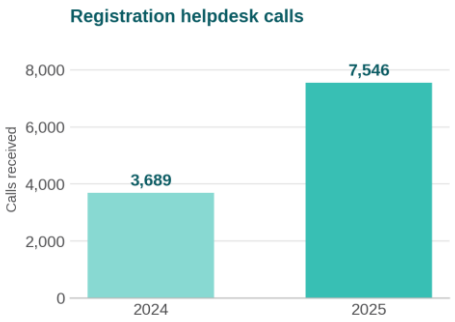


In 2025, registration renewal was a significant area of activity for the Registration Department. The 2025 registration renewal cycle was completed during the year, with 4,260 registration renewals recorded overall and the majority completed. This activity included both pre-school and school-age services and was supported through collaboration with County Childcare Committees, DCDE, Pobal and CSR colleagues. Provider-facing supports were also strengthened through the delivery of a registration renewal animated video, made available on the Early Years webpage, to support services to understand and complete the renewal process.

10.2.4. Registration Helpdesk

The Registration Department established a dedicated helpdesk to support registered providers and applicants with processes related to registration activity. The helpdesk provides a first point of contact for queries relating to new applications, change in circumstance and cessation requests, registration renewal, fees, stakeholder queries, childminding and other registration-related matters.

In 2025, the helpdesk experienced a substantial increase in demand. A total of 7,546 calls were received, compared with 3,689 in 2024. This represented an increase of 3,857 calls, or more than double the previous year's volume. The average call time also increased, from 2.36 minutes in 2024 to 3.46 minutes in 2025, reflecting the greater complexity and duration of provider queries during the year.



Most calls were resolved directly by the helpdesk. In 2025, 7,173 calls were resolved at helpdesk level, compared with 3,126 in 2024. A further 373 calls required action by another team, compared with 563 in 2024. This indicates that, despite the significant increase in call volume, the helpdesk was able to resolve a higher proportion of queries directly and reduce the number requiring onward referral.

The largest areas of query activity in 2025 related to registration renewal (2,109 calls), change in circumstance and cessation requests (1,899 calls) and new applications (1,431 calls). These areas align with the high level of renewal, change in circumstance and new application activity managed by the Registration Department during the year.

HELPDESK

What providers called about in 2025

2,109 calls about registration renewal	**1,899** calls about change in circumstance and cessation	**1,431** calls about new applications
95% of calls resolved by the helpdesk (7,173 calls)	**3.46** minutes average call time (2.36 in 2024)	**373** calls passed to another team (563 in 2024)

Overall, the 2025 helpdesk data demonstrate the importance of a dedicated provider support function in managing increased registration activity, resolving queries efficiently and supporting timely engagement across key registration processes.

10.3. Pre-School Services – Inspection

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

During 2025, the Inspectorate completed 2,514 inspections of pre-school services, compared with 2,316 in 2024. Pre-school inspections continued to be planned and prioritised on a risk-informed basis, with particular focus on services where concerns, notifications, inspection history or other intelligence indicated that regulatory assurance was required. The inspection programme also supported follow-up on non-compliance, review of corrective and preventive actions, and escalation where risks to children required a more formal regulatory response.

Inspection findings in 2025 show the continued impact of the inspection and corrective action process. Where non-compliance is identified, providers submit corrective and preventive actions, which are reviewed and, where necessary, escalated through regulatory compliance processes. This demonstrates the role of inspection not only in identifying non-compliance, but also in supporting timely provider action and improved regulatory outcomes.

The Inspectorate also strengthened inspection infrastructure during the year. The national inspection structure was reconfigured from eight to twelve operational areas, the Inspection Department Business Unit was established, and key inspection processes were revised or developed, including the Corrective and Preventive Action process, the Inspection Findings Review process, Notification of Incident arrangements, quality assurance activity and preparations for the implementation of new enforcement powers.

HOW IT WORKS

The pre-school inspection process

1 **Pre-inspection planning**
Review of registration history, previous inspection findings, concerns, Notifications of Incident, change in circumstance activity and other relevant regulatory intelligence.

2 **Notification and guidance**
The provider is notified and given guidance materials, where applicable. Most pre-school inspections are unannounced; fit-for-purpose inspections, which form part of the change in circumstance process, are generally arranged with the provider.

3 **On-site inspection**
Inspectors assess the premises, governance, staffing, policies and procedures, and interactions with children.

4 **Feedback**
Verbal feedback is given to the provider on the day, followed by a written inspection report.

5 **Draft report**
The provider can respond to the findings through the Factual Accuracy process and, where relevant, the Inspection Findings Review process.

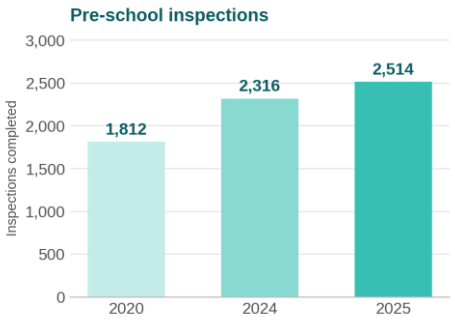
6 **Final report**
Provider feedback is incorporated where appropriate, and findings that require follow-up, escalation for enforcement action or a Regulatory Compliance Meeting are identified.

7 **Publication**
The final report is published on the Tusla website (Early Years Inspection Reports).

Inspection reports are subject to review and verification before release. This includes checking that the correct process has been followed, that evidence supports the findings, that the appropriate person has reviewed the report, and that the final output is suitable for issue and publication.

10.3.1. Pre-School Inspection

Pre-school inspection activity increased in 2025. The Early Years Inspectorate completed 2,514 pre-school inspections, compared with 2,316 in 2024, representing an increase of 198 inspections, or approximately 9%. Total pre-school and school-age inspection activity also increased, from 2,473 inspections in 2024 to 2,574 in 2025. The 2025 pre-school total excludes school-age inspections, which are reported separately.

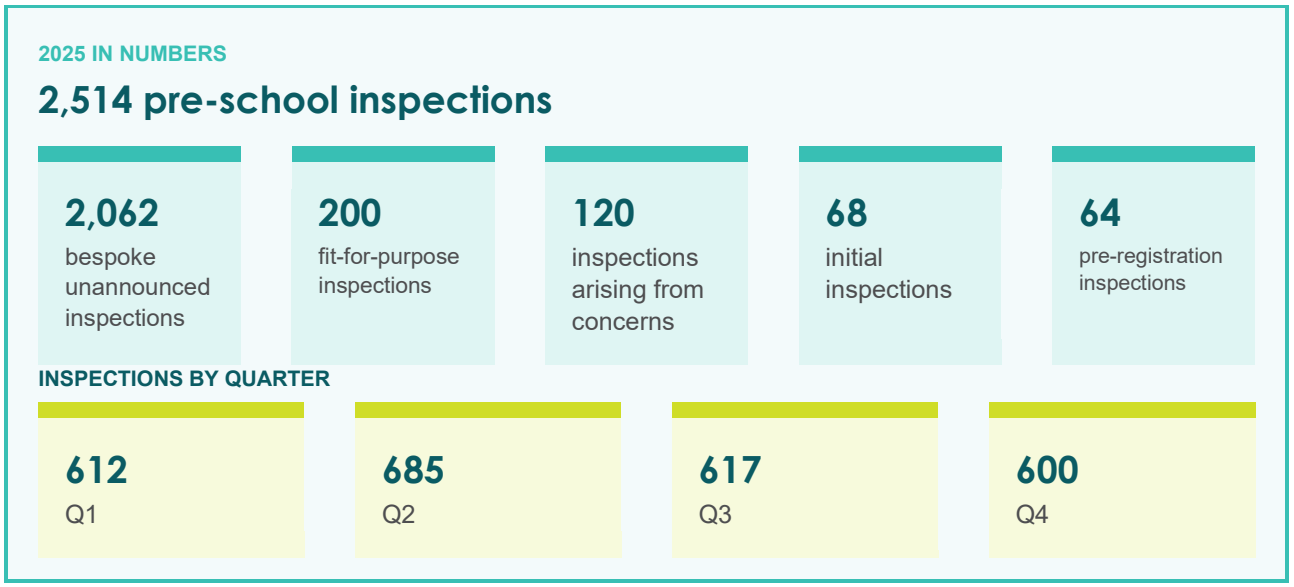


10.3.1.1. Inspection volume and scheduling

Inspection activity was sustained across the year, with 612 pre-school inspections completed in Quarter 1, 685 in Quarter 2, 617 in Quarter 3 and 600 in Quarter 4. Quarter 2 was the busiest period, while each quarter recorded at least 600 inspections. The 2025 programme was primarily

made up of bespoke unannounced inspections, supported by a smaller number of inspections linked to registration, change in circumstances, concerns and initial post-registration assurance.

10.3.1.2. Inspection types



The vast majority of pre-school inspections in 2025 (2,062 of 2,514) were bespoke unannounced inspections of registered services. These were supplemented by specific inspection types linked to registration, change in circumstances and risk response. In 2025, the Inspectorate completed 64 pre-registration inspections (PRIs), 200 fit-for-purpose inspections (FFPs), 120 inspections arising from concerns and 68 initial inspections. PRIs are undertaken as part of the registration process for proposed new pre-school services and form part of the first inspection activity linked to registration. FFP inspections are undertaken as part of the change in circumstance process where a proposed change requires an assessment of whether the service remains fit for purpose. Initial inspections are the first inspection undertaken following registration and are normally conducted within three months of operation. Concern-related inspections are undertaken where information received indicates that regulatory assurance or follow-up may be required.

10.3.1.3. Compliance and corrective action

During inspection, inspectors assess compliance with the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016. This includes consideration of governance and management arrangements, staffing, vetting and qualifications, health, welfare and development of children, safeguarding, premises, safety, infection prevention and control, fire safety, records, policies and procedures. Inspectors gather evidence through observation, review of documentation, discussion with the registered provider or person in charge, and consideration of the service environment and practice observed on the day of inspection.

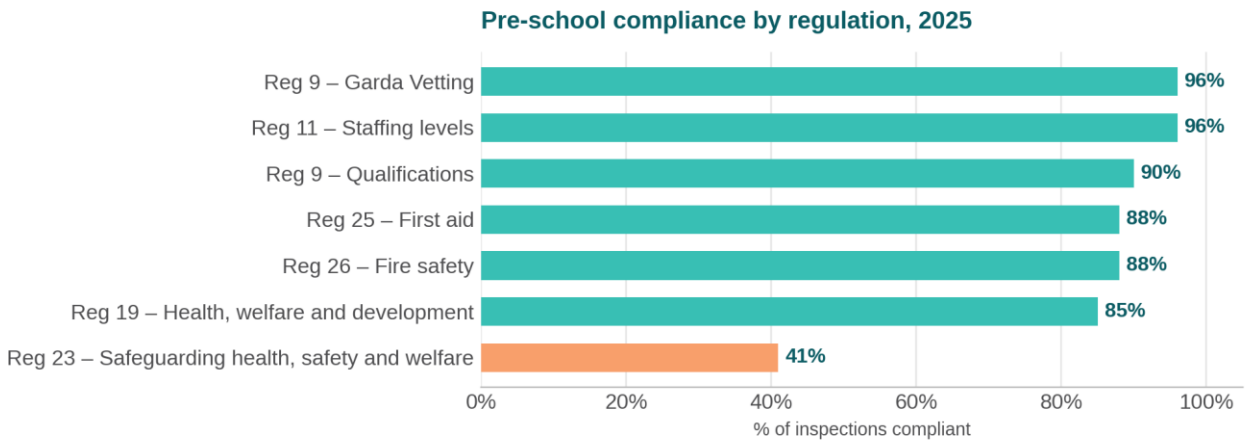
Where non-compliance is identified, the provider is required to respond through the Corrective and Preventive Action (CAPA) process. The CAPA response sets out the corrective action taken to address the specific non-compliance and the preventive action to reduce the likelihood of recurrence. Providers may also be required to submit evidence to demonstrate that the actions have been implemented. Inspectors review the CAPA response and supporting evidence before the inspection report is finalised and published. Where the response is incomplete, insufficiently evidenced or does not adequately address the risk, further follow-up or escalation may be required.

It should be noted that an inspection is recorded as non-compliant where one or more regulations are found to be non-compliant. This means that a single regulatory breach results in the inspection

being classified as non-compliant. Inspection outcomes therefore show whether an inspection was compliant or non-compliant overall, but do not show the number, seriousness or degree of regulatory breaches identified within individual inspections. Data relates to compliance following the Corrective and Preventive Action (CAPA) process.

10.3.1.4. Key compliance themes from inspection findings

The following section considers selected compliance themes from inspection findings across the four-year period from 2022 to 2025, where comparable data is available, providing context for 2025 findings and showing how compliance has changed over time for key regulations.



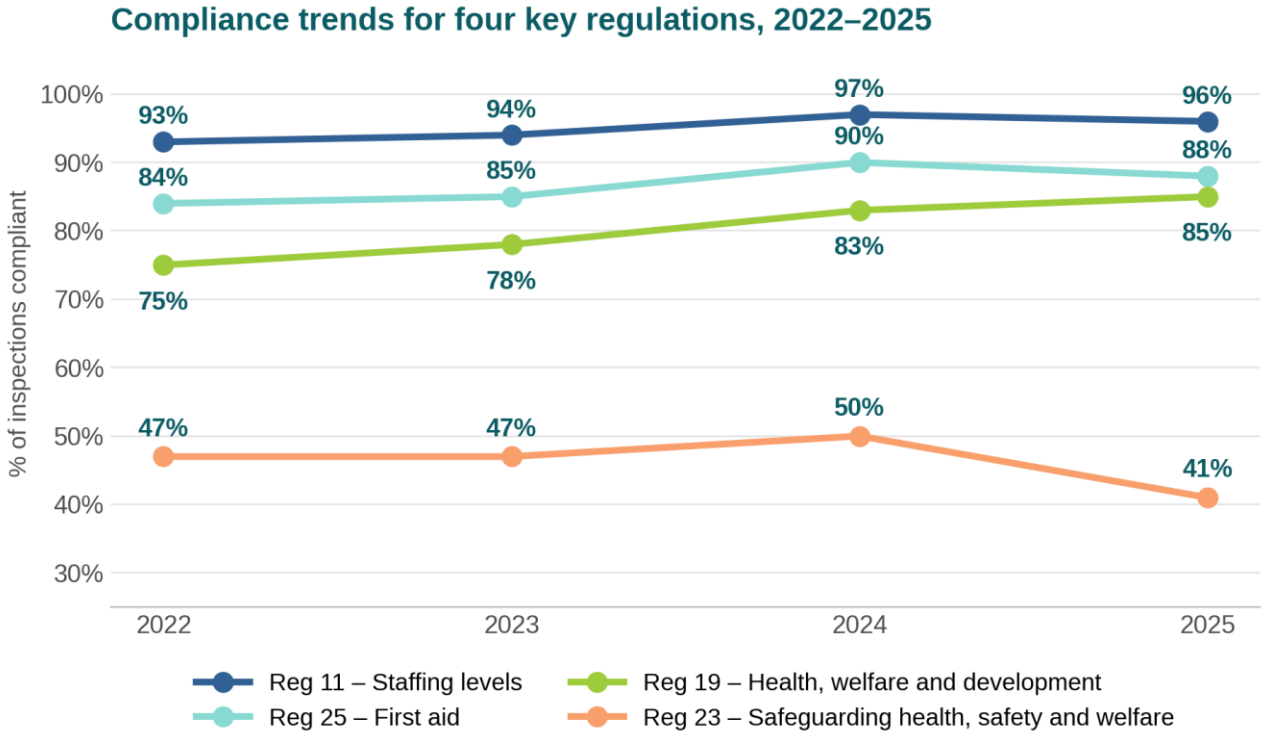
Inspection findings in 2025 continued to show recurring compliance themes across core areas of the 2016 Regulations. Regulation 9, which relates to management and recruitment, remained a significant focus because vetting, references, qualifications and recruitment records are central to safe governance and are frequently examined during inspection. Compliance with Garda Vetting remained high at 96%, while compliance with qualifications increased to 90%. International Police Vetting was reported more frequently, reflecting the number of staff who had lived outside Ireland for more than six consecutive months, with compliance remaining broadly stable.

Regulation 19, which addresses the health, welfare and development of the child, continued to show improvement over time, with compliance reaching 85% in 2025. The regulation covers five main areas of children's daily experience in pre-school services: children's basic care needs, supporting relationships, the physical play environment, the programme of activities and appropriate behaviour management practices. Regulation 19 was inspected more than 1,500 times in each year across the period, including 2,037 inspections in 2022 before the introduction of bespoke inspections and 1,868 inspections in 2025. Compliance increased from 75% in 2022 to 85% in 2025, an improvement of 10 percentage points over the period.

Regulation 23, which relates to safeguarding the health, safety and welfare of the child, has consistently been one of the most non-compliant regulations. It captures a broad range of safety issues within a service, including general safety matters relating to doors, windows, stairs, toys and equipment, electrical safety, storage and outdoor areas; infection prevention and control; fire safety and evacuation arrangements; and unsafe sleep practices. Regulation 23 was included in approximately 2,000 inspections in each year across the period. Compliance remained at 47% in both 2022 and 2023, increased to 50% in 2024, and reduced to 41% in 2025. The reduction in 2025 may have been influenced by the introduction of a regulatory notice requiring Garda Vetting to be renewed every three years. On inspection, where Garda Vetting was in place but was more than three years old, the service was deemed compliant with Regulation 9(2)(c) but non-compliant

with Regulation 23. Regulation 23 therefore remained a significant area for regulatory attention and provider improvement.

Regulation 11, which relates to staffing levels, was inspected in all pre-school inspections during the four-year period from 2022 to 2025, amounting to approximately 2,200 to 2,500 inspections each year. Compliance levels remained high across the period and increased overall, rising from 93% in 2022 to 96% in 2025. Compliance was 94% in 2023 and peaked at 97% in 2024 before remaining strong at 96% in 2025. The trend indicates sustained high levels of compliance with staffing-level requirements across inspected services.



Regulation 25, which relates to first aid, was inspected approximately 1,700 to 2,000 times each year between 2022 and 2025. The regulation requires services to have appropriate first aid training arrangements in place and a suitably equipped first aid box available. Compliance remained relatively high across the period, increasing from 84% in 2022 to 88% in 2025, with compliance of 85% in 2023 and a peak of 90% in 2024. The majority of non-compliance identified related to services not having a suitably qualified person trained in first aid on site at all times. While compliance levels are relatively high, it remains concerning that 237 inspections in 2025 identified first aid non-compliance, as this could have significant implications if a medical emergency occurred in a service.

10.3.1.5. Risk-based prioritisation

Risk-based prioritisation is central to how the Early Years Inspectorate plans and delivers the pre-school inspection programme. It supports a proportionate approach by directing inspection capacity to services where the need for regulatory assurance is greatest. In practice, prioritisation is informed by a range of regulatory intelligence, including previous inspection history, compliance findings, corrective and preventive action outcomes, concerns received, Notifications of Incident, change in circumstance activity, registration history and any emerging information indicating potential risk to children's safety, welfare or development.

This approach is particularly important in a context of high inspection volume, increased concerns activity and the need to maintain oversight of services within the three-year inspection cycle.

During 2025, concerns case management arrangements, Notification of Incident review, CAPA follow-up and escalation pathways all contributed to inspection planning. These processes helped the Inspectorate identify services requiring earlier inspection, follow-up inspection or other regulatory action, while also supporting more consistent decision-making across the expanded twelve-area inspection structure.

10.3.1.6. Immediate Action Notices

Inspection activity continued to identify areas requiring immediate provider action. In 2025, the Inspectorate issued 305 Immediate Action Notices to early years services where immediate action was required to address identified risk. The majority related to safety, with a smaller proportion relating to Garda Vetting or a combination of both. Immediate Action Notices may relate to matters such as unsafe premises or equipment, inadequate supervision, unsafe sleep arrangements, infection prevention and control concerns, safeguarding concerns, Garda Vetting issues, or other matters where delay in taking action could place children at risk.

Where an Immediate Action Notice is issued, the provider is required to take the actions specified by the Inspectorate and provide assurance or evidence that the risk has been addressed. The response is reviewed by the Inspectorate and may inform further follow-up, including additional inspection activity, regulatory compliance engagement or escalation where the risk is not adequately addressed.

IMMEDIATE ACTION NOTICES

Where immediate action was required in 2025

305	261	221	81
Immediate Action Notices issued	services that received a notice	notices relating to safety (72%)	relating to Garda Vetting; 3 to both

10.3.1.7. Regulatory Compliance Meetings

Regulatory Compliance Meetings are a separate enforcement and escalation mechanism used where concerns arise in relation to the operation of a registered service. Where significant concern is identified, the Inspection and Registration Manager may convene a Regulatory Compliance Meeting with the registered provider. These meetings are most commonly convened following inspection where there is significant concern regarding risk in the service, or where persistent non-compliance requires formal regulatory engagement. In 2025, Inspection and Registration Managers convened 54 Regulatory Compliance Meetings with registered providers. The meetings provide a structured forum to set out the Inspectorate's concerns, hear from the provider, agree required actions and determine whether further inspection, enforcement or escalation is required. Further information on enforcement and escalation activity is set out in section 12.

10.4. School Age Services – The Register

WHAT IS A SCHOOL-AGE SERVICE?

A school-age service is a service that provides care, including a range of developmental and recreational activities, for children under the age of 15 years who are in primary or post-primary education, outside of school hours. Examples include afterschool services and breakfast club services.

School-age services became subject to registration with Tusla following the commencement of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Registration of School Age Services) Regulations 2018 in February 2019. These regulations require services that cater for school-age children to register with Tusla before commencing operation. Unlike pre-school services, the current regulatory framework for school-age services provides for registration, while inspection-specific regulations have not yet been introduced.

The key legislation relating to school-age services is set out below.

KEY LEGISLATION

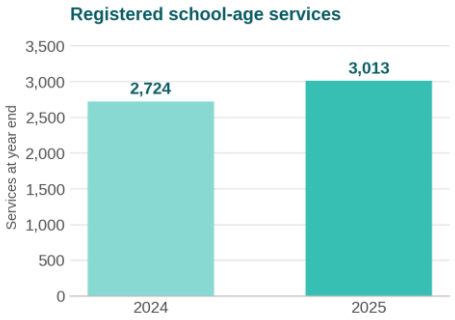
School-age services

Child Care Act 1991, Section 22 As amended by the Childcare Support Act 2018	Defines 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	Require services that 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	Clarified the employment status of people employed under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM).

10.4.1. School Age Services Registration

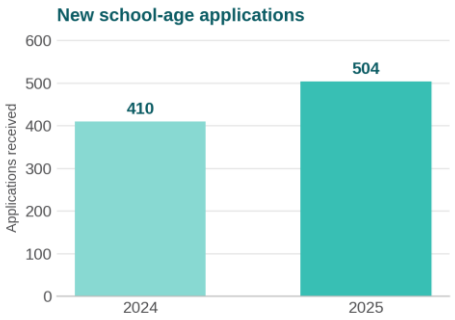
Initial registration of school-age services covers the process from application by a proposed registered provider through to review of supporting documentation, assessment against the school-age registration requirements, decision-making and communication of the outcome to the applicant.

At the end of 2025 there were 3,013 registered school-age services on the National Register, compared with 2,724 at the end of 2024. This was an increase of 289 services, or approximately 11%, year on year. The increase reflects continued growth in school-age provision and the ongoing role of registration in supporting regulatory oversight of services operating outside school hours.



The Early Years Inspectorate received 504 applications to register a new school-age service in 2025, compared with 410 in 2024. This was an increase of 94 applications, or approximately 23%. Application activity was highest in Quarter 2, when 226 applications were received, followed by 122 in Quarter 3, 78 in Quarter 1 and 78 in Quarter 4.

Of the new school-age applications received in 2025, 86 were closed as incomplete, compared with 92 in 2024. This represented approximately 17% of all new school-age applications received in 2025, compared with approximately 22% in 2024. The reduction in incomplete closures, alongside the increase in applications received, indicates improved progression of applications through the registration process during the year.



Registration activity should also be read alongside new services opening and existing service closures. During 2025, 381 new school-age services were registered, compared with 327 in 2024. This represented an increase of 17% (54 services). Service closures were lower in 2025, with 77 school-age services closed compared with 90 in 2024. Taken together, the increase in applications, higher number of new registrations and reduction in closures contributed to the overall growth in the school-age register during 2025.



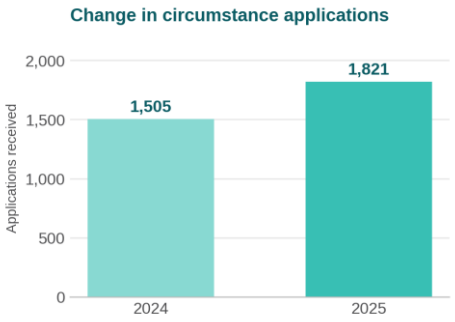
10.4.2. School Age Services Change in circumstance applications

Registered providers of school-age services are required to notify the Early Years Inspectorate where there are significant changes to their service. These change in circumstance applications allow the Inspectorate to review proposed or notified changes and to ensure that the service continues to meet the requirements of the school-age registration framework.

Changes that must be notified may include changes to the registered provider, the person in charge, the premises, the number of children catered for, the type of service offered, or other material aspects of service delivery. Timely notification supports the accuracy of the National Register and enables regulatory review where a change may affect the suitability or operation of the service.

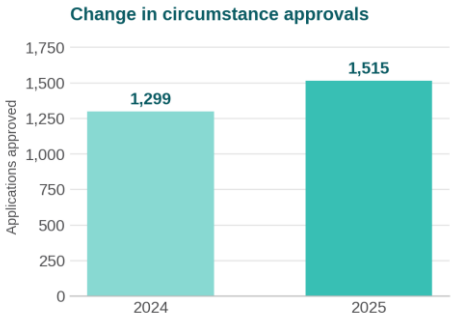
During 2025, the Early Years Inspectorate received 1,821 school-age change in circumstance applications, compared with 1,505 in 2024. This was an increase of 316 applications, or approximately 21%. The Inspectorate processed 1,831 school-age change in circumstance applications in 2025, compared with 1,509 in 2024, an increase of 322 applications, or approximately 21%.

There are two types of change requests. Category 1 requests are generally minor administrative changes and are usually assessed through a desk-based process. Category 2 requests involve more substantive changes, such as changes to premises, service type or the number of children catered for, and may require further documentation or additional review before approval.



The number of school-age change in circumstance applications closed as incomplete increased in 2025, with 249 applications closed, compared with 104 in 2024. Applications are closed as incomplete where the information submitted is incomplete and requests for further information are not responded to. This indicates that a greater proportion of applications required further documentation, clarification or follow-up before they could progress through the process.

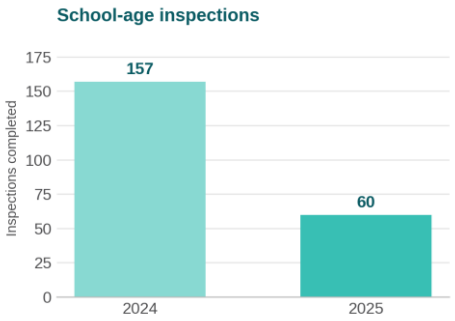
The number of school-age change in circumstance applications approved increased from 1,299 in 2024 to 1,515 in 2025. Overall, the 2025 data show higher activity across applications received, applications processed and approvals. This supports continued accuracy of the school-age register and reflects the scale of change being managed across registered school-age services.



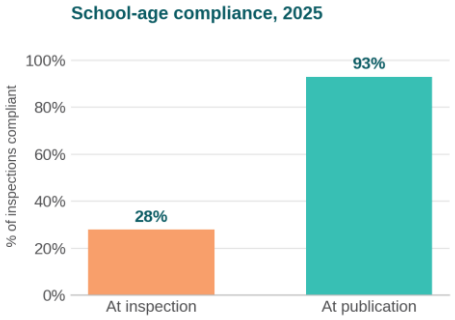
10.5. School Age Services – Inspection

Inspection activity for school-age services continued in 2025 within the context of a registration-focused regulatory framework. Unlike pre-school services, inspection-specific regulations for school-age services have not yet been introduced. As a result, school-age inspection activity remained more targeted and was primarily informed by concerns, Notifications of Incident, priority follow-up activity and other regulatory intelligence indicating that assurance was required.

During 2025, the Early Years Inspectorate completed 60 school-age service inspections, compared with 157 in 2024. This represented a reduction of 97 inspections, or approximately 62%, year on year. The reduction reflected a deliberate shift away from scheduled inspections of standalone school-age services during 2025, with inspection activity instead focused on services where information received by the Inspectorate indicated a need for regulatory review. Until inspection-specific regulations for school-age services are introduced, the Inspectorate can only inspect school-age services on the basis of information indicating unsuitability or an identified risk in a service.



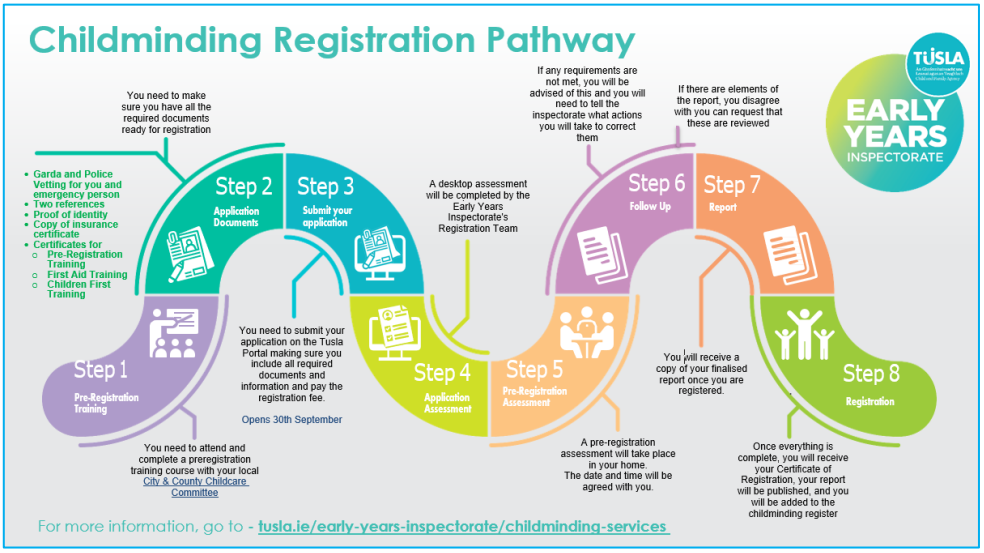
Inspection findings showed low levels of compliance in school-age services. Compliance was 28% at inspection stage, increasing to 93% at publication stage following follow-up and corrective action. The low level of compliance at inspection indicates that the school-age sector needs increased guidance and support to understand and meet its regulatory requirements and responsibilities.



The wider school-age service profile also informed inspection planning. At the end of 2025 there were more than 3,000 registered school-age services. Analysis of service distribution across the twelve operational areas identified concentrations of school-age services and high-risk school-age services in particular areas. This analysis will inform future staffing allocation and inspection planning as the Inspectorate moves towards a more proactive, priority-based inspection programme for school-age services.

School-age inspection activity in 2025 therefore reflected both the current limitations of the regulatory framework and the need to respond proportionately to risk. In 2026, the Inspectorate plans to commence a prioritisation-based inspection programme for school-age services, supported by the development of school-age inspection protocols, inspection notebooks and report templates. Enhanced stakeholder engagement and guidance will also be required to support providers to understand regulatory expectations and engage effectively with corrective action processes following inspection. The 2025 findings also highlight the need for inspection-specific regulations for school-age services and for additional resources to enable the Inspectorate to increase inspection coverage across the sector.

10.6. Childminding



10.6.1. Childminder Application and Registration Process

In September 2024, the Early Years Inspectorate established a dedicated application and registration pathway for childminding services, reflecting the specific operational context of home-based provision.

The process supports childminders from initial engagement through to a registration decision, in six stages:

HOW IT WORKS

The childminding registration pathway

1

Pre-registration engagement and training

Childminders are required to complete childminder-specific training, including first aid and safeguarding, delivered through County Childcare Committees. This ensures that applicants have the foundational knowledge required to meet regulatory standards prior to application.

2

Submission of application

Applications are submitted through the Tusla online portal, where childminders provide required documentation and information in relation to their service, premises and compliance with regulatory requirements.

3

Application review and validation

The Childminding Registration Unit reviews applications to ensure that all required documentation has been submitted and that the application is complete and valid before progressing to assessment.

4

Pre-Registration Assessment (PRA)

A home-based assessment is carried out by the Early Years Inspectorate. This assessment considers the suitability of the premises, governance arrangements and the childminder's capacity to provide a safe and appropriate service. The PRA represents a key point of engagement between inspectors and childminders and is conducted in line with the Inspectorate's Supportive Compliance approach.

5

Registration decision

Following completion of the assessment, a registration decision is made. This may result in registration (with or without conditions) or refusal, in line with legislative requirements and based on the level of compliance demonstrated.

6

Post-registration engagement (Phase 2)

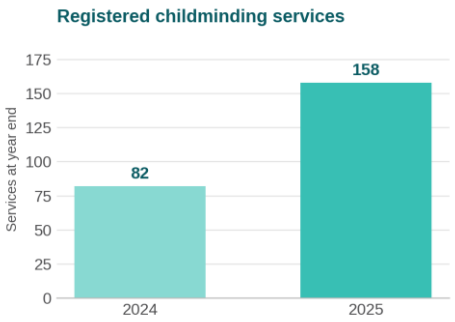
Following registration, the Inspectorate continues to engage with childminders through ongoing inspection and regulatory processes, supporting sustained compliance and quality improvement over time.

This structured process was developed and implemented during 2024 as part of the Childminding Regulation Project and reflects a proportionate, accessible and supportive approach to enabling childminders to engage with regulation for the first time.

10.6.2. Childminding Services – The Register

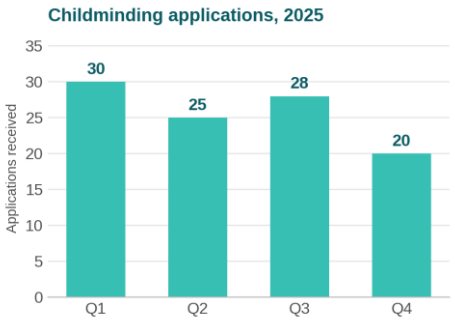
The childminding application portal opened on 30 September 2024 and by the end of the year 7 childminders had successfully completed the registration process. There were also 75 childminders who had already registered under existing regulations, bringing the total to 82.

During 2025, childminding registration activity expanded as the first full year of the new regulatory framework was implemented. At the end of 2025 there were 158 childminding services on the National Register, compared with 82 at the end of 2024.[1] This growth reflected continued progression through the new application, assessment and registration pathway, while also recognising that the overall number of registered childminders remains low in the context of the wider childminding sector.



[1] The end-2024 figure of 82 comprises 7 childminders registered under the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Childminding Services) Regulations 2024 and 75 childminders registered under the previous regulations. The Data at a glance table in section 5.1 shows only the 7 registered under the 2024 Regulations.

The Early Years Inspectorate received 103 applications to register a new childminding service in 2025. Application activity was highest in Quarter 1, when 30 applications were received, followed by 28 in Quarter 3, 25 in Quarter 2 and 20 in Quarter 4. Application numbers remained relatively low, which is expected in the context of phased implementation and the three-year transition window that allows childminders until the end of 2027 to register.



Following the introduction of the new regulations, a regularisation project was completed in 2025 for childminders who had registered under the previous regulations. Each registration was reviewed to identify the steps needed to bring it into line with the new regulations. All childminders had the number of children on their registration increased to six. Where appropriate, childminders were moved onto the Childminding National Register and given new Tusla numbers, and childminders with multiple services had these separated onto the relevant registers. Twenty services had to take additional steps to regularise, for example by reducing numbers, changing service type or hiring staff. Some services were also due for re-registration during the year, which required additional communication and support.

The project was complex because some childminders had multiple service types or were registered under different regulations. Existing childminders had not completed pre-registration training and so were less familiar with the new regulations, and some were also due to renew their registration. A small number had to reduce the number of children in their service. A communication and support plan, including a dedicated point of contact for each childminder, reflected the supportive compliance approach taken with the sector.

Registration activity was supported by the dedicated childminding application pathway described above, including childminder-specific pre-registration training, application review and home-based Pre-Registration Assessment. In 2025, 85 childminding Pre-Registration Assessments were completed by the Inspectorate, supporting registration decision-making and providing assurance in relation to the suitability of the childminding premises, governance arrangements and the childminder's capacity to provide a safe and appropriate service.

The childminding registration process was also supported by the continued use of an automated workflow on Tusla Case Management and a dedicated childminding webpage on the Tusla website. Registration Helpdesk data shows that childminding queries formed part of the Registration Helpdesk workload, with 297 calls recorded in 2025 compared with 204 in 2024. This reflects the need for accessible information and practical support for childminders engaging with regulation, many for the first time.

Overall, the 2025 data show that the childminding regulatory model continued to embed during its first full year of implementation. The increase in registered childminding services, the completion of Pre-Registration Assessments and the use of dedicated information and helpdesk supports demonstrate progress. However, the low level of applications also indicates that continued communication, sector engagement and support will be required during the transition period to encourage childminders to register before the end of 2027.

10.6.3. Childminding Services – Inspection

Inspection and assessment activity for childminding services developed during 2025 as part of the phased implementation of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Childminding Services) Regulations 2024. As childminding is delivered in a home-based setting, the regulatory approach is

designed to be proportionate, supportive and focused on the safety, welfare and development of children cared for in the childminder's home.

During 2025, the Inspectorate completed 85 childminding Pre-Registration Assessments. These assessments formed the main inspection-related activity for childminding during the first full year of the new regulatory framework. The Pre-Registration Assessment is carried out before a registration decision is made and provides assurance that the proposed childminding service is suitable to operate.

OUR APPROACH

Supportive Compliance

Supportive Compliance is a proactive regulatory approach with an emphasis on guidance and engagement. Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate applies this method to childminders, acknowledging their unique home-based setting and 'first-time' regulation concerns. Inspectors offer clear information, support, and ongoing engagement, being mindful of the private family environment. The aim is to help childminders comply with regulations, address non-compliance through constructive discussions, and identify operational improvements to ensure children's health, safety and wellbeing.

The assessment considers the suitability of the home environment, the childminder's understanding of regulatory requirements, safeguarding arrangements, health and safety, infection prevention and control, first aid, records, policies and the capacity of the childminder to provide safe and appropriate care. It also provides an important opportunity for engagement between the Inspectorate and childminders, many of whom are engaging with statutory regulation for the first time.

Implementation of the childminding assessment model was supported by the development of an end-to-end Pre-Registration Assessment process on Tusla Case Management, the preparation of PRA guidance, and training for inspection staff and childminding superusers. This supported consistency in assessment practice and helped embed the new childminding regulatory pathway during 2025.

Although Pre-Registration Assessments were the primary childminding inspection activity in 2025, the Inspectorate also continued preparatory work for future childminding inspection activity triggered by concerns, Notifications of Incident or other regulatory intelligence. This included identifying the need for childminding-specific inspection protocols, notebooks and report templates to support proportionate and consistent inspection practice as the number of registered childminders increases.

Overall, childminding inspection activity in 2025 reflected the early stage of implementation of the new regulatory model. The completion of 85 Pre-Registration Assessments provided a foundation for registration decision-making and supported childminders to understand regulatory expectations. As the transition window continues to the end of 2027 and application volumes increase, childminding inspection and follow-up processes will need to continue developing to provide assurance across the growing registered childminding sector.

10.7. Early Years Inspectorate Stakeholder Engagement

10.7.1. Overview

Stakeholder engagement remained a central part of the Early Years Inspectorate's regulatory approach during 2025. Engagement activity supported the communication of regulatory

requirements, informed the development of guidance and policy, and provided structured opportunities for providers, representative bodies, Government departments and partner organisations to contribute to regulatory practice and implementation.



The Inspectorate's stakeholder engagement activity was aligned with the CSR Stakeholder Engagement Strategy 2022–2025, which emphasises partnership, accessible communication and support for regulated services to understand and meet regulatory requirements. Throughout 2025, engagement focused on major operational and policy developments, including registration renewal, Garda Vetting, childminding registration, school-age service matters, regulatory notices, guidance development and preparations for new regulatory processes.

The Strategy provided the framework for a structured approach to engagement, including identifying stakeholders, defining the purpose and scope of engagement, selecting appropriate engagement methods, reviewing outcomes and using learning to inform improvement.

Engagement was delivered through a range of channels, set out below. This approach supported clearer understanding of regulatory expectations and enabled the Inspectorate to hear feedback from the sector while continuing to promote proportionate, risk-informed and child-centred regulation.

HOW WE ENGAGED

Engagement channels in 2025

Formal forums	Sector communications	Targeted provider correspondence	Surveys
Webinars	Helpdesk channels	Registration clinics	Cross-agency collaboration

10.7.2. Early Years Regulatory Consultative and Support Forums

The Early Years Regulatory Consultative Forum and Regulatory Support Forum continued to provide structured mechanisms for engagement with the early years sector during 2025. The forums met four times during the year and provided a regular route for sector dialogue, consultation and shared understanding of regulatory developments. The Consultative Forum enables relevant stakeholder organisations and agencies to contribute advice, input and recommendations to the work of the Early Years Inspectorate, with membership including representatives from DCDE, BetterStart, national voluntary childcare organisations, Childcare Committees Ireland, professional and sector representative bodies, disability and parent representation, and Tusla staff. The Regulatory Support Forum complements this by bringing together Early Learning and Care sector support organisations so that the Inspectorate can brief the sector on key initiatives, share practice, policy and protocol updates, and seek feedback on implementation.

FORUM AGENDA

Topics considered in 2025

- Childminding registration, implementation and sector engagement
- Registration renewal, new applications and registration office updates
- Garda Vetting developments and provider responsibilities
- Regulatory notices, including school-age service definitions and child safety matters
- Policy project updates and Quality and Regulatory Framework developments
- Self-evaluation and annual review of service
- NREP, enforcement activity and emerging enforcement developments
- Forthcoming sectoral guidance, including guidance on outdoor weather, screen and digital device use, policy development and student vetting
- CCTV and other emerging practice issues
- Structural changes within the Inspectorate and the move from eight to twelve operational areas
- The joint Tusla and Department of Education and Youth inspection information video

Across the year, the forums supported two-way engagement, enabling the Inspectorate to communicate developments, listen to sector feedback and promote consistent understanding of regulatory requirements.

10.7.3. Early Years Third Level Education Provider Forum

Engagement with higher and further education providers continued during 2025 through the Early Years Inspectorate Third Level Education Provider Forum and related correspondence. The forum is open to all third level education providers of early years education and supports alignment between regulatory requirements, early learning and care education programmes and student placement practice. The forum met in April 2025.

A key focus during 2025 was safeguarding and Garda Vetting for students undertaking practice placements in early years services. The Inspectorate engaged with education providers on the development and publication of guidance on vetting for students before they commence practice placements. This guidance clarified the responsibilities of educational institutions and early years providers, including the need for mandatory vetting for students aged 18 and over, consideration of vetting information before a placement commences, and appropriate management of police clearance where students have lived outside Ireland.

The forum also provided an opportunity to discuss how education providers respond to student-reported safeguarding concerns and to strengthen shared understanding of regulatory expectations in placement settings. Correspondence continued as required during the year to address queries from higher and further education providers, including questions relating to student documentation, Garda Vetting, references, placement responsibilities and the appropriate contact points for regulatory queries.

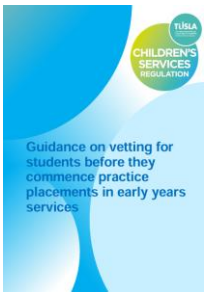
10.7.4. Communications and Sector Supports

Communication and sector support activity in 2025 focused on ensuring that providers, childminders, education partners and sector stakeholders had access to clear, timely and practical information about regulatory requirements. This activity supported the implementation of key regulatory processes including registration renewal, Garda Vetting, childminding registration, change in circumstance applications, inspection processes, policy development and new guidance.

Sector-wide communications were issued through the Tusla–DCDE bulletin and direct stakeholder emails throughout the year. These communications included updates on the 2025 registration renewal cycle, Garda Vetting, new applications and change in circumstance timelines, childminding resources, childminder feedback surveys, regulatory notices and published guidance. Communications were also used to support providers to prepare for renewal, complete required documentation and understand the interaction between renewal, Garda Vetting and registration status.

PUBLISHED IN 2025

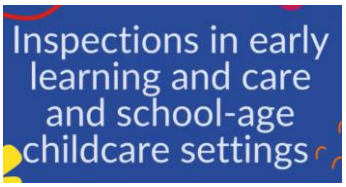
New guidance and resources for the sector



Guidance on vetting for students before they commence practice placements



Regulatory notice: use of nappy storage and disposal bins in early years services



Inspections in early learning and care and school-age childcare settings (video)

A number of provider-facing guidance and support materials were progressed during 2025. These included the publication of guidance on vetting for students before they commence practice placements in early years services and the publication of *Keeping children safe and comfortable indoors and outdoors in all weathers*.

The Inspectorate also published two regulatory notices during the year: *Definition of Enrolment in a School Age Service* and *Use of nappy storage and disposal bins in Early Years Services*. These notices supported consistent interpretation of regulatory requirements and provided practical direction to registered providers.

New guidance and policy documents, and updates to the Quality and Regulatory Framework, progressed during the year. The Inspectorate also worked with the Department of Education and Youth Inspectorate on an information video explaining inspections of early learning and care settings.

Practical support was also provided through dedicated contact channels and targeted engagement. The Registration Helpdesk supported a substantially higher volume of provider queries in 2025, with calls relating mainly to registration renewal, change in circumstance and cessation requests, new applications and childminding. Dedicated contact routes were also available for the Regulatory Practice Development Team, the Childminding Helpline, the Early Years Vetting Unit, reception and general queries, new applications, change in circumstances and registration renewals.

Registration renewal support was a particular focus because of the scale of the 2025 renewal cycle. Providers received formal communications before registration expiry, including initial notification, reminder letters and follow-up telephone contact. For the large cohort of services expiring at the end of 2025, additional communications included renewal Q&A material, Garda

Vetting guidance, direct portal links, registered postal correspondence and urgent reminders. A pilot in-person renewal and Garda Vetting clinic was also held in Dublin with support from the local County Childcare Committee.

Childminding communications and supports continued throughout the year as the new regulatory framework embedded. Childminders were signposted to resources and videos to support the registration process, and registered childminders were invited to complete feedback surveys on their experience of registration and pre-registration assessment. Feedback recorded during 2025 indicated positive engagement with the registration process and the pre-registration assessment process, while also highlighting the need for continued practical support during the transition period to the end of 2027.

Publication and accessibility of regulatory information also remained a focus. During 2025, more than 2,800 inspection reports were published and approximately 6,000 registration certificates were processed and posted. These activities supported transparency, public access to regulatory information and provider assurance in respect of registration status.

2,800+
inspection reports published

6,000
registration certificates processed and posted

7,546
calls to the Registration Helpdesk

Overall, communications and sector support helped the Inspectorate manage significant regulatory change in 2025, keeping providers and stakeholders clearly informed and supported.



Section 11

Early Years Inspectorate – Additional Regulatory Processes

This section contains:

11.1 Inspection Findings Review

11.2 Concerns about early years services

11.3 Notifications of Incident

11. Early Years Inspectorate – Additional Regulatory Processes

Reviews of inspection findings, concerns and Notifications of Incident help keep early years regulation fair, responsive and focused on risk to children.

There are additional processes that support the effective regulation of all services in the early years sector, whether pre-school, school-age or childminding. This section sets out three of them: the Inspection Findings Review process, through which providers can seek review of inspection findings; the management of concerns (unsolicited information) about early years services; and Notifications of Incident, which registered providers are required to submit when specified incidents occur.

11.1. Inspection Findings Review

The Inspection Findings Review process provides an important quality assurance function within the inspection system. It enables providers to challenge findings through a structured review pathway, supports independent scrutiny of inspection evidence and provides learning that informs inspector guidance, report-writing supports, training and wider quality assurance activity.

The Inspection Findings Review process applies to inspections of both pre-school and school-age services and was significantly strengthened in 2025. It provides a formal mechanism for registered providers to seek review of inspection findings where they disagree with the findings recorded in an inspection report. The process supports fairness, transparency and consistency in inspection decision-making, while ensuring that published inspection reports are evidence-based and accurately reflect the regulatory findings identified during inspection.

The process has two stages. An Inspection Findings Review 1 is carried out by an independent Inspection and Registration Manager who was not involved in the original inspection. Where a provider remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they may request an Inspection Findings Review 2. This second stage is a full de novo review carried out by an independent panel chaired by a Deputy Head of Inspection and supported by Inspection and Registration Managers who are independent of the inspection under review.

In 2025, there were 48 submissions for Inspection Findings Review 1. As many more pre-school services than school-age services were inspected during the year, most review activity related to pre-school inspections. These submissions included 147 disputed findings, each of which required independent assessment. Of these findings, 31 were accepted, 26 were partially accepted and 90 were rejected.

Of the findings that were partially accepted or rejected at Review 1 stage, 57 findings progressed to Inspection Findings Review 2. At Review 2 stage, 14 findings were accepted, 14 were partially accepted and 29 were rejected. Submissions for review were most frequently associated with Regulation 19: Health, Welfare and Development of the Child and Regulation 23: Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of the Child. Together, these two regulations accounted for approximately 45% of Inspection Findings Review submissions, indicating that provider challenges

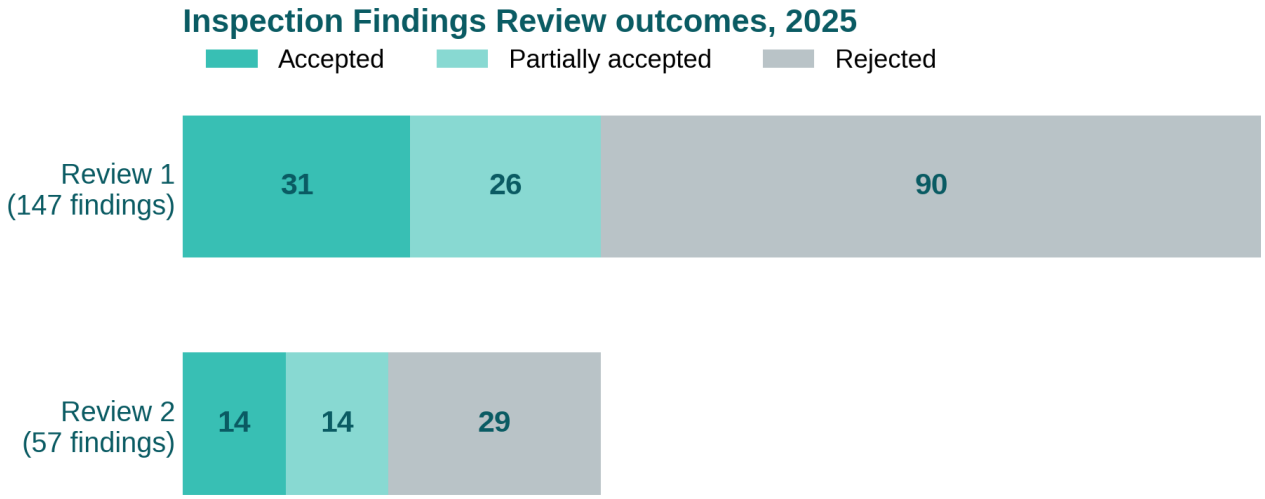
were most commonly concentrated around two significant and frequently inspected areas of regulatory practice.

HOW IT WORKS

A two-stage review

Review 1
An independent Inspection and Registration Manager, not involved in the original inspection, reviews the disputed findings.

Review 2
Where the provider remains dissatisfied, an independent panel chaired by a Deputy Head of Inspection carries out a full de novo review.



11.2. Concerns about early years services

The Early Years Inspectorate (EYI) operates a dedicated Concerns Office for unsolicited information and notifications relating to pre-school, school-age and childminding services. Where possible, concerns about children's welfare or safety should first be raised with the registered provider. If escalation to EYI is required, concerns are submitted to the EYI Concerns Office.

Each concern is recorded, assessed for regulatory remit and risk rated. The risk rating informs the response, including provider engagement, inspection planning, follow-up activity or referral to another pathway such as Services Operating Outside of Registration Status (SOORS), unregistered services, the National Registration Enforcement Panel (NREP) or the Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit (CSSCU). EYI maintains regulatory oversight of concerns but does not conduct investigations.

Correspondence to registered providers, including the documentation requested and any follow-up requirements, was agreed through the Concerns Case Management Meeting process and subject to review before issue, supporting consistency, quality assurance and proportionate regulatory follow-up.

Concerns activity increased in 2025. EYI received 704 unsolicited information submissions, compared with 460 in 2024. Of the 2025 submissions, 506 related to pre-school services, 177 to school-age services and 21 to childminding. The increase was particularly notable for school-age services, where concerns rose from 100 in 2024 to 177 in 2025.

Concerns were reviewed through Concerns Case Management Meetings, where Deputy Heads of Inspection and Inspection and Registration Managers worked with the Concerns team to agree risk ratings and regulatory actions. In 2025, 36 concerns were rated critical and 155 were rated high risk. In response to concerns activity, 84 inspections were brought forward or triggered, supporting timely regulatory oversight where information indicated potential risk to children.

2025 IN NUMBERS

Concerns about early years services

506
pre-school concerns (360 in 2024)

177
school-age concerns (100 in 2024)

21
childminding concerns (new in 2025)

704
total unsolicited information submissions (460 in 2024)

36
concerns rated critical risk (17 in 2024)

155
concerns rated high risk (174 in 2024)

84
inspections brought forward or triggered by concerns

11.3. Notifications of Incident

Registered providers are required to notify the Early Years Inspectorate (EYI) of specified incidents that occur in a service, including serious injuries, infectious diseases, irregular closures, children missing from a service and other incidents that may indicate risk to children's safety, health or welfare.

Notifications of Incident are managed by the Early Years Inspection Department. They are recorded, assessed for regulatory remit and issued to inspection teams for review and follow-up. In 2025, EYI received 653 Notifications of Incident, of which 600 were within EYI remit. All notifications within remit were issued to inspection teams within 10 days of receipt, meeting the relevant timeliness standard throughout the year.

The 600 Notifications of Incident within remit were risk rated to support proportionate regulatory follow-up. Of these, 17 were rated critical, 47 high, 141 medium and 395 low. All critical notifications triggered inspection activity, while high-risk notifications were subject to inspection or follow-up engagement to seek assurance that appropriate mitigation had been put in place.

2025 IN NUMBERS

Notifications of Incident

653
notifications received (960 in 2024)

600
within EYI remit (704 in 2024)

53
outside remit (256 in 2024)

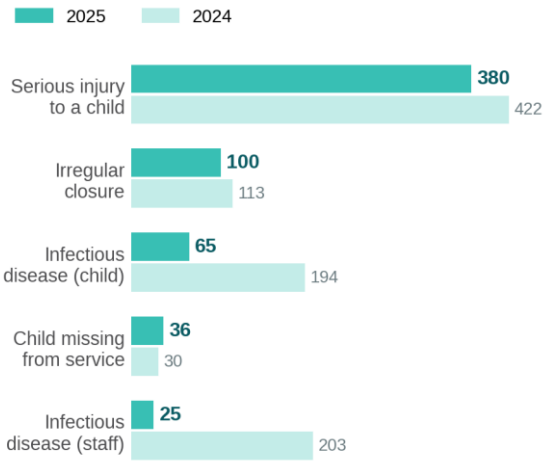
100%
issued to inspection teams within 10 days

RISK RATING OF NOTIFICATIONS WITHIN REMIT

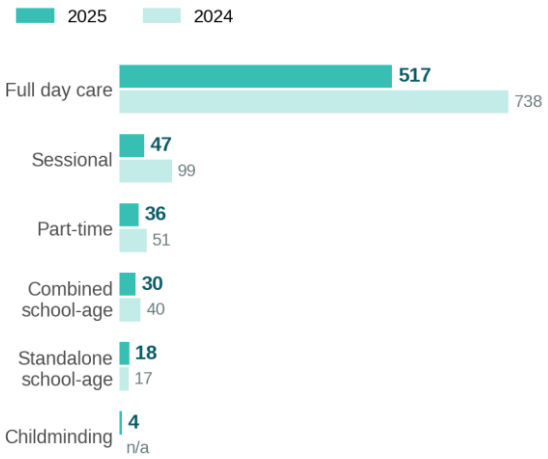
17	47	141	395
critical	high	medium	low

Notifications decreased overall from 960 in 2024 to 653 in 2025. This reduction was influenced by lower infectious disease notifications, including a reduction in Covid-19-related notifications. Serious injury to a child remained the largest category, accounting for 380 notifications in 2025. Notification data continued to inform inspection planning, risk assessment and follow-up activity, supporting timely regulatory oversight where incidents indicated potential risk to children.

Notifications by category



Notifications by service type



TUSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

CHILDREN'S SERVICES REGULATION

Section 12

Enforcement and Escalation Activity

This section contains:

12.1 Early Years Inspectorate Enforcement and Escalation
12.2 ACIMS Enforcement and Escalation
12.3 ACIMS Special Emergency Accommodation Enforcement
12.4 AEARS Enforcement and Escalation
12.5 CSSCU Enforcement and Escalation
12.6 Garda Vetting and Positive Disclosure

12. Enforcement and Escalation Activity

Enforcement became more structured in 2025, with escalation decided through National Registration Enforcement Panel arrangements across all four services.

The Enforcement Department supports escalation and enforcement across ACIMS, AEARS, CSSCU and EYI, where non-compliance, safeguarding concerns, suitability issues, failure to engage or operation outside a registration framework require formal action.

WHAT IS NREP?

The National Registration Enforcement Panel (NREP) is the formal forum for considering statutory and administrative enforcement matters, including conditions, refusal or removal from registration, warrants of entry, Advance Notices, prosecution and related escalation pathways. CSR operates separate NREP arrangements for EYI matters and for ACIMS, AEARS and CSSCU matters.

The Department also coordinates Early Years SOORS and unregistered service processes, Garda Vetting escalation and the Positive Disclosure Review Panel.

12.1. Early Years Inspectorate Enforcement and Escalation

EYI enforcement and escalation activity in 2025 followed a graduated pathway from inspection, concerns, incident notifications, registration activity and other intelligence through to corrective action, regulatory engagement and referral to Early Years NREP where required.

12.1.1. Inspection Follow-Up and CAPA

Following inspection, providers receive feedback on non-compliance or immediate risk. Immediate risks may be addressed through an Immediate Action Notice; wider non-compliance is normally progressed through the Corrective and Preventive Action process.

CAPA responses set out corrective and preventive actions and, where required, evidence of implementation. Incomplete, delayed or insufficient responses may lead to follow-up, further inspection, regulatory compliance engagement or escalation.

12.1.2. Graduated Enforcement Pathway

Escalation may include Immediate Action Notices, Regulatory Compliance Meetings, conditions of registration, Regulatory Enforcement Meetings and referral to Early Years NREP, particularly where risk is significant or persistent, assurance is insufficient or providers fail to engage.

GRADUATED ENFORCEMENT

How EYI escalates where risk is significant or persistent

1
Immediate Action Notice
Immediate risks are addressed quickly with specified actions.

2
Regulatory Compliance Meeting
Formal engagement where there is significant concern or persistent non-compliance.

3
Conditions of registration
Case-specific conditions to manage risk or secure compliance.

4
Regulatory Enforcement Meeting
Structured meeting to set out concerns and required actions.

5
Early Years NREP
Referral for consideration of statutory or administrative enforcement.

6
Enforcement action
For example, refusal, removal from the register, warrant of entry or prosecution.

12.1.3. Early Years NREP

Early Years NREP considers escalated EYI matters arising from inspection, registration, concerns, Garda Vetting, SOORS, unregistered service activity and other regulatory intelligence.

In 2025, 23 referrals were accepted by Early Years NREP, and 10 Regulatory Enforcement Meetings were held. Enforcement options included conditions, refusal of registration, proposed removal from the register, warrants of entry and prosecution.

At year end, 10 pre-school services, 2 school-age services and 2 childminding services were at NREP. There were 5 pre-school registrations with conditions attached, 1 school-age registration with conditions attached and no childminding registrations with conditions attached. A total of 6 combined conditions were recorded across Early Years Inspectorate services at year end.

Formal enforcement activity during 2025 included one prosecution of an unregistered service provider, which concluded with the Probation Act applied by the Court. A further prosecution relating to failure to comply with a condition was ongoing at year end. One school-age registration renewal application was refused, one new childminding application was refused following suitability consideration, and one Early Years service was proposed for removal from the register. No Temporary Prohibition Orders or Closure Orders were issued in 2025.

2025 IN NUMBERS

Early Years enforcement at a glance

23
referrals accepted by Early Years NREP

10
Regulatory Enforcement Meetings

14
services at NREP at year end

6	149	80
registrations with conditions attached	services referred to SOORS	potential unregistered services referred

12.1.4. SOORS and Unregistered Services

SOORS and unregistered service processes address services operating outside their approved registration status or operating without registration. Reviews draw on registration history, change records, inspection reports, open-source information, provider engagement and wider CSR intelligence.

SOORS Activity

In 2025, 149 registered services were referred to SOORS for operating outside registration status or making changes without prior notification. Of these, 95 were regularised and 8 remained open at year end. Where changes could not be regularised, providers were required to cease the unauthorised operation and revert to their approved registration status. School-age services accounted for 36 SOORS referrals during the year, reflecting the importance of continued oversight of services operating within the scope of their approved registration.

Unregistered Services Activity

In 2025, 80 potential unregistered services were referred to SOORS. Following engagement, 19 were registered, 4 were in registration at year end, 34 did not require registration, 10 remained open and 1 was referred to NREP for consideration of enforcement action, including a warrant of entry.

12.2. ACIMS Enforcement and Escalation

ACIMS enforcement and escalation activity was considered through the shared NREP arrangement for ACIMS, AEARS and CSSCU, providing a structured route for screening referrals, reviewing risk and determining proportionate enforcement responses.

ACIMS matters may escalate where there is serious or repeated non-compliance, breach of conditions, operation without or outside registration, significant events, Garda Vetting non-compliance, false or misleading information, refusal or removal from the register, or a potential prosecution threshold under Part VIII of the Child Care Act 1991.

2025 IN NUMBERS

Shared NREP for ACIMS, AEARS and CSSCU

46	15	4
referrals accepted for discussion	NREP meetings held	Regulatory Enforcement Meetings

ACIMS ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITY

10	2	2	1
ACIMS referrals	conditions attached	refusals of registration	prosecution concluded

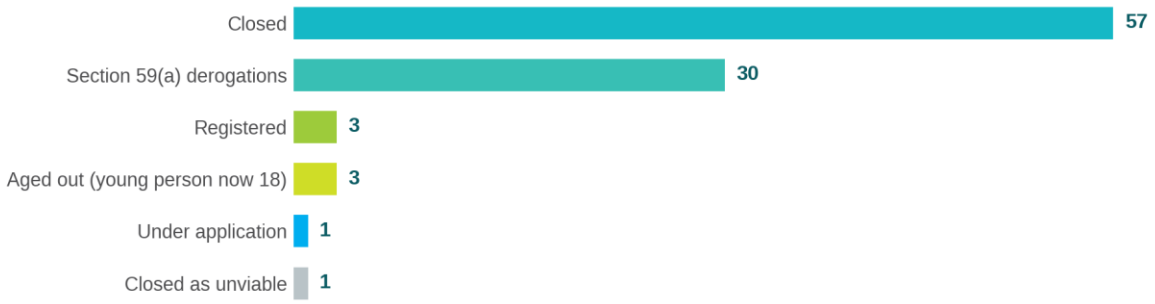
One investigation remained open concerning the provision of false documents during an ACIMS inspection. A prosecution that commenced in 2024 concluded in 2025 with a conviction and a suspended custodial sentence for the registered provider, and proceedings were under way to seek disqualification from operating a service in the future.

12.3. ACIMS Special Emergency Accommodation Enforcement

Special Emergency Accommodation enforcement remained a significant area of ACIMS work in 2025, focused on reducing reliance on unregulated emergency arrangements and moving appropriate provision towards registration.

Enforcement Phase III concluded on 2 December 2025 and encompassed 13 providers and 95 locations or centres. By year end, 3 centres were registered, 1 centre was under application, 57 centres had closed, 3 centres had aged out because the young people were now 18, 30 centres were recorded as Section 59(a) derogations, and 1 application had closed as unviable. These outcomes show the scale of transition activity progressed during the year and the extent to which enforcement and provider engagement were used to clarify registration status, close unsuitable arrangements and progress appropriate services towards registration.

Special Emergency Accommodation, Phase III: outcomes for 95 locations



Section 59(a) derogations were recorded separately to distinguish emergency arrangements requiring continued oversight from centres progressing through registration, centres closed, and placements no longer required.

Phase IV is due to begin in 2026, with a focus on Section 36(d) emergency placements. The initial operating period for these centres was extended from 30 to 45 days following policy review.

12.4. AEARS Enforcement and Escalation

AEARS enforcement and escalation activity was considered through the shared NREP arrangement for ACIMS, AEARS and CSSCU. Matters may escalate where registration should be refused or removed, where conditions are required, or where an independent school or education centre fails to provide a certain minimum education or engage with AEARS.

In 2025, AEARS recorded 30 referrals to NREP. Decisions taken at NREP during the year resulted in 1 condition, 15 refusals of registration and 10 removals from the register. These figures reflect

the timing of NREP decisions and so differ from the refusal figures in section 8.2. Following a tribunal outcome, conditions now require the written agreement of the parent or guardian.

30
AEARS referrals

1
condition attached

15
refusals of registration

10
removals from the register

12.5. CSSCU Enforcement and Escalation

CSSCU enforcement and escalation matters are considered through the same NREP arrangement for ACIMS, AEARS and CSSCU. Matters may be escalated where a Failure to Furnish notice has issued and there has been no response, or where the response remains non-compliant. NREP may direct that an Advance Notice issue and, where required, may proceed to consideration of a non-compliance notice and entry on the Register of Non-Compliance.

In 2025, CSSCU recorded 6 referrals through NREP arrangements and 1 Advance Notice. Wider CSSCU enforcement activity is set out in the CSSCU section of this report and included increased use of Failure to Furnish notices, Advance Notices, regulatory enforcement meetings and non-compliance notice activity.

6
CSSCU referrals through NREP

1
Advance Notice directed by NREP

38
CSSCU enforcement measures in 2025 (see section 9)

12.6. Garda Vetting and Positive Disclosure

Garda Vetting activity undertaken by the Early Years Vetting Unit provides an important safeguarding input to registration, childminding suitability and enforcement decision-making. Where a vetting disclosure cannot be progressed through routine approval because of the nature of the disclosure, the level of engagement with the person concerned, or wider suitability considerations, the matter may be escalated for further review.

The Positive Disclosure Review Panel supports this escalation pathway. It considers positive disclosures and suitability matters where the relevant team is unable to approve the disclosure without further review. The Panel considers Garda Vetting disclosures where offences are identified in EYI or ACIMS functions, and suitability matters under the Childminding Regulations 2024.

In 2025, 44 positive vetting disclosures and 4 childminder suitability disclosures were recorded, with 4 matters referred to NREP. The Panel considered 1 positive Garda Vetting disclosure relating to an application to be a centre-based registered provider and 2 childminding declaration of suitability disclosures relating to medical and mental health matters. This supported proportionate, case-specific decision-making and ensured that positive disclosures were linked appropriately to registration, suitability and enforcement pathways.



Section 13

Quality Assurance and Improvement

This section contains:

13.1 Quality Management System ISO 9001 Certification

13.2 Internal Quality Assurance Audit Programme

13. Quality Assurance and Improvement

The Quality Management System achieved ISO 9001:2015 certification across 30 geographical sites and won an Innovation in Service Delivery award.

13.1. Quality Management System ISO 9001 Certification

In 2025, Children's Services Regulation continued to embed and strengthen its Quality Management System (QMS) as a core mechanism for ensuring consistency, transparency, accountability and continuous improvement across regulatory practice. The QMS provides a structured framework for planning, delivering, monitoring and reviewing regulatory activity, supporting consistent decision-making while enabling a proportionate, risk-informed and child-centred approach to regulation.

The EYI Organisation Handbook and Quality Manual is a core document controlled within the QMS. It provides an overview of how the Inspectorate's quality management arrangements operate, describes the interaction of key regulatory processes, and sets out how registration, inspection, enforcement and regulatory practice are supported by documented controls, monitoring, audit, management review and continual improvement. The manual also supports alignment with ISO 9001 by reflecting the structure and requirements of the standard.

The QMS applies a process-based approach to the Inspectorate's core regulatory functions, with registration, inspection, enforcement and regulatory practice identified as key processes supported by defined responsibilities, controls, monitoring and review.

A major milestone in 2025 was the extension of ISO 9001 certification across the Early Years Inspectorate's national footprint. The QMS was certified by an external accredited body as meeting the requirements of ISO 9001 across 30 geographical sites in 26 counties. This followed external audit activity by the National Standards Authority of Ireland during the year and provided independent assurance that the Inspectorate's systems, processes and quality controls meet an internationally recognised standard. The certification established the Early Years Inspectorate as the first national regulatory body in Ireland to achieve this level of ISO 9001 certification.

30
geographical sites certified to ISO 9001

26
counties covered

1st
national regulatory body in Ireland to achieve this level of certification

The achievement was recognised at a QMS celebration event in December 2025 and through the QMS winning an Innovation in Service Delivery award at the Tusla Excellence and Innovation Awards 2025. The certification reflected several years of work to map, standardise, document and improve regulatory processes and provided external validation of the Inspectorate's commitment to quality assurance, public trust and continuous improvement.



During 2025, the QMS became increasingly embedded in day-to-day regulatory practice. Standard Operating Procedures, work instructions, templates, guidance documents, quality records and controlled document processes supported greater consistency across registration, inspection, enforcement, regulatory practice and development, and business support functions.

DOCUMENT CONTROL

The QMS in numbers

708
active documents in the QMS document index

141
new documents approved at version 1.0

298
documents updated

19
SOPs updated through annual review

32
Management Review actions completed

3,015
paper files destroyed under the Records Retention Schedule

14GB+
of corresponding digital files deleted

Key QMS framework documents were also reviewed to ensure that documented information remained aligned with practice, regulatory change, governance arrangements and strategic priorities. Management Review continued to provide a formal mechanism for assessing the continuing suitability, adequacy, effectiveness and strategic alignment of the QMS.

The Management Review action tracker showed 32 completed actions, with a smaller number of actions carried forward into 2026, demonstrating structured follow-through and accountability for improvement actions.

The QMS also supported the collection, validation, analysis and reporting of performance information, ensuring that activity data, audit findings and process metrics informed management review, improvement actions and annual reporting.

Data quality assurance was further supported through the development of a centralised data hub and validation processes. Data owners submitted agreed measures through a central SharePoint-based workflow, supported by clear definitions, automated reminders, validation by data owners and reporters, and reporting through business intelligence tools and custom data tables. Within the

Inspection Department, a dual validation approach was developed, combining point-of-entry checks with post-entry error reporting to identify discrepancies, omissions and implausible values and support timely correction.

REVIEW

Documents and areas reviewed in 2025

KEY QMS DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

- CSR Strategy
- CSR Culture Statement
- EYI Quality Policy and EYI Organisation Handbook and Quality Manual
- EYI PESTLE
- Competency Matrix
- Communications Matrix
- Stakeholder Map

MANAGEMENT REVIEW COVERED

- Performance and process effectiveness
- Governance and risk
- Audit activity and corrective actions
- Stakeholder engagement and training
- Document control
- Opportunities for improvement

The QMS was further supported by the CSR Governance Framework implemented during 2025, which clarified reporting lines, committee structures, process ownership, escalation routes and decision-making arrangements, supporting stronger oversight and clearer alignment between operational activity, quality assurance, risk management and strategic objectives.

Records management also progressed as part of the wider quality and governance programme. During 2025, 3,015 paper files were destroyed in accordance with the CSR Records Retention Schedule, with further sites in progress and more than 14GB of corresponding digital files deleted. This work supported stronger compliance with records retention requirements, improved information governance and a clearer transition towards records management becoming business as usual.

Overall, the QMS in 2025 provided a strong foundation for consistent, evidence-informed and accountable regulation. ISO 9001 certification, strengthened governance, improved document control, records management, audit activity, management review and staff development all contributed to a more mature quality system. The focus for 2026 will be to maintain certification, continue implementation of improvement actions, further embed quality assurance across CSR, and progress the planned procurement and implementation of an electronic QMS to support document control, corrective action and continuous improvement.

13.2. Internal Quality Assurance Audit Programme

The Internal Quality Assurance Audit Programme continued to develop during 2025 as an important component of the Quality Management System. The programme provides structured assurance on the extent to which QMS processes conform to the Inspectorate's own requirements and the requirements of ISO 9001, assesses whether processes are effectively implemented and maintained, and supports continual improvement through the identification of non-conformities and opportunities for improvement.

In 2025, the audit programme focused primarily on Regulatory Practice, the Office of the National Service Director (ONSD) and Quality processes, while also including audit activity relating to inspection. The audit schedule was revised during the year to support the extension of the Quality

Assurance Audit process to AEARS, with an AEARS Home Education registration audit commenced in Quarter 4.

AUDIT PROGRAMME

Nine Quality Assurance Audits completed in 2025

1. Inspection of staff Garda Vetting files
2. Use of digital images
3. Corrective action
4. Standards of integrity and codes of conduct
5. Purchase to pay
6. Management of registration certificates
7. Publication of inspection reports
8. Induction for Early Years Inspectors
9. Induction for Inspection and Registration Managers

The audits also identified positive practices, including better use of standardised forms and guidance, effective use of SharePoint to support record access, strong engagement by audited teams, improved adherence to approval limits in the purchase to pay process, and structured induction that supports the competence and integration of new staff.

Audit activity also reinforced the importance of staff competence as part of the wider QMS approach. Induction, role-specific training, mentoring, supervision and documented training records support consistency in regulatory practice and help ensure that staff carrying out activities affecting service quality have the knowledge, skills and experience required for their roles.

AUDIT FINDINGS

Cross-cutting themes and opportunities for improvement

1. **Documented information**
   Some standard operating procedures (SOPs), work instructions and guidance documents would benefit from updating so that they continue to reflect current practice.
2. **Consistency of practice**
   There is scope to further standardise how some operational processes, roles and sign-off steps are applied across teams.
3. **Record keeping**
   Records evidencing completed process steps could be made more consistently complete and easier to retrieve.

These themes aligned closely with ISO 9001 requirements and informed wider improvement work on document review, process mapping, corrective action, induction, publication processes and records management. Overall, the 2025 audit programme supported the continued maturation of the QMS, and AEARS audit activity, which began in Quarter 4, extended quality assurance across CSR.



Section 14

Conclusion

14. Conclusion

The 2025 Annual Report demonstrates a year of significant delivery, growth and consolidation across Children's Services Regulation. Across Early Years, Alternative Care, Alternative Education and the Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit, CSR strengthened public assurance through proportionate, evidence-informed and child-centred regulation.

The scale of activity in 2025 reflects both the breadth of CSR's statutory remit and the increasing complexity of the services within its oversight. The Early Years Inspectorate maintained a substantial registration, inspection and support programme across pre-school, school-age and childminding services. ACIMS responded to continued growth in the non-statutory residential sector, increased inspection activity, maintained oversight of non-statutory foster care agencies and supported the transition of Special Emergency Accommodation towards regulated provision. AEARS improved access to assessment, reduced waiting lists and strengthened registration compliance across home education and independent schools. CSSCU expanded its safeguarding compliance reach through increased statement review, services of concern activity, enforcement and strategic engagement.

CSR also strengthened the systems that support consistent regulation. The CSR Strategy 2025–2030, annual Business Plan, Governance Framework, SCDL subcommittee structure, Data Governance Committee, Quality Management System, ISO 9001:2015 certification across 30 geographical sites and the development of the CSR Programme Office all contributed to a more coherent and accountable regulatory system. These developments improved decision-making, escalation, quality assurance, data oversight and the connection between strategy, risk, operational delivery and continuous improvement.

The CSR Governance Framework, implemented during 2025, was central to this progress. It clarified reporting lines, committee structures, process ownership, escalation routes and decision-making arrangements, strengthening oversight across national, departmental and committee structures and aligning operational activity more closely with quality assurance, risk management and strategic objectives.

Enforcement and escalation became more structured and visible during the year. NREP arrangements, Regulatory Enforcement Meetings, SOORS and unregistered service processes, Garda Vetting escalation, Positive Disclosure Review Panel activity and CSSCU enforcement measures supported proportionate responses where risk, non-compliance, safeguarding concerns, suitability issues or failure to engage required formal regulatory action.

Stakeholder engagement and communication remained central to CSR's approach. Across all functions, CSR worked with Government departments, statutory partners, providers, representative bodies, education partners, sector support organisations and international regulators. This engagement supported clearer understanding of regulatory requirements, improved compliance, shared learning and public confidence.

Overall, 2025 strengthened CSR's foundations for the next phase of regulatory development and identified the pressures that need continued focus in 2026. CSR will build on this progress with a clear focus on safeguarding, quality, accountability, transparency and the best interests of children and young people.



Section 15

A Look Ahead

15. A Look Ahead

In 2026, Children's Services Regulation will build on the strengthened foundations established during 2025. The focus will be on consolidating progress, embedding new systems and responding to increasing demand, service complexity and emerging risk across all CSR functions.

LOOKING AHEAD

CSR priorities for 2026

Governance
Embed the CSR Governance Framework

Data and digital
Strengthen data governance, Tusla Case Management and reporting

Inspection and assessment
Evolve inspection and assessment models across services

Enforcement
Embed new statutory enforcement powers

Services
Deliver service-specific priorities in ACIMS, AEARS, CSSCU and EYI

Engagement
Invest in stakeholder engagement and communication

Culture
Support staff wellbeing, learning and connection

Quality
Maintain ISO 9001 and progress an electronic QMS

A key priority will be to further embed the CSR Governance Framework so that decision-making, reporting, escalation and assurance arrangements operate consistently across national, departmental and committee structures. CSR will continue to strengthen SCDL, SLT and subcommittee reporting, improve action tracking and ensure that risks, performance information, audit findings and improvement actions are visible through appropriate governance channels.

Data and digital assurance will remain central to CSR's development. In 2026, CSR will continue to strengthen data governance, validation tools, key performance indicator (KPI) frameworks, file management arrangements and reporting dashboards. Further development of Tusla Case Management, centralised workflows and business intelligence reporting will support more consistent use of regulatory intelligence in planning, inspection, assessment, monitoring and enforcement. CSR will also progress responsible approaches to emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), supported by appropriate governance, risk assessment and training.

Inspection and assessment models will continue to evolve. The Early Years Inspectorate will progress school-age inspection protocols, childminding concerns and Notification of Incident inspection processes, revised risk assessment arrangements, decision-support tools, inspection practice guidance and updated report templates. ACIMS will implement its revised inspection model and risk-rated inspection planning. AEARS will continue to embed sustainable assessment cycles across home education and independent schools, while supporting timely applications, clearer guidance and stronger registration compliance.

Enforcement and escalation will be a major area of focus. CSR will work to embed new statutory enforcement powers, strengthen NREP and SOORS capacity, develop suitability decision-making frameworks and further clarify Garda Vetting information-sharing and escalation pathways. As enforcement activity grows in volume and complexity, CSR will continue to ensure that decisions are grounded in fair process, robust evidence, clear thresholds and proportionate regulatory action.

Service-specific priorities will also shape the year ahead. ACIMS will strengthen registration pathways, monitor non-statutory foster care agencies, oversee Special Emergency Accommodation transition activity and support safer, better-governed care arrangements. AEARS will maintain progress on waiting list reduction, timely preliminary assessment, independent school registration compliance, application supports and stakeholder communication. CSSCU will continue implementation of the CSSCU Strategy 2025–2027, with a focus on governance, risk, services of concern, enforcement and thematic safeguarding priorities. The Early Years Inspectorate will support childminding transition, school-age inspection development, registration renewal, concerns management, Notifications of Incident and provider support.

CSR will continue to invest in stakeholder engagement and communication so that children, families, providers, representative organisations, statutory partners and Government departments have clearer information on regulatory requirements and planned developments. Engagement through forums, sector communications, guidance, surveys, education partners, national stakeholders and international regulatory networks will support improved compliance, shared learning and public confidence.

A strong internal culture will remain essential. CSR will continue to support staff wellbeing, cross-team engagement, learning and development, professional networks and opportunities for colleagues to understand each other's roles across the wider CSR structure. This will be important as teams manage increased demand, new powers, expanded inspection and assessment models, digital change and continued organisational growth.

Quality improvement will underpin all of these priorities. CSR will maintain ISO 9001:2015 certification, continue implementation of audit and management review actions, strengthen controlled documentation and records management, and progress electronic QMS development. Through these actions, CSR will continue to mature as a coherent, accountable and learning regulatory system, with a clear focus on safeguarding, quality, transparency and the best interests of children and young people.

> *"CSR enters 2026 broader in reach, stronger in governance and more mature in practice.*

About Children's Services Regulation

Children's Services Regulation (CSR) is part of Tusla's Quality and Regulation Directorate. Through its four services – the Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service, the Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service, the Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit and the Early Years Inspectorate – CSR registers, inspects and assesses services and, where necessary, takes enforcement action so that services for children are safe and of good quality.

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