



Minister Foley welcomes the significant increase in the number of children benefitting from the National Childcare Scheme

19th January 2026

Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, Norma Foley today welcomed the significant increase in the number of children benefitting from the National Childcare Scheme.

The scheme provides subsidies that substantially reduce the cost of early learning and childcare for tens of thousands of families across the country.

New data shows that a total of around 245,000 children benefitted from the scheme in 2025 – a 12% increase on around 218,000 children who benefited from the scheme in 2024.

There were significant increases in the number of children benefitting from NCS subsidies in Clare (18% increase), Offaly (18% increase) and Roscommon (16% increase). Meanwhile, the number of subsidised children has increased by 9% in Dublin city and an average of 13% in other areas of County Dublin.

The increase in uptake reflects the continued Government investment in the early learning and childcare sector, including a 53% increase in the minimum hourly National Childcare Scheme subsidy from September 2024.

Minister Foley said:

“This increase in the number of children benefitting from the National Childcare Scheme is a positive development. The National Childcare Scheme has undergone a significant number of enhancements in recent years and we will continue to build on that progress. New, lower maximum fee changes for families paying the highest prices and higher subsidies for lower income families are on the way in September. I am committed to ensuring families across the country have access to more affordable early learning and childcare.”

The recently published *Shaping the Future: The Early Years Action Plan* contains details of changes to the income-assessed National Childcare Scheme subsidies which will improve affordability for up to 47,000 children from low-income families.

These changes, which will be introduced in September 2026, will increase the lower income threshold from €26,000 to €34,000 and the upper threshold from €60,000 to €68,000. The multiple child discount will also be increased, which reduces parents' reckonable income for the Income Assessed subsidy.

There will also be reductions in the highest fees charged to parents across the country from September 2026, with the lowering of the maximum fees that Core Funding Partner Services can charge. These new, lower maximum fee levels will be announced in the coming months when full financial returns from providers have been analysed.

ENDS

Note for Editors

The data referred to in this press release is provisional and represents the number of unique children availing of the National Childcare Scheme (NCS). These figures are provisional and may increase over the coming weeks. A county level breakdown of the number of children benefitting from National Childcare Scheme subsidies is as follows:

County Division	2024- number of children with NCS subsidies	2025 - number of children with NCS subsidies	% Increase
Cork City	8011	9202	15%
County Carlow	2557	2869	12%
County Cavan	4417	5081	15%
County Clare	4790	5639	18%
County Cork	14176	16331	15%
County Donegal	8894	9866	11%
County Galway	15528	17150	10%
County Kerry	7804	8573	10%
County Kildare	9268	10648	15%
County Kilkenny	4468	4855	9%
County Laois	4365	4587	5%
County Leitrim	1961	2235	14%
County Limerick	9644	11014	14%
County Longford	1941	2141	10%
County Louth	5287	5820	10%
County Mayo	5152	5944	15%
County Meath	7715	8899	15%
County Monaghan	5093	5479	8%
County Offaly	2423	2853	18%
County Roscommon	3090	3586	16%
County Sligo	4241	4721	11%
County Tipperary	9703	11205	15%
County Waterford	5024	5706	14%

County Westmeath	4211	4639	10%
County Wexford	7431	8397	13%
County Wicklow	5920	6430	9%
Dublin City	22156	24242	9%
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	10691	12046	13%
Fingal	13525	15476	14%
South Dublin	12380	13979	13%
*Total Unique Children	218529	245731	12%

Please note: Final ‘*total unique children*’ may differ from the total sum of county level data. This is because a child may have multiple claims within a given year i.e. claims with more than one service provider or across two counties etc. However, for the purposes of the final total, such children are only counted once.

The National Childcare Scheme

The National Childcare Scheme provides financial support to help families with their early learning and childcare costs. The Scheme, which was introduced in November 2019, has been designed on the principle of progressive universalism ensuring that families on the lowest incomes receive the greatest level of support.

There are two types of subsidies available to families:

- Universal subsidies are available to all families with children between 24 weeks and 15 years of age. This subsidy is not means tested and provides €2.14 per hour for a maximum of 45 weekly hours.
- Income Assessed Subsidies are available to families with children aged between 24 weeks and 15 years. This subsidy is means tested and will be calculated based on the applicant’s individual circumstances. The rate will vary depending on the level of family income, the child’s age and educational stage, and the number of children in a family.