

**CEO Briefing Note: NPHE**

**Covid-19 Monitoring of Children's Services**

**Date: 20 May 2020**

## **Introduction**

HIQA has the responsibility for monitoring, inspecting, and in regard to Special Care Units only the registration of:

- Statutory Children's Residential Centres. Non-statutory children's residential centres are regulated by Tusla. There are currently 33 statutory CRCs in operation. These centres provide a range of services including medium-term, long-term, emergency, and respite residential care placements
- Oberstown Children Detention Campus on an annual basis. Oberstown is a national service that provides a safe and secure environment for young people who have been committed to custody after conviction for criminal offences or remanded to custody while awaiting trial or sentence.
- Special Care Units, which are provided by Tusla. There are currently 3 Special Care Units, which provide secure care for non-offending children who have been assessed as requiring such a placement, as they pose a risk to themselves and or others. All SCUs were registered for the first time in November 2018 and are due for renewal in November 2021.
- Statutory and non-statutory foster care services
- Child protection and welfare services

### **1.1 Covid-19 Monitoring of Oberstown Children Detention Campus during Covid-19**

Monthly quality assurance reports are received by phone from the Campus Director. Lines of enquiry are based on national criteria for detention schools 2008.

To date, no child in Oberstown has contracted Covid-19 and stringent measures are in place to prevent infection. Oberstown also has a comprehensive strategy in place to manage any staffing challenges as a result of an outbreak.

### **1.2 COVID-19 Monitoring of SCUs and Children's residential centres**

HIQA completed full inspections of 6 CRCs in quarter 1 2020. The implementation of compliance plans submitted by Tusla continue to be monitored by HIQA.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the programme of inspections of CRCs and SCUs for quarter 2, 2020 was suspended. Risk-based inspections will however be carried out as required.

The current system of monitoring in place includes:

### **1. Liaison with the National Service Director, Children's Residential Services**

From the outset of the pandemic, HIQA has maintained contact with Tusla's National Service Director for children's residential services. On 27 April 2020, HIQA was provided with an overview risk assessment for children's residential services relating to COVID-19 matters, and a scenario plan on best, worst and most likely case scenarios for these services, from a service, staff and child perspective. The National Director informed HIQA of the reporting system in place between Tusla and the DCYA during the Covid-19 crisis and confirmed that PPE is available for staff, along with guidance on its use for staff.

### **2. Quality assurance reports**

On 2 April 2020, HIQA commenced a programme of monitoring of statutory CRCs and SCUs through two-weekly calls by inspectors to managers of these services.

The aspects of service provision being assessed during Covid-19 include:

- safeguarding and child protection
- family and social work contact
- governance and management
- staffing and resources
- health and education
- planning for children during the Covid-19 crisis.

Data provided to HIQA through regulatory notifications provided by SCUs and quality assurance reports from SCUs and CRCs shows that as of week beginning 18 May 2020, there are currently no children with a confirmed case of Covid-19. While there have been several suspected cases, testing has returned negative for these children.

As of the week beginning 18 May 2020, there were two confirmed cases of Covid-19 for staff (1 in a SCU, 1 in a CRC). There is 1 suspected case amongst staff members. This number has fluctuated over the last few months. Tusla has embarked on a programme, which is on-going, of testing of all children and staff in CRCs and SCUs for Covid-19.

The majority of centres reported being able to manage staffing levels, particularly when several staff have been self-isolating following contact with other staff or persons in their private lives who had contracted the virus. However, HIQA has sought assurance about the use of agency staff to ensure that the risk of infection is minimized by reducing the movement of agency staff across multiple centres. HIQA has been informed by centre managers that where agency staff are used, core staff have been assigned to their centre. Centres have also reported being successful in supporting children to isolate where necessary.

### 3. Consultation with children

On May 15th HIQA completed a week long programme of consulting with children placed in statutory CRCs and SCUs. The purpose of this was two-fold: to gain some insight into children's experience of care during the Covid-19 crisis and to triangulate their experiences with what managers of CRCs and SCUs had told us during their two-weekly quality assurance phone calls.

HIQA inspectors spoke with **58 out of 114 children available in CRCs** and **14 out of 17 children placed in SCU**.

Some common issues emerged for children directly related to Covid-19:

**Family contact:** Many of the children talked of their experience of not seeing their family and friends, but they were happy with the level of contact they had through various mediums such as phone calls, and facetime.

**Social work contact:** Children said that their social workers had maintained contact with them during this time. Some older young people were concerned about moving on placements and when this would happen for them.

**Covid-19:** The majority of children said that they felt safe from contracting Covid-19. However, some were of the view that social distancing was not always practiced at all times, and they were conscious of the risk posed to them by staff coming in and out of their centres. Where relevant, HIQA made managers aware of childrens' anxieties, and sought and received assurances on this matter.

**Education:** Children informed inspectors that they were being supported to complete school work during this time.

**Health and wellbeing:** Children reported feeling well and having the supports they needed. This included continuing mental health supports and GP care where needed.

#### 1.3. Competition for children:

On 7 May 2020, HIQA announced a competition for children in statutory children residential centres, special care units, and Oberstown Children Detention Campus.

HIQA has invited children to submit either a photograph, painting, short story or poem which:

- Shows how creative they have been during the Covid-19 crisis
- Tells us of an act of kindness they have shown or experienced during the Covid-19 crisis.

The winners will be announced 8 June 2020.

### 2.1. Monitoring of Foster Care and Child Protection and Welfare Services

On-site inspection activity ceased at the end of March 2020, at the start of the Covid-19 restrictions. HIQA's monitoring of Foster Care and Child Protection and Welfare services continues through the ongoing review of notifications received, review and follow up of any unsolicited information, and updates to action plans and issues arising from previous inspections.

HIQA were in communication with the two Tusla Service Directors with responsibility for Foster Care and Child Protection and Welfare, in recent weeks, in order to gather information in relation to Tusla's plans during Covid-19. A formal process for on-going engagement with the two Service Directors will commence at the end of May/early June 2020 and monthly thereafter. Some of the issues for discussion will include emerging issues and trends, Covid-19 related updates, the National Emergency Foster Care Panel and associated procedures and processes, and statutory visits to children in care and child in care reviews.