How Irish driving school websites handle booking: an automated audit of 58 homepages (November 2026)

Codrin Diaconu, Wizz Media S.R.L., Iaşi, Romania · Version 1.0 · 23 November 2026 · Licence: CC BY 4.0
Data and code: `dataset.csv`, `check.py`, `domains.txt` (included in this record)

Abstract. Learner drivers in Ireland must complete 12 Essential Driver Training (EDT) lessons with an approved instructor, so a driving school's website is often the first point of contact for a young, mobile-first audience. We audited the homepages of 58 Irish driving school websites, collected from public search results in November 2026, with an automated script that records technical and conversion-related signals. Basic technical hygiene was almost universal: 100% served HTTPS and 98% declared a mobile viewport. Conversion features were much less common. 86% offered a click-to-call link, but only 24% linked to WhatsApp, 50% used "book online" or "book now" wording on the homepage, and none embedded a recognisable third-party booking widget on the homepage. 36% (21/58) offered neither WhatsApp nor any online-booking wording. Of the 37 sites with a copyright notice, 10 showed a year of 2022 or earlier. We conclude that for this sample the main gap is not mobile compatibility but the path from visit to booking request, and we publish the dataset and script so the audit can be repeated.

1. Background

Since April 2011, learner drivers in Ireland whose first learner permit was issued on or after 4 April 2011 must complete EDT, a course of 12 one-hour lessons with a Road Safety Authority (RSA) Approved Driving Instructor (ADI). Most driving schools are small businesses, often a single instructor. Their customers are largely aged 17–25 and search and book from phones. Earlier small-business web studies tend to measure page speed or mobile layout; fewer look at how easy it is to actually request a lesson. This note gives a small, reproducible snapshot of both.

2. Method

Sample. Websites were collected on 23 November 2026 from organic web search results for queries combining "driving school", "driving lessons" and "EDT" with Irish city and county names (Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick, Waterford, Kilkenny, Wexford, Kildare, Wicklow, Meath, Louth, Westmeath, Kerry, Clare, Tipperary, Donegal, Mayo, Cavan, Monaghan), plus a few sites found during earlier manual review. Directories, insurers, social media pages, forums and the RSA itself were excluded, leaving 61 driving school domains. Three could not be audited (no response, HTTP 503, HTTP 404 at the root), giving **n = 58**. The sample is a convenience sample biased towards schools that rank in search, and is not representative of all ~2,600 ADIs in Ireland.

Measurement. For each domain, the homepage (`https://domain/`, following redirects) was fetched once with a mobile Safari user agent. The script (`check.py`) records: HTTP status, final URL and HTTPS; total load time of the HTML document; HTML size; presence of a `meta name="viewport"` tag; `tel:` links; WhatsApp links (`wa.me`, `api.whatsapp.com`); known booking widgets (Calendly, SimplyBook, Setmore, Acuity, Bookwhen, Square Appointments, Fresha, YouCanBook.me, Wix Bookings); the phrases "book online", "book now" or "online booking"; a euro price on the homepage; JSON-LD of type LocalBusiness/DrivingSchool/Organization; an HTML form; the latest year in a copyright notice; and the platform where detectable.

3. Results

Signal (homepage)	Sites	Share
HTTPS	58/58	100%
Mobile viewport declared	57/58	98%
Click-to-call (`tel:`) link	50/58	86%
HTML form of any kind	38/58	66%
"Book online" / "book now" wording	29/58	50%
Price in euro shown	24/58	41%
Structured data (JSON-LD business/organisation)	22/58	38%
WhatsApp link	14/58	24%
Recognised third-party booking widget	0/58	0%
Neither WhatsApp nor booking wording	21/58	36%

Platforms. WordPress was detected on 28 sites (48%), Wix on 3, Weebly and Joomla on 2 each, and GoDaddy, BaseKit, HubSpot and Drupal 7 on one each; 19 could not be identified from the HTML.

Age signals. 37 sites showed a copyright year. 27 showed 2023 or later (often generated automatically, so not proof of recent updates). 10 showed 2022 or earlier, including 6 at 2019 or earlier and the oldest at 2013.

Speed and size. The median HTML load time was 0.84 s, with 12 sites above 2 s and 7 above 3 s. The median HTML size was 103 KB; 6 homepages exceeded 300 KB of HTML alone. These timings were measured from a single location in Romania and cover the HTML document only, not images or scripts, so they are indicative.

4. Discussion

The audit contradicts a common assumption, which we also held before running it: that small driving school sites are mostly "not mobile-friendly". Almost all declare a mobile viewport and use HTTPS. The

weaker area is conversion. Half of the homepages do not invite the visitor to book online, three quarters offer no WhatsApp link even though instructors commonly coordinate lessons by phone and message, and no site embeds a standard scheduling widget on the homepage. A booking request in this sample usually means a phone call or a general contact form.

For small schools this may be rational: an instructor driving all day cannot answer calls, and a short structured request (gearbox, lesson type, start date, pick-up area, name) delivered by message may be easier to handle than a calendar. We did not measure conversion, so this is a hypothesis rather than a finding.

5. Limitations

- Convenience sample from search results; schools without websites or ranking poorly are missing.
- Homepage only. A school may offer booking on another page; our figures describe what a visitor sees first.
- Pattern matching can miss widgets loaded by JavaScript after page load, and wording such as "book now" may link to a phone number rather than a booking system.
- A viewport tag is necessary but not sufficient for a good mobile experience. We did not run Lighthouse or visual tests.
- Single snapshot, one fetch per site, from one location.

6. Data availability

`dataset.csv` contains one row per domain with every recorded signal. `check.py` reproduces the audit from `domains.txt` using Python 3 and curl. Only publicly accessible homepages were fetched; no personal data was collected.

Competing interests

The author runs a web development studio that builds websites and booking flows for small businesses, including driving schools. The study was designed and published openly so that the data can be checked independently.