



Deputy Ken O'Flynn
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Dear Deputy,

Further to Parliamentary Question PQ 41016/26, namely:

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality the number of young people discharged from special care units in each year since 2020; the number who subsequently experienced placement breakdown, homelessness, emergency accommodation use, psychiatric admission or re-referral to Tusla services within 12 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Special care units are secure, residential facilities for children in care aged between 11 and 17 years. They are detained under a High Court care order for a short-term period of stabilisation when their behaviour poses a real and substantial risk of harm to their life, health, safety, development or welfare. In line with Article 37 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, such detention, which deprives a child of their liberty, is used only as a measure of last resort. The Child and Family Agency (Tusla) have the statutory responsibility for the operation of Special Care in Ireland, and for the provision of Special Care beds.

Tusla have advised that since 2020 the total number of young people discharged from special care is 130. As of 29 May 2026, Tusla have provided the following breakdown of children discharged from special care:

Number of Discharges from Special Care	
2020	25
2021	25
2022	21
2023	17



2024	13
2025	21
2026	8

Tusla have advised that they do not collate the number who subsequently experienced placement breakdown, homelessness, emergency accommodation use, psychiatric admission or re-referral to Tusla services within 12 months. This would require specialist research using the existing data held on individual files. However, current research on the experiences of children in care and adults receiving aftercare may provide useful insights into these issues as the current project progresses.

In relation to current research, the Care Experiences Programme is a research and data initiative examining the lives of children and young people in care and adults who were in care as children. The Programme is located in the Department and is being carried out in close collaboration with Tusla. There are four projects under the Programme, one of which is seeking to better understand the pathways that children and young people take through the care system, and this will include consideration of those who experience special care.

Officials in the Department of Children are currently developing a National Policy Framework for Alternative Care. This will deliver on a commitment in the Programme for Government to develop a national plan on alternative care, including articulating a long-term vision for alternative care in Ireland.

Yours sincerely

Norma Foley TD.

Minister for Department of Children, Disability and Equality