

E-Bulletin February Edition



Welcome to your Early Years e-bulletin.

I hope you have enjoyed some well-deserved rest and relaxation over the Christmas and New Year period. I wish you well in your important work in 2024.

I am pleased with the results of an independent evaluation of the *Access and Inclusion Model* (AIM). The findings were overwhelmingly positive and I would like to extend my thanks to each service that has ensured that more than 27,000 children and their families- have benefitted from AIM since being introduced.



Every child should have access to high quality early learning and childcare. The findings from the evaluation shows the enormous difference AIM is making to the lives of children with a disability - removing barriers to accessing and participating in mainstream pre-school with their peers.



E-Bulletin February Edition

The extension of AIM from September, which I announced as part of Budget 2024, informed by the findings from this evaluation, will bring further benefits to these children.

This extension is among a suite of actions officials in my Department are taking to ensure we continue to build on the success of AIM to ensure, going forward, AIM works in the best interest of all children and families.

Additionally, I was delighted with the launch Pobal's [Early Learning and Childcare Data](#) website. This is an innovative resource for all stakeholders in the early learning and childcare sector that will support evidence-informed policy development and planning at a national and local level.

This new approach will allow us to release data in a more timely way. The interactive nature of the dashboards will provide users greater control over their use of the data and will ensure it is more meaningful and useful to them.

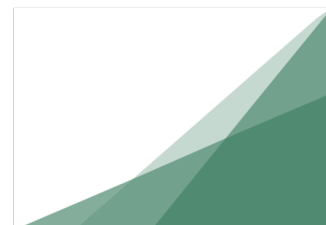
I look forward to seeing how these dashboards, developed by Pobal, will evolve and are used in the coming months and years.

All the best,



Roderic O'Gorman T.D.

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth



E-Bulletin February Edition



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

Pilot Nurturing Skills Learner Fund

In December, Minister O’Gorman announced the launch of the new pilot Nurturing Skills Learner Fund.

The pilot Nurturing Skill Learner Fund will make a contribution of up to 90% of course fees for early years educators seeking to upskill by studying for a recognised ELC qualification at level 7 or 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications. The Nurturing Skills Learner Fund is designed to complement and add to other Government financial supports, such as the Free Fees Initiative and SUSI grants.

The funding – which will be limited, especially during this pilot phase – will be open to new applicants for a Qualifications Advisory Board (QAB) approved early learning and care course at level 7 or 8 for the year 2024/2025 where the educational institution is participating in the Nurturing Skills Learner Fund. The full list of QAB approved courses is located at the following link: [QAB approved courses](#).



Funding will be paid directly to the approved Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) throughout the duration of study for successful applicants to reduce the up-front financial barrier to participation by early years educators and school-age childcare practitioners.

Applicants for the pilot Nurturing Skills Learner Fund should apply for an approved QAB early learning and care course at level 7 or 8 in the normal way. A number of HEIs have expressed an interest in participating in the scheme. Applicants should communicate directly with the HEIs to determine if the Institution is participating in the pilot Nurturing Skills Learner Fund scheme.

The application process for the Pilot Nurturing Skills Learner Fund will open in May 2024, via Pobal, to early years educators who have applied to higher education institutions for approved QAB courses, with a view to educators who are selected for the pilot receiving financial support for studies commencing in September 2024.

E-Bulletin February Edition

Further updates and information regarding Nurturing Skills Learner Fund and the application process will be available, in due course, on the Nurturing Skills Learner Fund website at www.gov.ie/NurturingSkillsLearnerFund



Financial Review of Sessional Early Learning and Childcare Services

The report of the Independent Financial Review of Sessional Early Learning and Childcare Services by Frontier Economics has been published and is available [here](#).

The financial viability of all early learning and childcare services will continue to be kept under review this year through analysis of financial returns under Core Funding Financial Reporting Requirements. These data will also inform the allocation for year 3 of Core Funding as well as the preparations for Budget 2025.

Minister O’Gorman and the Department would like to take this opportunity to thank the sessional services who participated in this Review.

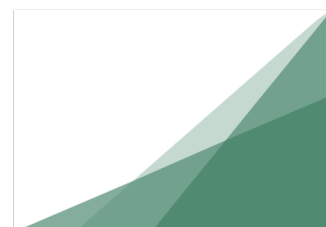
End-of-Year Three Evaluation of AIM published

The End-of-Year Three Evaluation of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) was published on 19 January 2024. This independent evaluation was commissioned by the Department, in fulfilment of an action in First 5 and was undertaken by researchers at the University of Derby.

The findings from the evaluation have already informed the phased extension of AIM announced in Budget 2024, specifically the extension of targeted AIM supports to ECCE-age children beyond time they spend in the ECCE programme, in term and out of term.

The Department is working to build on the success of AIM with further enhancements informed by the evaluation.

The press release and full End-of-Year Three Evaluation of AIM Research and Technical Report and Executive Summary can be found [here](#).



E-Bulletin February Edition

AIM Rules published

The AIM Rules 2023/24 were published on 4 January 2024. The updated AIM rules are available on the AIM website [here](#).

Compliance checks are included for AIM in 2024. Further information on these checks are included in the rules document linked above.

Building Blocks – Capacity Grant Expansion and Extension Funding Streams



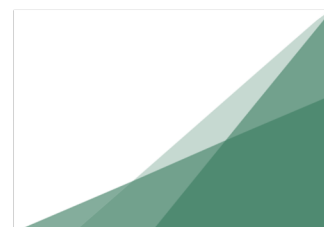
Minister O’Gorman announced a €45 million capital grant programme under the Building Blocks Capacity Grant for the Early Learning and Childcare Sector on 7 December 2023. This programme is part of a wider Building Blocks Capital Programme for the sector over the period 2023-2025, funded under the revised National Development Plan.

The purpose of the Building Blocks Capacity Grant is to address capacity gaps by expanding and extending existing provision where most needed. The Capacity Grant is comprised of two strands: the *Building Blocks Expansion Grant Scheme* and the *Building Blocks Extension Grant Scheme*.

Under the *Building Blocks Expansion Grant Scheme*, €15m will be made available this year to applicants to fund renovations or reconfigurations of existing early learning and childcare services, in order to create additional places in areas of identified undersupply.



In order to be eligible for funding, services must commit to increasing their service provision for the one to two age group and/or the two to three (pre-ECCE) age group in either a full day or part-time service



E-Bulletin February Edition

Projects of between €50,000 and €100,000 may be funded to deliver additional capacity. The Grant will be open to both privately-owned and community-led services. Match funding will be required for privately-owned services, with a maximum contribution by the Department of 50% of total project costs. Match funding will not be required of community-led services.

Service providers may be funded for either the Expansion Grant Scheme or the Extension Grant Scheme. Successful applicants under the Expansion Grant Scheme will not be eligible to apply for the Extension Grant Scheme once it opens for applications.

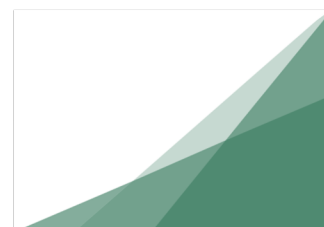
Pobal will make the application form for the Expansion Grant Scheme available in late February. Details of the Extension Grant Scheme will be made available in the coming months.

The network of City and County Childcare Committees will act as a support for services considering applying for funding.

Consultation on the draft childminding regulations

The National Action Plan for Childminding 2022-2028 commits to extending State support and regulation to childminders on a phased basis. Phase 1 of the plan involves the development of regulations that are specific and appropriate to childminders. Work on this has been ongoing since 2022 through the National Action Plan Advisory Groups and the Steering Group. An essential part of the development of the regulations is public consultation.

The consultation on the draft regulations runs from Thursday, 8 February and will remain open for 12 weeks until 5pm on Thursday, 2 May. The consultation documents, including an easy read summary of the regulations and an online survey, can be found on the consultation website [here](#). This is the chance for childminders, parents and other stakeholders to have their say on the regulations, including important issues such as the maximum number of children a childminder should be able to care for, child protection measures, the training required and the supports needed. For more information about how to take part in the consultation, please go [here](#).





E-Bulletin February Edition

2024 OECD Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey

This year marks the first year that Ireland is participating in the OECD Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS Starting Strong).

Recruitment for the survey is already underway. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) began contacting selected services in December to gather a sample that is representative of the wider sector.

If your service has been selected, it is important that you complete and return the 'listing form' included in your information pack. This form asks you to provide details of all early years educators and managers in your setting who either:

- a) regularly work with children under three (U3)

OR

- b) regularly work with children aged three to school age (ISCED 02)

A sample of early years educators and managers from each of these groups will be invited to complete an online survey between February and April 2024.

The information you provide will help us to support the working conditions and training needs of early years educators and managers and build the overall quality of the workforce.

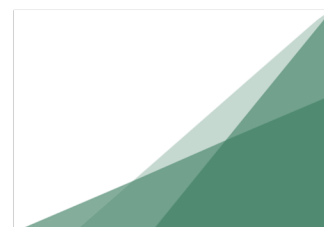
The CSO have a dedicated support line to help selected services through the steps involved in completing the listing form. You can access support from the CSO, using the contact details provided below:

Gemma O'Connell Duff: Telephone: (+353) 21 453 5110. Email: talis@cs.ie

Further information on TALIS Starting Strong can be found at:

bit.ly/TalisStartingStrong

Listing forms can be returned via email to talis@cs.ie or by post in the paid return envelope to: Director General, Central Statistics Office, Skehard Road, Business Reply, Cork, T12 X00E.



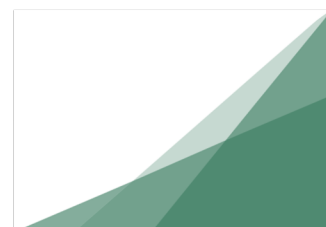


E-Bulletin February Edition

Expressions of Interest sought for new Young Ireland Advisory Council

Minister O’Gorman recently launched an Expressions of Interest form for a new Young Ireland Advisory Council. This Council will consist of individuals outside Government with experience working with or supporting children and young people. We encourage everyone who believes they can make a positive contribution to read about the criteria [here](#) and submit an application before close of business Wednesday, 14 February.

The Advisory Council will provide a forum for civil society and independent experts to influence and support the implementation of policies for children and young people, in particular Young Ireland: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (0-24) 2023-2028. It is important that the Council includes diverse representation from all those working with children and young people, particularly those who may not come from dedicated children and young people’s organisations. Expressions of Interest are also welcome from academics and other independent experts who can contribute their knowledge to the Council.



E-Bulletin February Edition

Ireland Reads is back for February 2024

Irish libraries, Children's Books Ireland, Age Friendly Ireland, Adult Literacy for Life, NALA, booksellers and others are partnering once again to get the whole country reading this month in the lead up to Ireland Reads Day on Saturday, 24 February.

Everyone is being asked to 'Get lost in a good book' during February or on Ireland Reads Day itself, Saturday, 24 February – whether that's reading a book, a newspaper, a comic – whatever works grabs your interest!

Ireland Reads organisers would love if everyone in early learning and childcare - educators, practitioners, children and parents - would get involved and spread the word!



Here's how you can get involved

Visit www.irelandreads.ie, where you can:

Get some reading inspiration – simply enter the type of book you like best, how long you have available to read each day and the website will suggest a book and tell you how long it will take to read it.

Visit your library during February or on Ireland Reads Day

All over the country, libraries will be holding events and activities in support of Ireland Reads. Libraries have lots planned for all ages during February and on Saturday, 24 February for Ireland Reads Day.

Check irelandreads.ie or your library website for details of what's happening near you!



E-Bulletin February Edition

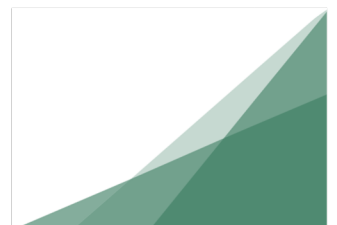
Grab your Ireland Reads read!

Library members can borrow from 13 million items or download from thousands of eBooks, audiobooks, magazines and newspapers online. Simply visit librariesireland.ie to join.

You can browse and borrow in your local library or browse and reserve online. Libraries also have thousands of eBooks, audiobooks and online newspapers and magazines available to download straight to your device.

Please also consider supporting your local bookshop.

Thank you for helping to get Ireland Reading!



E-Bulletin February Edition

Resolving Conflict with Children in 6 Steps

Clare County Childcare Committee has kindly produced a short video animation called *Resolving Conflict with Children in 6 Steps*.

This video is designed to show parents, guardians, and early years educators and school-age childcare practitioners how they can help children calmly settle their fights or rows.



This animation is available to watch:



- English: bit.ly/6Steps_English
- Ukrainian: bit.ly/6Steps_Ukrainian

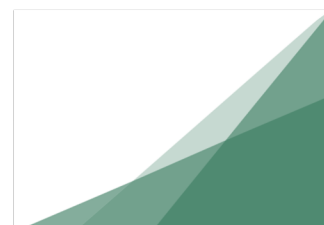
Conflict between children is normal and healthy. Children need help to handle their feelings and their arguments. Over time, children should be able to self-regulate their own behaviour. The important thing is to be there with children and guide them.

The video is based on the HighScope resource *Steps in Resolving Conflicts*.

Steps in Resolving Conflicts

- 1. Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions.**
 - Place yourself between the children, on their level.
 - Use a calm voice and gentle touch.
 - Remain neutral rather than take sides.
- 2. Acknowledge children's feelings.**
 - "You look really upset."
 - Let children know you need to hold any object in question.
- 3. Gather information.**
 - "What's the problem?"
- 4. Restate the problem.**
 - "So the problem is ..."
- 5. Ask for ideas for solutions and choose one together.**
 - "What can we do to solve this problem?"
 - Encourage children to think of a solution.
- 6. Be prepared to give follow-up support.**
 - "You solved the problem!"
 - Stay near the children.

  HIGHSCOPE.
HIGHSCOPE.ORG



E-Bulletin February Edition



Pobal E-zine

Early Learning and Childcare Supports – Reminder

With 2024 early learning and childcare programmes well under way, we can start to look ahead to spring, and, indeed the brighter evenings. Below is a reminder of the supports available to providers and parents in terms of the early learning and childcare programmes that we administer on behalf of the Department.



Early Years Provider Centre (EYPC)

The Early Years Provider Centre (EYPC) is the designated point of contact for service providers to direct queries regarding existing Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth funded early learning and childcare programmes.

Below you will find information on opening hours and contact details for the EYPC.

Early Years Provider Centre

Opening Hours	Contact
 Monday - Friday: 9.00am - 5.00pm <i>Please note that the Early Years Provider Centre is closed every Wednesday from 9.00am - 10.00am due to training purposes</i>	 HIVE - Submit a Service Request  eypc@pobal.ie  01 511 7222

Our dedicated Early Years Team is available to support services and the sector



E-Bulletin February Edition

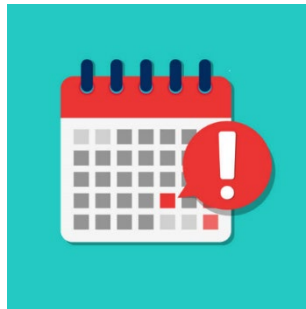
National Childcare Scheme Parent Centre

If any parents in your service have a question about the National Childcare Scheme, remember that they can call the Parent Support Centre on **01 906 8530**.

Lines are open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.



Payment dates



February 2024 Payments

February 2024 Payments	
Friday, 9 February	AIM L7 NCS CCSP
Friday, 16 February	AIM L7 NCS
Friday, 23 February	AIM L7 NCS CCSP



E-Bulletin February Edition

Payment dates (continued)

March 2024 Payments	
Friday, 1 March	AIM L7 NCS Core Funding ECCE
Friday, 8 March	AIM L7 NCS CCSP
Friday, 15 March	AIM L7 NCS
Friday, 22 March	AIM L7 NCS CCSP
Friday, 29 March	AIM L7 NCS Core Funding

Better Start

Find events for children and families on the [training and events](#) page on our website.



Forbairt Cáilíocht
Luathbhlianta Náisiúnta
National Early Years
Quality Development

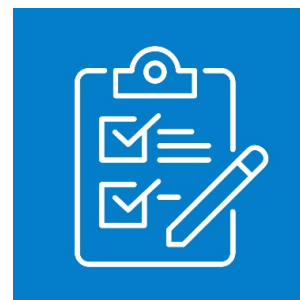
For early year's educators, there is a link to Barnardos and the National Childhood Network (NCN) websites where you will find their schedule for early 2024.



E-Bulletin February Edition

Quality Development Service

Aistear and Play training will be delivered by the Quality Development Service between April and June. The course focuses on how play-based approaches are facilitated through interactions and learning environments and is a combination of workshops and onsite mentoring visits.



Details on how to express your interest in taking part will be announced on the Early Years Hive and the Better Start website.

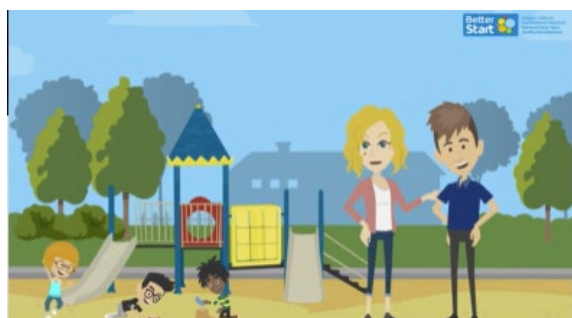
Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)

As we move into February, you will be planning transitions to year 2 of the ECCE programme and to primary school. This would be a good time to look at '[My Inclusion Plan](#)' and the section on the 'Voice of the Child', reflecting and listening to the child's experience in the ECCE programme.



AIM Information Video

We were delighted to launch the new AIM information video recently. It tells the story about the role of the Early Years Specialist when delivering Expert Educational Advice and Support. It shows how to access AIM supports and what can be expected from the mentoring journey.



Here is the link to the video: [AIM Information Video](#)

Please share this video and use it in the work that you do.



E-Bulletin February Edition

Better Start Early Years Learning and Development

There are a small number of places available for Lámh Module One courses in March. Upcoming training events such as Hanen 'Teacher Talk' are advertised on the Better Start website [here](#) where you will find several e-learning courses available to you, such as Sensory Processing in Early Learning.



The course has 4 modules:

1. What is Sensory Processing?
2. Development of Sensory Processing in an early learning environment.
3. Practical strategies.
4. Supporting a child's needs.
 - Each module comes with a reflective worksheet that helps you think about your own practice.
 - You will also find a 'Job Aid' tool to help you observe and document where a child may be experiencing difficulties with sensory processing.
 - The modules are supported by lots of resources that you will find when you click on, 'extend my learning'.
 - A webinar by a subject matter expert will be available to you when you have completed the course. This will answer some of the frequent questions that arise on sensory processing in early learning settings.

Whoever in your team has access to the Early Years Hive can now register your educators so they can access Better Start's Learning Gateway. An access link is available on the Early Years Hive Service Providers Portal under Resources 'Continuing Professional Development' (Access). Further guidance is available under 'Help and Support' on the Early Years Hive.

To find out more about Better Start go to www.betterstart.ie



EARLY YEARS INSPECTORATE – January 2024

New Inspection Findings Review and Factual Accuracy Processes

The current Disputed Findings process has been extensively reviewed and enhanced. The new process, which will be renamed the *Inspection Findings Review (IFR) process*, will be introduced and implemented for inspections which are carried out on or after 12 February 2024.

A webinar was held to outline the new process on 29 January 2024 which has been recorded and made available on the Tusla website [here](#).

The process for Inspection Findings Review and for Factual Accuracy have been separated into two distinct processes.

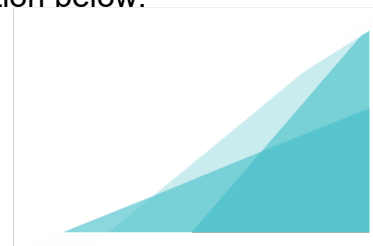
Inspection Findings Review

Inspection Findings Review refers to the process applied if the registered provider disagrees with inspection findings in the draft inspection report.

If a registered provider wants to request an Inspection Findings Review, they need to complete and submit the Inspection Findings Review Form along with evidence provided where possible and within the **following timeframes**:

- Review 1: Within 10 working days from issue of draft inspection report
- Review 2: If the registered provider is unhappy with the outcome of Review 1, they have five working days from issue of Review 1 outcome to submit a request for review 2.

An overview and a guidance document have been developed to explain the process to providers and are available on our website along with the Inspection Findings Review Form, see link in the 'where to find out more information' section below.





E-Bulletin February Edition

A request for an Inspection Findings Review must be sent to eyi.ifr@tusla.ie .

Factual Accuracy Review

Factual accuracy refers to an error in the draft inspection report, for example: number of staff members, date of inspection.

If a registered provider wants to request a Factual Accuracy Review, they must complete the Factual Accuracy Review Form, and submit the completed form within 10 working days from issue of draft inspection report.

A guidance document has been developed to explain the process to providers and is available on our website along with the Factual Accuracy Review Form, see link in the 'where to find out more information section' below.

A request for a Factual Accuracy Review must be sent to the lead inspector who carried out the inspection to which the factual inaccuracy relates to.

Where to find out more information?

Guidance documents in relation to both processes can be found here:

<https://www.tusla.ie/services/preschool-services/focused-inspection-tool-and-outcome-reports/>

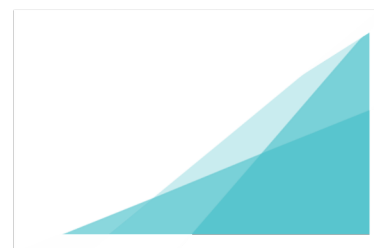
Multiple Provider Oversight Project

The Multiple Provider Oversight Project has been developed to support the way that the Early Years Inspectorate interacts with those services that are part of a larger group. There are two categories of multiple provider;

Category 1 – providers within neighbouring regions.

Category 2 – providers where the geographic locations of the services are widespread.

The aims of the Multiple Provider Oversight Project are aligned to OECD best Practice Principles for Regulatory Policy which state that *“Inspection functions should be co-ordinated, and where needed, consolidated: less duplication and overlaps will ensure better use of public resources, minimise burden on regulated subjects and maximise effectiveness.”*



E-Bulletin February Edition

Anticipated advantages and benefits of the project are

- Multiple Providers only have to deal with one inspection team and Inspection and Registration Manager instead of up to four to five.
- Improved co-ordination and improved communication. Support multiple providers to build and sustain compliance across all services.

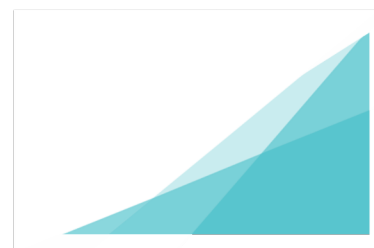
Garda Vetting

In September this year [we published a Regulatory Notice](#) advising all providers that all adults in early learning and care and school-age childcare working directly with children are required to have a vetting disclosure dated within the previous three years. When a registered provider receives a Garda vetting disclosure there is a date in bold. The vetting will be considered valid for three years from the date on the disclosure. Applicants must renew their vetting before it expires to ensure they remain vetted and compliant with safeguarding measures.

From 1 January 2024, where a registered provider has a Garda vetting disclosure over three years old but is unable to provide evidence that a Garda vetting disclosure dated less than three years has been obtained and reviewed for an employee, unpaid worker, contractor, or board member who has access to children, this will be deemed as non-compliant and captured in the EYI inspection report. If regulatory compliance is not met, the service will be escalated to the Early Years Inspectorate National Registration Enforcement Panel (NREP). The NREP will review and consider whether non-compliance with Garda Vetting and/or other vetting requirements is considered high risk to children or is persistent in the service.

School Age Services Registration & Inspection

As the statutory regulator, the Early Years Inspectorate undertakes inspections of school-age services in accordance with legislation. Inspections are undertaken in response to Feedback and Concerns received into the Early Years Inspectorate and/or where risk is identified, to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements in school-age services.



E-Bulletin February Edition

From the summer the Early Years Inspectorate have published all school-age service inspection reports in the same way that pre-school service inspection reports have been published since 2019. Publication of these reports provides regulatory transparency and will allow any interested parties to view the reports.

You can access all school-age service inspection reports on our website: <https://www.tusla.ie/services/preschool-services/early-years-providers/early-years-inspection-reports/>

Use the 'advanced search' option to enter any relevant details about the service you want to look for.

This page provides information about all registered early years services. You can search for a service either by county / service type or, through the advanced search option, by Tusla number, name or eircode.

For each service you can access;

- The name and address of a service
- Details of Registered Providers / Persons in charge
- All published inspection reports (which can be downloaded)
- Details of registration including any conditions attached to registration
- Recent inspection dates

To Learn more about inspection reports and how they are written you can download the Guide to [Reading an Early Years Inspection Report](#).

If you would like further information or if you experience problems trying to access information or reports, please contact the publishing team: - eyi.publishing@tusla.ie

The Department of Education also undertakes inspections of early years services in Ireland. These inspections are focused on the quality of the nature, range and appropriateness of the early educational experiences for children. You can access these reports on the [Department of Education Early years Education Inspections website](#).

Advanced search

Search by facility, proprietor or Tusla Id...

Enter your Eircode to locate facilities in your area...

To support providers and staff in school-age service registration and inspections; we have created a range of resources that can all be found on our website.

<https://www.tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/school-age-services/i-am-a-school-age-provider/>

