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STANDARDS CIRCULAR

Subject: **Amendment to Minimum Standards for Children's Homes**	**Circular Reference: FCPD Communication 02//2019** **Date of Issue: 1 February 2019**
For action by: Chief Executive, HSC Board Director of Social Care and Children, HSC Board Chief Executives, HSC Trusts Directors of Children's Services, HSC Trusts Chief Executive, RQIA **For information to:** Chief Executive, NICCY Chief Executive, VOYPIC Director, Barnardo's Chief Executive, MACS Operations Manager, Safe Places for Children UK	**Related documents** **Relevant legislation, guidance and circulars can be accessed here:** https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/children-residential-care **Superseded documents** **Minimum Standards for Children's Homes – April 2014** **Status of contents:** Minimum Standards for Children's Homes must be complied with. **Implementation:** Immediate **Enquiries:** Any enquiries about the content of this Circular should be addressed to: Looked After Children Unit Family and Children's Policy Directorate Department of Health Room A3.7 Castle Buildings Stormont BELFAST BT4 3SQ ☎ 028 90765659 ✉ fcpdadmin@dhsspsni.gov.uk **Summary of contents:** This circular advises of an amendment to the Minimum Standards for Children's Homes (introductory section of 'Fitness of the Premises – New Homes and Extensions'). It introduces some flexibility in the space and measurement requirements in the registration considerations of smaller domestic-style children's homes where it is keeping with the child's best interests and the home's statement of purpose.

Introduction

1. The Minimum Standards for Children's Homes aim to improve the quality and consistency of care for children and young people in Children's Homes and provide further detail on the criteria for registration and inspection set out in the Children's Homes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

2. The Standards were published in 2014 following consultation with key stakeholders. They make the point that there is ***no such thing as a "typical children's home" in the same way as there is no such thing as a "typical child or young person", and it is recognised that some of the criteria [within the Standards] do not apply in every home or to every child and young person***. Also, the Standards were developed with the aim of keeping child-centred care to the fore. In their development, children and young people's told us that ***they wanted their homes to be homely and similar to those of their friends not in care***.

3. The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority [RQIA] uses the Standards to register and inspect residential child care services under the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

Purpose of change to Minimum Standards for Children's Homes

4. The purpose of the change to the Minimum Standards for Children's Homes is to introduce some flexibility into the space and measurement requirements for <u>new</u> smaller, domestic-style dwellings and/or extensions (where up to a maximum of four children or young people will reside), without compromising the health and social care needs of the individual children and young people. Consequently *Section 2: Requirements for Registration, Fitness of the premises – New Homes and Extensions* (Page 86) has been amended to include the following text:

'It is acknowledged that for some children and young people, living in a small home, (one which provides accommodation for up to 4 children and young people), is in their best interests and is more likely to deliver better outcomes for them. In those circumstances, it will be challenging to maintain the homely, domestic-style environment children and young people have indicated they want, and to achieve the space and measurements outlined in requirements N1 to N50.

It remains the responsibility of the provider to demonstrate that they are working towards the requirements in this section. However, in relation to small homes, the standards may be more flexibly applied, <u>on condition that</u> it can be demonstrated that any departure from the standard is in line with the home's statement of purpose and function and does not compromise the individual health and social care needs of the children and young people who will reside there. In particular, flexibility may be applied to the following requirements: N7 (corridor width), N8 (door opening width), N12 (number of call points), N23 (bedroom space), N33 (bathroom/toilet space), N35 (separate laundry area) and N44 (external storage space). RQIA will equally apply flexibility in the application of this standard to small homes in making registration decisions and in the course of inspections, subject to the conditions outlined above being met.'

5. The Standards on the Departmental website have been updated to reflect this change and can be accessed at:

https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/care-standards-childrens-homes-full-version.pdf

Action

6. You are asked to note and implement the contents of this Circular and to cascade to staff within your organisation as appropriate.

Yours faithfully



EILÍS McDANIEL
Director