



Children's Rights Alliance Report Card 2012 Executive Summary

23 January 2012

The *Children's Rights Alliance Report Card 2012* examines whether the Government has honoured the promises it has made to the one million children living in Ireland. *Report Card 2012* – the fourth in a series of annual publications – analyses key commitments in the areas of education, health, material wellbeing, safeguarding childhood and realising children's rights.

Report Card 2012 evaluates the new Government on progress it has made since taking office in March 2011, based on the commitments in the *Programme for Government*. This year the Government achieves a 'C+' grade – the highest grade awarded in the Report Card series to date. A 'C+' grade marks a fresh start in Ireland's journey to become one of the best places in the world to be a child. The institutional framework in relation to children has been radically reformed, with the appointment for the first time of a full Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, the establishment of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and steps taken towards the creation of a dedicated Child and Family Support Agency. Crucially, the Government has pledged to hold a referendum to strengthen children's rights in the Constitution in 2012; has taken steps to tackle literacy, address our patronage system, and build a new children's hospital. However, even with this progress and improved grades, some children are left wanting. The rights of many children continue to be violated in specific areas, particularly those experiencing poverty or in detention in St Patrick's Institution.

In *Report Card 2012*, the Alliance has chosen commitments that have the potential to improve the lives and life chances of all children in Ireland and have endeavoured to ensure that selected commitments are clear and measurable. The grades awarded are based on the new Government's intentions and progress over a 10 month period. Next year, in *Report Card 2013*, the Alliance will base grades solely on deliverables.

The Alliance welcomes the opportunity to track the progress of a children's rights referendum and to give a clear focus for the first time to the experiences of Traveller and migrant children. There are, however, some key areas that did not feature in the *Programme for Government*, and so there is no commitment for the Alliance to track: such as obesity, play and recreation, and reform of court proceedings involving children. The Alliance is calling for these issues to be addressed in the forthcoming second National Children's Strategy. *Report Card 2012* tracks 23 Programme for Government commitments. Emanating from our analysis are 29 immediate actions that we believe the Government should take in 2012 to promote the rights of children.

REPORT CARD 2012: GRADING

Grade for Report Card 2012 = C+

Area	Subsections	Grade	Average grade	
EDUCATION	Early Childhood Care and Education	B	B-	Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, investment in free pre-school year and school buildings to be commended.
	Child Literacy	B+		
	Children with Special Educational Needs	C		
	School Buildings	B		
HEALTH	Primary Care	C-	C	Investment in children's hospital welcome, but children's health needs still left wanting.
	Mental Health	C+		
	Alcohol and Drugs	D		
	Children's Hospital	B		
MATERIAL WELLBEING	Child Poverty	E	D	Harsh measures in Budget 2012 will hit the poorest families hardest.
	Area based approach to tackling child poverty	D		
	Children and the Social Welfare System	C		
SAFEGUARDING CHILDHOOD	Child and Family Support Agency	B	D+	Positive steps in child welfare and protection. Failure to commit funds for children in detention is inexcusable.
	Ryan Report Implementation Plan	C		
	Youth Homelessness	D		
	Children in Detention	F		
REALISING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS	Children's Rights Referendum	B	B	Commitment to referendum and patronage work to date welcome. Pledges to migrant and Traveller children lack focus.
	Patronage and Pluralism in Primary Education	B		
	Traveller Children	N/A		
	Migrant Children	N/A		

Explanation of Grades

- A – Excellent, making a real difference to children's lives
- B – Good effort, positive results for children
- C – Satisfactory attempt, but children still left wanting
- D – Barely acceptable performance, little or no positive impact on children's lives
- E – Unacceptable, taking steps in the wrong direction, no positive impact on children
- F – Fail, taking steps that undermine children's wellbeing
- N/A – Not applicable

EDUCATION: GRADE 'B-'

This is Government's second best overall grade. This section examines early childhood care and education, child literacy, children with special educational needs, and school buildings.

The Government got a 'B-' grade because it has:

- Successfully implemented the **universal free pre-school year** and maintained substantial funding for the year in 2012
- Published a **National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy** and committed resources for its implementation
- Failed to progress implementation of legislation for children with **Special Educational Needs**
- Invested in **school buildings** to cater for demographic demand.

To do better next time, the Government must:

- Invest in quality by implementing standards and up-skilling the workforce in early years' care and education
- Invest in a targeted early childhood education programme for disadvantaged children, as committed to in the *Programme for Government*
- Drive implementation of the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*
- Publish and begin execution of the plan to implement the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (ESPEN) Act 2004
- Ensure that the promised €364 million is allocated for school buildings in Budget 2013.

Key research findings:

- Gross Domestic Product invested in education was 4.7% in 2011, well below the average of 6.2% across the 31 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, ranking Ireland fourth from bottom on education spending, at 27th place
- 94% of eligible children are availing of the free pre-school year scheme; this is almost 73,000 pre-school children in 4,300 services
- Spending on Early Childhood Care and Education makes up approximately 40% of spending by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- The 2010 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment survey of 15-year-olds in reading literacy ranked Ireland in 17th place – a sharp drop from 5th place in 2000, suggesting that one in six students in Ireland (17%) has poor reading skills
- In 2006, the National Council for Special Education estimated that implementation of the EPSEN Act would cost €397 million over a five year period. In 2011, the minimum cost of implementation was estimated at €235 million
- There are over 10,000 Special Needs Assistants in Irish schools, supporting over 14,000 individual children with special *care* needs. Approximately 9,950 learning support/resource teacher posts are allocated to schools to provide additional support to pupils with special *educational* needs
- The numbers of children at primary level is expected to grow by 40,000 by 2018, from 515,000 to 555,000; and by 20,000 at post primary level, from 323,000 to 342,000
- The Government's Capital Development Plan commits multi-annual funding for school buildings of €364.5 million in 2012, €364 million in 2013, €464 million in 2014, €471 million in 2015 and €411 million in 2016.

HEALTH: GRADE 'C'

The Government gets a 'C' in this section. This section examines primary care, mental health, alcohol and drugs, and the children's hospital.

The Government got a 'C' grade because it has:

- Made a series of commitments to developing **Primary Care** services. Members of the primary care team include general practitioners (GPs), nurses/midwives, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and social workers; however, the delivery of these teams is slow
- Invested in **Child and Adolescent Mental Health** and commenced the promised Review of the Mental Health Act 2001
- Failed to publish the promised **National Addiction Strategy**
- Pledged investment in new **National Children's Hospital**

To do better next time, the Government must:

- Ring-fence multi-annual funding for the delivery of the promised Primary Care Teams
- Provide sufficient funding in Budget 2013 to increase the number of Child and Adolescent Community Mental Health (CAMH) Teams
- Complete recruitment of a specialist therapeutic team for children in special care and detention
- Publish the Review of the Mental Health Act 2001 and draft a Bill to amend the Act
- Publish a National Addiction Strategy that focuses on the impact of alcohol on children
- Introduce a legislative ban to protect children from exposure to alcohol marketing
- Begin the process of building the new National Children's Hospital

Key research findings:

- 2011 Healthstat figures show that in relation to speech and language therapy and treatment, 18 of the 32 Health Service Executive (HSE) community areas have an unsatisfactory service, requiring attention
- At present, one third of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Teams do not provide services for 16- and 17-year olds
- Between January and September 2011, 105 children were admitted to mental health adult units. The highest proportion of admissions to adult units was in the HSE West region
- Cheap alcohol is fuelling a health and crime crisis costing an estimated €3.7 billion a year in health, crime/public order and ancillary costs
- One in 11 children are impacted negatively by parental alcohol problems and one in every six cases of child abuse is attributed to alcohol
- There is a strong correlation between early school leaving and early drug use: 2010 research found that 57% of early school leavers surveyed had used cannabis, compared with 24% of school attendees; and 41% of early school leavers have taken other drugs compared to 11% of school goers
- The Government's Capital Development Plan pledges funding for the development of the new National Children's Hospital. The funds will be generated from a large upfront payment arising from the new National Lottery licence

MATERIAL WELLBEING: GRADE 'D'

The Government gets a 'D' in material wellbeing this year. This section examines child poverty, area-based approaches to tackling child poverty and children and the social welfare system.

The Government got a 'D' grade because it:

- Chose to hit poorest families – lone-parent and large families – hard in *Budget 2012*
- Failed to reduce the rates of **child poverty**
- Provided little information on the promised **area-based child poverty initiatives**
- Demonstrated no concrete progress on integrating **tax and social welfare systems**

To do better next time, the Government must:

- Subject *Budget 2013* to a comprehensive child poverty proofing
- Introduce a specific national child poverty target
- Clarify the Department responsible for leading on the area-based initiative
- Undertake a review of what works in addressing child poverty at an area-level
- Commit to strategic integration of the tax and welfare systems by the end of 2012

Key research findings:

- Children are the group most at risk of poverty in Ireland, with one in every six children – over 185,000 children – living in households where the family income is less than 60% of the national median income per adult
- Almost 9% of children – 96,000 – live in consistent poverty that means they cannot afford basic necessities like food, warm clothing or heating
- Poverty rates in families with more than three children increased from 6% in 2009 to almost 10% in 2010, according to figures released in 2011
- Deprivation levels among children increased between 2009 and 2010 from 23% to 30%
- Almost half of all poor children live in lone parent families; these families make up 17% of all those at risk of poverty. Children living in jobless households make up 14% of those at risk of poverty
- 61% of families of three-year-olds reported experiencing difficulties in making 'ends meet' in 2011 and almost two thirds (63%) reported that the recession had had a *very significant* or *significant* effect on them
- 2010 United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) research found that without government intervention in the form of social transfers and taxes, child poverty rates in Ireland would triple
- The cumulative effect of cuts to Child Benefit in Budgets 2010, 2011 and 2012 means that in 2012, families with three or more children have lost more than €80 on their monthly child income support payments
- A fund of €36 million has been provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Atlantic Philanthropies for three area-based prevention and early intervention projects in Dublin over five years; the pilot phase is due to conclude in 2013

SAFEGUARDING CHILDHOOD: GRADE 'D+'

The Government gets a 'D+' in safeguarding childhood this year. This section examines the Child and Family Support Agency, the Ryan Report *Implementation Plan*, youth homelessness and children in detention.

The Government got a 'D+' grade because it has:

- Taken important steps towards establishing the **Child and Family Support Agency**
- Made mixed progress on delivering commitments in the **Ryan Report Implementation Plan** on vetting, social workers and Children First Guidance
- Made slow progress in addressing **youth homelessness**
- Continued to violate children's rights through the detention of children in **St. Patrick's Institution**, an adult prison

To do better next time the Government must:

- Establish a dedicated Child and Family Support Agency to be operational in 2013
- Build on progress made in 2011 by bringing to completion key commitments under the Implementation Plan
- Mainstream the commitments and learning from the Implementation Plan and its Monitoring Group in the work of the new Department and Agency
- Complete and publish the high level review of the *Youth Homelessness Strategy* in 2012
- Commit capital funds to build the National Children Detention Facility and thus end the inappropriate practice of detaining children in St. Patrick's Institution

Key research findings:

- *Budget 2012* introduced a new sub-head (B.15 Child and Family Services) to the HSE vote (number 39), linked to the establishment of the Child and Family Support Agency
- The *Second Ryan Report (The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse) Implementation Plan Progress Report* stated that of the Plan's 99 actions 51 were complete, 3 were partially complete, 7 were on target, and 38 were classed as 'implementation on-going'
- A total of €23 million has been provided to-date towards the rollout of the actions contained in the Implementation Plan: €14 million in *Budget 2010* and €9 million in Budget 2011
- There are 1,201 social workers employed in the HSE Children and Family Services, out of a total of 2,386 social workers employed by the HSE
- 60 social workers were to be recruited in 2011. By December 2011, 57 of the 60 posts were either filled or accepted
- HIQA found 24 children under 18 to be in hostels for homeless children on the night of 24 November 2010
- On 15 June 2011, there were 41 boys aged 16 and 17 years in St. Patrick's Institution in the Mountjoy Prison complex, Dublin
- 'No screens on visits' was voted the single most important issue by the boys in St. Patrick's Institution
- At any one time a third of those detained in St. Patrick's Institution request to be held 'on protection' for safety reasons

REALISING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS: GRADE 'B'

Realising children's rights is a new section in *Report Card 2012*. The Government gets a 'B' grade this year. This section examines the children's rights referendum, patronage and pluralism in primary education, Traveller children and migrant children. The sub-sections examining Traveller children and migrant children have been given an 'N/A' grade (not applicable), as commitments in both areas are deemed too vague to grade. The Alliance will track commitments to these groups in the forthcoming second National Children's Strategy and in *Report Card 2013*.

The Government got a 'B' grade because it has:

- Made a necessary and welcome commitment to hold a **children's rights referendum** in 2012
- Taken proactive, constructive steps in **patronage and pluralism in primary education**

To do better next time the Government must:

- Hold a referendum as early as possible in 2012 to strengthen children's rights in the Constitution
- Publish the White Paper on Patronage and Pluralism in Primary Education and progress implementation
- Specify commitments to Traveller children in the second National Children's Strategy, particularly in relation to education and health
- Recognise Travellers as an ethnic group and provide capacity for their representation at national policy level on children's issues
- Evaluate the impact of the Visiting Teachers for Travellers Programme, which has been abolished
- Specify commitments to migrant children in the second National Children's Strategy
- Ensure that the Immigration, Residence and Protection (IRP) Bill is compatible with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Key research findings:

- The Taoiseach, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the Minister for Justice and Equality have each stated their commitment to hold a children's rights referendum in 2012
- Budget 2012 allocated €3 million for the holding of a referendum on children's rights: this sum was also previously allocated in Budgets 2010 and 2011
- The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, established in April 2011, received 220 submissions and consulted with 81 children
- In 2011, 96% of schools had a religious patron, with 89.6% of those under the patronage of the Catholic Church
- Three consecutive consultations with children undertaken by Pavee Point in 2006, 2009 and 2011 indicated that discrimination against Traveller children continues in the school system
- Traveller children are six times as likely to be in care when compared to the total population
- There are an estimated 45,700 migrant pupils at primary level (almost 10%) and 18,000 migrant pupils at second level
- Ireland is ranked 16th out of 31 countries in terms of its preparedness to help new immigrants enter the school system and do well at their studies

About the Alliance

The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of over 90 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working to secure the rights of children in Ireland, by campaigning for the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It aims to improve the lives of all children under 18 years, through securing the necessary changes in Ireland's laws, policies and services.

For full copies of *Report Card 2012*, contact:

Children's Rights Alliance
4 Upper Mount Street
Dublin

Tel: 353-1-6629400

Web: www.childrensrights.ie

Email: communications@childrensrights.ie