



**Health
Information
and Quality
Authority**

An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte

Health Information and Quality Authority Regulation Directorate monitoring inspection of Non-Statutory Foster Care Services

Name of service provider:	Five Rivers Ireland
Type of inspection:	Focused
Date of inspection:	24 March 2026
Lead inspector:	Nicola Rossiter
Support inspector(s):	Lorraine O'Reilly Bernadette Neville Hazel Hanrahan Susan Geary Eva Boyle
Fieldwork ID	MON-0049519

Safeguarding

This inspection is focused on the safeguarding of children and young people placed in foster care through non-statutory foster care services.

Safeguarding is one of the most important responsibilities of a provider. It has a dual function, to protect children from harm and promote their welfare. Safeguarding is more than just the prevention of abuse, exploitation and neglect. It is about being proactive, recognising safeguarding concerns, reporting these when required to the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) and other relevant authorities also having measures in place to protect children from harm and exploitation.

Safeguarding is about promoting children's human rights, empowering them to exercise appropriate choice and control over their lives, and giving them the tools to protect themselves from harm and or exploitation and to keep themselves safe in their relationships and in their environment.

About this inspection

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) monitors services used by some of the most vulnerable children in the State. Monitoring provides assurance to the public that children are receiving a service that meets the national standards. This process also seeks to ensure that the wellbeing, welfare and safety of children is promoted and protected. Monitoring also has an important role in driving continuous improvement so that children have access to better, and safer services.

HIQA is authorised by the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality under Section 69 of the Child Care Act, 1991 as amended by Section 26 of the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2011 to inspect foster care services provided by the Child and Family Agency (Tusla)¹, including non-statutory providers of foster care, and to report on its findings to the Minister.

HIQA monitors the performance of the Child and Family Agency against the National Standards for foster care and advises the Minister and the Child and Family Agency.

This inspection was a monitoring inspection of Five Rivers Ireland to monitor compliance with the *National Standards for Foster Care* (2003), with a focus on the

¹ Tusla was established on 1 January 2014 under the *Child and Family Agency Act 2013*.

safeguarding of children in foster care. The scope of the inspection included standards 9, 10, 14, 17 and 19 of the *Nationals Standards for Foster Care* (2003).

How we inspect

As part of this inspection, inspectors met with the relevant professionals involved with Five Rivers and with foster carers. Inspectors observed practices and reviewed documentation such as foster carer's files, children's files and relevant documentation relating to the areas covered by the specific standards against which the service provider was inspected.

The key activities of this inspection involved:

- the analysis of data submitted by the service provider
- interviews with:
 - the chief executive officer (CEO) and managing director of the company
- focus groups with:
 - two principal social workers (who were designated liaison person in their respective regions)
 - four social work team leaders
 - five link workers
 - twelve foster carers
- observations of:
 - assessment team meeting
- the review of:
 - policies and procedures, minutes of various meetings, audits, trackers and service plans.
 - a sample of 33 foster carer files
 - a sample of 15 children's files
 - a sample of 10 staff supervision files
- conversations or visits with:
 - seven children
 - five foster carers
 - three children in care social workers
 - one guardian ad litem

Acknowledgements

HIQA wishes to thank children and foster carers that spoke with inspectors during the course of this inspection in addition to staff and managers of the service for their cooperation.

Profile of the Foster Care service

The Service Provider

The information in this section of the report was provided by the service for inclusion in the report.

Five Rivers was established in 2002. Five Rivers is the longest running independent fostering agency in the Republic of Ireland. Five Rivers Ireland holds four contracts with Tusla the Child and Family agency which relate to the provision of foster care to children and young people for general foster care placements, enhanced foster care, provision of emergency placements out of hours and the provision of an aftercare service. Five Rivers Ireland also has a small multi-disciplinary team (MDT) which provides support to the fostering team and undertakes assessment and therapeutic work for children and young people who are referred to the service.

Five Rivers Ireland is led by the chief executive officer (CEO) along with the senior leadership team made up of finance manager, four principal social workers. Principal social workers cover broad regions. There is also a social care manager who oversees the social care team and is a training specialist, coordinating pre-approval training and trauma informed training for staff and carers across the organisation. There is an education specialist to provide consultation and support to young people and foster families. The CEO and finance manager are supported by an executive/personal assistant.

Five Rivers Ireland is a nationwide service with three offices based in Dublin, Cork and Donegal. Five Rivers Ireland has foster families in all counties. The Cork based principal social worker covers Munster. The team has two team leaders, nine social workers and one social care leader and one social care worker. There are three business support/ administrators based in the Cork office. One of these also provides business support for the emergency placement support team. Two of the finance team are also based in the Cork office. Another provides central business support to the principal social workers and senior management team.

Donegal based principal social worker covers Donegal and Connacht. There are also two team leaders attached to this team based in Mayo and another based in Leitrim. There are 10 social workers based across Connacht and Donegal to provide

supervision and support to the families in this region. There are also two social care workers and two-family support workers attached to the northwest team. There are two business support administrators also based in the Donegal office.

In Dublin there are two principal social workers. One with responsibility for general foster care placements across Leinster, Monaghan and Cavan. This team is serviced by three team leaders and 12 social workers. Two additional social workers are on maternity leave. There are three social care workers supporting the families across the Leinster team. This team also has three business support administrators. The emergency placement support service is headed up by a principal social worker. There is also a team leader for this team. Three duty social workers and one fostering social worker. In addition, there are a team of six sessional social workers who support the out of hours placement service.

At the time of inspection there were 204 children placed with Five Rivers Ireland foster families. In addition, there are an average of five children placed in emergency placements at any one time. Five Rivers Ireland has a small multi-disciplinary team comprised of psychology, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and play therapy. The team is supported by business support. Five Rivers Ireland is a trauma informed organisation and promotes a trauma informed approach to building relationships and supporting carers. There are significant supports and training provided to foster carers.

There were 219 approved foster carers within Five Rivers Ireland at the time of the inspection, with 204 children placed in the service. These households were located across Ireland.

Placements with Five Rivers Ireland are commissioned by Tusla service area teams. Tusla retain their statutory responsibilities to children placed with this service and approve the foster carers through their foster care committees. The foster care agency is required to adhere to relevant standards and regulations when providing a service on behalf of Tusla. Both services are accountable for the care and wellbeing of children.

Private foster care services are monitored by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Five Rivers Ireland was last audited by the Tusla Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service (ACIMS) in January 2026. Monitors reviewed standard 10 of the National Standards for Foster Care (2003) and found the organisation was operating in line with good practice and relevant standards with robust oversight and governance arrangements in place to ensure compliance with safeguarding procedures and the assessment of allegations and concerns. However, this inspection found concerns in respect to standard 10 and 19 which, will be outlined in this report.

Compliance classifications

HIQA will judge the service to be **compliant, substantially compliant or not-compliant** with the standards. These are defined as follows:

Compliant: A judgment of compliant means the service is meeting or exceeding the standard and is delivering a high-quality service which is responsive to the needs of children.

Substantially compliant: A judgment of substantially compliant means the service is mostly compliant with the standard but some additional action is required to be fully compliant. However, the service is one that protects children.

Not compliant: A judgment of not compliant means the service has not complied with a standard and that considerable action is required to come into compliance. Continued non-compliance or where the non-compliance poses a significant risk to the safety, health and welfare of children using the service will be risk-rated red (high risk) and the inspector will identify the date by which the provider must comply. Where the non-compliance does not pose a significant risk to the safety, health and welfare of children using the service, it is risk-rated orange (moderate risk), and the provider must take action within a reasonable time frame to come into compliance.

This inspection report sets out the findings of a monitoring inspection against the following standards:

National Standards for Foster Care		Judgment
Standard 9	A safe and positive environment	Substantially Compliant
Standard 10	Safeguarding and child protection	Not Compliant
Standard 14	(a) Assessment and approval of non-relative foster carers	Compliant
Standard 17	Reviews of foster carers	Compliant
Standard 19	Management and monitoring of foster care services	Not Compliant

This inspection was carried out during the following times:

Date	Times of inspection	Inspector name	Role
24 March 2026	09:00hrs to 17:30hrs 09:00hrs to 17:30hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs	Nicola Rossiter Lorraine O' Reilly Bernadette Neville Hazel Hanrahan	Lead Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector
25 March 2026	09:00hrs to 17:30hrs 09:00hrs to 17:30hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:30hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs	Nicola Rossiter Lorraine O' Reilly Bernadette Neville Hazel Hanrahan Eva Boyle Susan Geary	Lead Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector
26 March 2026	09:00hrs to 17:30hrs 09:00hrs to 16:30hrs 09:00hrs to 19:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs	Nicola Rossiter Lorraine O' Reilly Bernadette Neville Hazel Hanrahan Eva Boyle	Lead Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector
27 March 2026	09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs	Nicola Rossiter Lorraine O' Reilly Bernadette Neville Hazel Hanrahan	Lead Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector

Children's experience of the service

Children's experiences were established through visiting and talking to a sample of seven children and 17 foster carers. Inspectors also spoke with 12 Five Rivers Ireland staff, and four professionals involved in the children's lives. A review of 33 foster carer files, 15 children's files, 10 staff supervision files, and other documents also provided further insight into the experience of children and the service provided by Five Rivers Ireland.

Children who met with and spoke with inspectors described an overall positive experience and close connections with link workers in Five Rivers Ireland. Children who were observed in their home appeared relaxed and comfortable with their foster carers. The inspection found that children were treated with dignity and respect, their rights were promoted and they were being cared for by foster carers who understood their responsibilities to safeguard and protect children. Inspectors observed warm and affectionate interactions between children and their foster carers. Children spoke of family holidays and life events and how these were acknowledged and celebrated by their foster carers. A child described feeling 'happy' and others told inspectors they 'liked the house' and "everything is going well" and the kitchen is 'the hub of the house'. Overall children were happy in their placement and well supported by foster carers.

Five Rivers Ireland has a mechanism in place for children to have their voices heard by sharing their thoughts and opinions through an online method and by returning a dedicated leaflet to Five Rivers Ireland directly. Five Rivers Ireland had in place 'A Young Person's Guide for Foster Care' outlining who will be involved in their life and what to expect from their foster carers and the support they will receive from a Five Rivers Ireland fostering link worker. There was a practice in place to ensure children were informed of their rights to access information, and who to speak to if they have a worry or a complaint and they were told about the various advocacy services which children may wish to avail of on their fostering journey.

Five Rivers Ireland had a practice in place to ensure foster carers own children were also provided with 'A Young Person's Guide to Becoming a Foster Family' to support them in their understanding of what it means to become a foster family and the type of additional responsibilities a family might need to take on to become a foster family. The guide outlined why children come into care; the type of people a child is likely to meet while their parents are going through the assessment process and the different types of foster carers they may provide. Five Rivers Ireland encourages children of foster carers to have their voice heard and reach out if they have worries or concerns and are provided with information on how to do this. Five Rivers Ireland provides a dedicated point of contact to receive all queries, concerns and complaints from children in foster care and also for birth children of foster carers. Foster carers told inspectors that Five Rivers Ireland placed emphasis on 'including and appreciating our children' and recognising their role and contribution.

Feedback from foster carers about their experience of fostering with Five Rivers Ireland was extremely positive. Foster carers told inspectors that their link workers were crucial in supporting them in the development of stable placements for children. Some of what foster carers told inspectors included:

"support was amazing" to get the right match
"if you need something done there's someone to talk to"
engagement with Five Rivers Ireland is "very personal and not transactional"
"you can speak your mind, there's no judging"
Five Rivers Ireland are "very professional, kind and caring"
my link worker is "brilliant for following through"

Professionals who spoke with inspectors also described a positive working relationship with Five Rivers Ireland. Some of what they told inspectors included:

the working relationship is "exceptional and the involvement and correspondence is frequent and timely"
I have "no concern" for the care provided to children by Five Rivers
the link worker is "forthcoming" and has done "fantastic work to support carers".
"I cannot fault the work undertaken by Five Rivers"
Five Rivers are "child centred and have good relationships with both foster carers and are also able to challenge them"

Overall, the views shared by children, foster carers and professionals about their experience of Five Rivers Ireland outlined that the service was child centred and promoted children's rights and the safeguarding of children.

Summary of inspection findings

As previously noted in this report placements with Five Rivers Ireland are commissioned by Tusla service area teams. Tusla retain their statutory responsibilities to children placed with this service and approve the foster carers through their foster care committees. The foster care agency is required to adhere to relevant standards and regulations when providing a service on behalf of Tusla. Both services are accountable for the care, wellbeing and safeguarding of children.

Children in foster care require a high-quality service which is safe and well supported by Tusla social workers. Foster carers must be able to provide children with warm and nurturing relationships for them to achieve positive outcomes. The service provider must be well governed to produce these outcomes consistently.

This report reflects the findings of this focused inspection, which looked at how Five Rivers Ireland ensured foster carers provided a safe, healthy and nurturing home for children to achieve positive outcomes while having their welfare promoted and their developmental needs met. Every child has a right to feel protected and safe from harm and this inspection reviewed the processes and mechanisms in place to ensure children's safety and their rights were central to the culture of Five Rivers Ireland. The inspection looked at the assessment and approval process to determine whether a comprehensive assessment of carers' capacity and abilities to provide a safe and caring placement to a child was carried out; and if additional and or necessary supports were made available to assist in this process. The inspection also looked at the process of completing regular reviews in line with standards, and foster carers continuing capacity to provide high-quality care to children placed in their care. The final component of the inspection involved a review and analysis of the structures in place for the management, monitoring and delivery of a high-quality foster care service.

In this inspection, HIQA found that, of the five national standards assessed:

- two standards were compliant
- one standard was substantially compliant
- two standards were not compliant.

The inspection found that there were concerns in respect to safeguarding of children under standard 9, 10 and 19. Following the inspection five individual cases were escalated which related to unannounced home visits, safety planning and consistent implementation of safeguarding policies. HIQA sought assurance in the form of an urgent compliance plan due to these concerns and Five Rivers Ireland submitted a satisfactory response.

Foster carers were child-centred and aimed to ensure that all safeguards were in place for children placed with them. Five Rivers Ireland had safeguarding mechanisms in place to ensure the safe oversight of each foster care household. However, improvements were required regarding the timely completion of family care policies.

Five Rivers Ireland had in place practices, policies and procedures to promote the safety and welfare of children. Foster carers were provided with relevant training to their roles and with clear guidance on what to do if a child goes missing from their care. A number of practices however required improvement; including, a schedule of unannounced home visits, mechanisms to ensure safety plans were tailored to the individual needs of children and the appropriate identification of child sexual exploitation concerns.

Assessments of foster carers were carried out in line with the national framework. Assessments of applicants were completed in a timely manner and provided detailed analysis by a suitably qualified assessing social worker of an applicant's capacity to foster. Applicants were provided with access to their assessments and were advised of their right to make changes prior to submission to the foster care committee.

Five Rivers Ireland had a policy which outlined the requirements of the review process; including consultation, formal review and presentation to the foster care committee. Training plans were updated and renewed Garda vetting applications were submitted for each review. Preparatory work was completed in a timely manner and included the views of all household members where appropriate. Reports were submitted to the foster care committee, and foster carers were informed of decisions and recommendations.

Five Rivers Ireland had a clear management structure in place and policies which were aligned to national guidance. There were multiple mechanisms in place including trackers and various meetings at senior management level; however, these were not robust enough to effectively identify all safeguarding concerns and as a result, there was a potential for harm to occur.

The service was run by management who were suitably qualified and had the relevant expertise and knowledge. The service had good practice in relation to the assessment and review of foster carers however there were a number of areas that required improvement to address gaps in safeguarding practices as outlined in this section of the report. In addition, improvements were required in relation to the quality of staff supervision and oversight in respect to the mechanism to

ensure the foster care placement remains safe. In respect to these concerns, Five Rivers Ireland, provided a satisfactory plan to address them.

Standard 9: A safe and positive environment

Foster carers' homes provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for children or young people.

Foster carers were responsive to children's needs and were committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment. Foster carers provided children with age-appropriate opportunities for learning and play, where children's welfare was promoted and their developmental needs were met. Five Rivers Ireland worked closely with families to promote children's rights to ensure children were supported to maintain family links and friendships. Children were supported to become involved in community-based activities and explore hobbies and interests. Five Rivers Ireland had oversight mechanisms in place to support foster carers in providing safe placements for children. This included ongoing review of placements, health and safety checks and family care policies. The inspection found that there were delays in a small number of cases in respect to these checks and there was one case escalated following the inspection, where the health and safety check document was incomplete since 2024. A satisfactory response was provided to HIQA in respect to this case. Improvements are required to ensure all checks are completed in a timely manner as per Five Rivers Ireland policy and to ensure all the relevant documents are reviewed and on the foster carer's files.

Five Rivers Ireland had several systems in place to ensure foster carers homes were safe and suitable to the needs of children, including sufficient space and a home free of hazards, such as family care policies. All foster carers were allocated a link worker and they completed regular announced home visits in line with regulation; health and safety checks and unannounced visits. This report will refer to unannounced home visits under standard 10.

Prior to a child going to live with a foster carer, a link worker carried out a health and safety assessment of the carers home to ensure all risks had been identified and appropriately addressed, relevant to the age and developmental needs of the child. This included an assessment of the child's bedroom and discussions with carers about any potential hazards within the home. Following the initial completion of health and safety assessments, these were reviewed and updated in consultation with foster carers to ensure the environment remained safe and appropriate. The upkeep and maintenance of vehicles and the presence of pets was also included in assessments. The inspection found the ongoing suitability of a foster carers home could be accounted for across a range of reports, including the link workers support and supervision reports, health and safety checklists and the

carers own 'family care policy' which illustrated appropriate and practical applications of health and safety rules and checks within the home. For example, discussions with children around wearing seatbelts; upgrade to child-proof locks, additional fencing to provide safety outdoors and age-appropriate expectations and rules around privacy. The practice of including observations of children's bedrooms was becoming a more frequent practice, both as part of a review of health and safety assessments and through link workers visits to the home. The inspection found that health and safety checks were completed in line with the provider's policy. However as noted previously one case was escalated due to the health and safety check not being completed in full or reviewed following an incident. This requires increased oversight from Five Rivers Ireland management to ensure all required documents regarding health and safety checks are signed and completed in full.

All foster carers with Five Rivers Ireland are allocated a link worker who is responsible for providing support and supervision and ensuring foster carers have the necessary guidance, support and direction to provide safe and quality care to children. The inspection found good evidence of regular announced home visits by link workers which appeared to positively impact on the ability of foster carers to analyse and sustain a high level of care for children. Carers reported feeling "empowered to resolve issues" straight away when problems arose and described Five Rivers Ireland as going "beyond the call of duty" to support. However, unannounced home visits were not completed in some foster care placements in line with the provider's policy.

The inspection found that Five Rivers Ireland provided a range of training to foster carers, which included safeguarding training. Foster carers understood their responsibilities to promote and protect children's rights and received support and guidance in doing this through regular visits from link workers. A 'family care policy' was in place which sets out the boundaries and rules for all members of the household to help everyone in the family to understand what they can expect while living together. Some of the areas covered in the safer family care policy included bedtime routines, taking photographs, use of mobile phones and showing affection. From a sample of files reviewed, the inspection found that where appropriate, family care policies were devised in consultation with all members of the family and were amended where necessary, for example, when a new child comes to live with the family or when a single carer has a new partner. The inspection found that not all family care policies were up-to-date at the time of inspection. From the files sampled, two households were found to have out-of-date family care policies, and an additional four families were identified from a tracker provided by a principal social worker for one of the regions. Five Rivers Ireland had a plan in place for link workers to meet with families to complete the relevant updates. Improvements are required to ensure the timely completion of family care policies for all foster care households as per the providers own policy.

Family care policies which were reviewed during the inspection were found to be written in a child friendly manner, easy to understand, with clear boundaries and expectations, and were also signed by children and shared with the child's social worker. This meant children could be clear on what to expect in the home and to know that their environment was safe.

Five Rivers Ireland supported and encouraged children in maintaining links and relationships with family members and significant people in their lives, where it was appropriate to do so and this included extended family. Foster carers were supported through guidance from link workers to facilitate access, attend family gatherings and support and prepare children for time spent with their families. Foster carers who spoke with inspectors recognised the importance of acknowledging a child's journey and the important people in it. One care plan reviewed during inspection noted the child was receiving an incredible level of care, and that foster carers were noted as strong advocates for the child. One parent acknowledged in a foster care review report; the great care being provided to a child and the respect shown by the foster carer. A parent described the foster carer as 'fantastic' and the positive relationship they shared. The inspection found carers regularly facilitated access in a range of settings and supported children celebrating significant events such as a communion where family members were invited. Another foster carer welcomed siblings of a foster child to a Christmas party held in the foster carer's home. As a result, children were able to spend time with their families, celebrate significant milestones and maintain important connections.

Children's hobbies and interests and time spent with friends was seen as an important part of a child's development. Children were supported to attend a range of extra-curricular activities in the community which supported their physical, social and emotional development. A review of children's files found that children were being brought to swimming lessons, hurling training and sporting activities; and were also being supported in navigating new friendships, for example, speaking to children about the importance of accepting other cultures and raising awareness on how to respect other people's views.

The inspection found that children were provided with appropriate clothing and nutritious and varied meals. Children's individual preferences were respected and where children expressed preferences about clothing or food, this was accommodated by foster carers. Inspectors spoke to children's social workers and were told of the unique care provided by foster carers in recognising children's personal preferences, cultural and religious backgrounds and specific requests. Foster carers facilitated children attending religious ceremonies and mass. The majority of children placed with Five Rivers Ireland had their voices heard and

were involved in decision making about their care and their development was promoted and respected.

This inspection found that foster carers of Five Rivers Ireland were supporting the wellbeing and development of children in a nurturing environment. The voices of children were heard, and their individual preferences were respected and supported. Regular announced home visits from link workers in line with regulations supported foster carers to continue to provide stimulating environments for children, where they felt safe to learn and play at their own pace, while foster carers upheld and protected their rights. Children were supported to maintain links with immediate and extended family members. Five Rivers Ireland had a number of mechanisms in place to ensure that foster care homes were safe and well maintained and promoted the rights of the child. However, some improvements were required with regards the timely update of health and safety checks and completion of family care policies as per the providers policy. It is for these reasons this standard is deemed substantially compliant.

Judgment: Substantially Compliant

Standard 10: Safeguarding and child protection

Children and young people in foster care are protected from abuse and neglect.

Five Rivers Ireland had safeguarding and child protection policies in place which outlined the processes to safeguard children in accordance with national guidelines and standards. However, the inspection found that relevant safeguarding policies were not consistently implemented. HIQA sought assurances on five individual cases and issued an urgent compliance plan following fieldwork. The urgent compliance plan was issued in respect to the identified concerns, as listed below:

- gaps in unannounced visits, and that all Five Rivers Ireland foster carers will receive unannounced visits in line with the organisations policy.
- that all staff in the service are able to identify child sexual exploitation concerns and adhere to the mandatory reporting procedures in line with Children First (2017) and relevant legislation, national guidance and policies.
- details of mechanisms to ensure safety plans are tailored to the individual needs of children and are reviewed regularly to ensure plans remain effective.

Five Rivers Ireland provided satisfactory assurances and outlined a clear plan to address the identified concerns.

Five Rivers Ireland had a policy for unannounced home visits which stated all foster carers will receive a yearly visit by their link worker as a safeguarding mechanism. From a sample of files reviewed, the inspection found that where unannounced home visits had occurred, these were recorded in detail and included observations of children's bedrooms and all actions were addressed, such as a family care policy which required updating based on changes to the living environment. There were a number of families who had not received unannounced home visits in line with the provider's policy, and this was acknowledged by Five Rivers Ireland management. This delay ranged from being one month to 12 months overdue. In one case, this related to children who were on a safety plan and required additional safeguards. The inspection found that although there were gaps in unannounced home visits other safeguarding measures were in place such as regular support and supervision visits from the link worker. Following the inspection, Five Rivers Ireland provided assurances that an action plan was in place to complete all outstanding unannounced home visits by the end of May 2026. In addition, all unannounced home visits with foster carers with children placed with them would be completed within the expected twelve-month timeframe going forward, as per the provider's policy.

Five Rivers Ireland had a safeguarding and child protection policy in place, and this policy was aligned to Children First (2017). Staff at all levels demonstrated a robust knowledge of the policy and were clear in their responsibilities as mandated persons. Link workers provided guidance to foster carers, and likewise, the designated liaison person (DLP) regularly discussed safeguarding concerns with link workers to assist with categorising concerns and identifying the relevant reporting pathway and appropriate next steps. Foster carers also told inspectors they were knowledgeable and had a clear understanding of their role as mandated persons. However, the inspection found in one case reviewed that the concern was reported to the relevant authorities five days after the concern was identified. In this instance the on-call service available to foster carers out of hours was not used. This had the potential to impact on the immediate safety of the child.

Data submitted prior to the inspection outlined that there were 73 child protection and welfare reports made in the 12 months prior to the inspection. A sample of 7 child protection and welfare reports were reviewed by inspectors. The inspection found that information was, for the most part, responded to and dealt with in line with Children First (2017). However, one case was escalated which related to the timely identification and reporting of child sexual exploitation concerns to the relevant authorities. There was a delay in reporting this concern and management acknowledged this delay and told inspectors that a link worker would further assist foster carers in their role as mandated persons and reporting child protection concern as per Children First (2017).

Link workers provided examples of completing a joint child protection and welfare report after a child disclosed historical concerns, which demonstrated their practice of implementing the safeguarding and child protection policy. Inspectors also found this on review of files. However, the inspection also found the quality of detail recorded in one report required improving to ensure all relevant information was reported. This case was escalated following the inspection and a satisfactory response was received.

Four safety plans were reviewed by inspectors. The majority were found to be detailed and appropriately identified the risks to children while also including clear guidance for foster carers on how best to respond and support children. For the most part safety plans were discussed and agreed in consultation between Five Rivers Ireland, foster carers and Tusla, and where appropriate, with children. However, the systems in place to track and record Five Rivers Ireland oversight of safety plans required improvement. Three of the four safety plans reviewed were escalated following the inspection following concern for the oversight of their implementation. While the rationale for safety plans was clearly understood by foster carers and staff, there was no central system in place for the routine monitoring of foster carer's implementation of safety plans. This was acknowledged by Five Rivers Ireland management and a plan for improved oversight of safety planning was identified. Following the inspection, Five Rivers Ireland provided assurances that the safeguarding section of case supervision records was updated to include a specific safety plan section, and this would be discussed between the link worker and the team leader going forward.

Data provided to inspectors prior to the inspection outlined that there were 12 individual allegations against foster carers and this was in respect to nine foster carers. At the time of the inspection there were two open allegations. Inspectors sampled three of the 12 allegations. One case was escalated with regards safeguarding concerns and Five Rivers Ireland committed to completing a look back review to identify further learnings from this case, and effective safeguards were in place to ensure the child's safety. The other two allegations reviewed were managed appropriately and in line with policy, and children were effectively safeguarded.

Five Rivers Ireland had a specific guidance document on the reporting and recording of welfare concerns, allegations, issues raised and child protection and welfare concerns, which outlined the specific steps to be taken when a staff member and foster carer become aware of a safeguarding issue, and the policy for the designated liaison person to be notified and updated on actions and outcomes. The inspection found some child protection and welfare concerns were submitted following consultation with Tusla about whether the information meets the threshold for reporting. The majority of concerns were appropriately responded to

and followed up once reported, and the relevant actions were taken to safeguard children in their placements.

All foster carers of Five Rivers Ireland received training in how to deal with disclosures of abuse and how to report concerns through the Tusla portal in line with responsibilities as mandated persons. Policies related to identifying and responding to concerns of bullying, missing from care episodes and internet safety were in place to support foster carers in understanding their responsibilities to safeguard children and protect them from harm. Foster carers told inspectors that they were knowledgeable about the different types of abuse and the pathway for reporting. Foster carers told inspectors that they would typically report the concern to a link worker in the first instance and seek support around next steps; however as evidenced in the case escalated, this can result in a delay in reporting to the relevant authorities. Foster carers were aware of their duty to report the information in a timely manner which may also mean contacting the on-call service. The inspection found that foster carers had completed mandatory training and where additional training was outstanding, a plan was in place for this to be completed. For example, foster carers who had not completed additional training, such as, *Protecting Children Protecting Ourselves*, were scheduled to attend within a number of weeks. In some instances, link workers and principal social workers provided direct training at an alternative time, which demonstrated a commitment to ensure all training was completed and foster carers were equipped with the necessary tools to keep children safe.

Five Rivers Ireland had four principal social workers (PSW), three of which who also held the role of Designated Liaison Persons (DLPs) in their respective region. Designated liaison persons had primary responsibility for the management and oversight of all safeguarding and child protection concerns. A DLP tracker was maintained by each PSW which recorded the status and progress of all allegations, welfare concerns, child protection and welfare reports and issues raised. There were monthly meetings between the DLPs in the service to monitor and track concerns and allegations. Themes arising were reviewed and any further action required was identified. The DLPs held responsibility for ensuring all reports were dealt with and followed through in accordance with Five Rivers Ireland policy, which was aligned to Children First (2017). At management meetings, the CEO was advised of new and emerging concerns or allegations which had been recorded on the DLP tracker; although, the CEO also advised of receiving daily updates with respect to safeguarding and child protection concerns. The inspection found that the DLP tracker was a key mechanism for PSWs and the CEO to maintain oversight of actions and decisions. While it contained extensive detail and DLPs met regularly to review the progress of all entries, there were some gaps. For example, outcomes to a number of child protection and welfare concerns for a child no longer in the service had not updated on this tracker.

Protocols were in place to manage episodes of children missing from care. The majority of files reviewed had absence management plans on file for children and in cases where these were missing, there was an escalation procedure in place to request these from Tusla. However, not all missing documents which were escalated and requested, had been provided at the time of the inspection. For example, one case reviewed and escalated following the inspection found the absence management plan for a child was dated May 2022 and was therefore out-of-date. Absence management plans are intended to provide direction and guidance in the event a child goes missing and the absence of such plan, has the potential to impact on a child's safety. Assurances received from Five Rivers Ireland following the inspection confirmed this had been requested. Incident reports and child protection and welfare reports were completed when required and link workers provided assistance to foster carers in completing these. The inspection found that foster carers were knowledgeable about the procedure to follow should a child fail to return on time or leave their care without permission. The 24/7 on call service held up-to-date information on each family and foster carers told inspectors that the on-call service was excellent and there was always someone available to guide foster carers if they need help. Foster carers told inspectors the on-call service was familiar with their profile and individual circumstances. At various intervals, link workers discussed and revised procedures with foster carers during support and supervision visits where it was felt there was a possible risk of a child's absence. When children were missing, carers understood their responsibilities to keep them safe from harm and they were familiar with the policies and supports in place to guide their practice.

A tracking system was in place to ensure all Garda vetting for foster carers, support carers and household members over 16 years was in place. This was reviewed regularly at management meetings and renewal applications were submitted in a timely manner, ensuring Garda vetting for carers remained up-to-date. At the time of the inspection, two renewal applications for Garda vetting were outstanding; however, these were in progress and management had oversight of these.

All foster carers had an allocated fostering link worker, whose role it was to provide support and supervision to ensure foster carers had the necessary guidance and direction to provide safe and quality care. Link workers carried out planned visits in line with Five Rivers Ireland policy. Visits consisted of discussions regarding plans for children, training needs for carers, challenges emerging for birth children, outstanding documentation and an opportunity to acknowledge concerns arising for carers and to ensure appropriate supports were available. Foster carers told inspectors that they received weekly check-in calls from link workers and visits once per month as well as being informed of alternative cover arrangements for when link workers were on leave. The support from link workers and Five Rivers Ireland overall was described by foster carers as being very

positive. One foster carer said they would have left fostering if it was not for Five Rivers Ireland, while another carer said link workers 'absolutely listen and act'. Foster carers were advised of additional supports being offered such as counselling following a bereavement and how Five Rivers Ireland pay attention to the overall wellbeing and checking in with foster carers. The commitment to supporting foster carers was evident across the service and it supported the vision to ensure children were given opportunities to thrive and meet their potential.

Five Rivers Ireland had policies in place to safeguard and protect children in care. Staff at all levels had a working knowledge of Children First (2017) and link workers provided regular support and supervision to assist carers in promoting and protecting the rights of children. Five Rivers Ireland had six children placed in households that exceeded the standards, and the foster care committee were informed of these placements with relevant approvals in place. The gaps in service related to inconsistent implementation of Five Rivers Ireland safeguarding policies; including, unannounced home visits, recognition and timely reporting of child sexual exploitation concerns in one case, a lack of oversight in regard to ensuring updated absence management plans were in place for all children and gaps in monitoring foster carers implementation of safety plans. It is for these reasons this standard was deemed not compliant.

Judgment: Not compliant

Standard 14a: Assessment and approval for Non-relative foster carers

Foster care applicants participate in a comprehensive assessment of their ability to carry out the fostering task and are formally approved by the health board prior to any child or young person being placed with them.

Five Rivers Ireland carried out assessments of foster carers in accordance with national guidance. Foster carers who applied to Five Rivers Ireland were provided with a welcome pack which outlined the process from the time of enquiry, including assessment, through to approval. The welcome pack informed prospective foster carers about what to expect and the commitment involved. The welcome pack described the process as long, intense and involving a high level of scrutiny and analysis of the capacity of families to foster successfully. It also outlined the requirements to complete 'foundations for fostering' training and the compulsory background checks which are presented to the foster care committee with a completed fostering assessment.

Five Rivers Ireland set out a clear process and pathway for the assessment and approval of foster carers. This included informing applicants of the requirement for the assessment to be a two-way process whereby applicants receive all the information necessary to determine whether fostering is the right choice for them

and their family; while also advising applicants of the assessing social workers role to gather information and to complete checks to meet the criteria for the approval of foster carers. Applicants were advised of the requirements to have their completed assessment presented to the foster care committee. Five Rivers Ireland placed an emphasis on including foster carers own children in as many aspects of the assessment process as possible and provided "*A Young Persons Guide to Becoming a Foster Family*" which provided details on why children come in to care, different types of care and some of the rules and boundaries which may be in place once a child comes to live with a family. Foster carers highlighted the significance of having their own children included in the assessment process and the positive impact this had.

Data received prior to the inspection stated 16 assessments of general foster carers were completed by Five Rivers Ireland within the previous 12 months and an additional 24 were ongoing. Four of the 16 assessments completed were reviewed as part of the inspection and were found to be comprehensive in their overall analysis of the applicant's capacity to foster. Assessment reports included a number of interviews with applicants and provided insight into their experience of caring for children, current lifestyle, and suitability of accommodation, financial stability and overall expectations about fostering children. Assessment reports provided clear recommendations regarding approval and were completed to a high standard and in a timely manner. Foster carers described their experience of the assessment process as 'amazing' and discussed how the views and feedback of biological children were taken into consideration. Others described it as 'a long, in-depth, well-paced process'. Assessment reports demonstrated a thorough process and full exploration of an applicant's motivation to foster and their understanding of what the role requires. Assessment reports included information from multiple sources which contributed to the overall recommendation. Foster carers told inspectors they were provided with access to their assessment report, and they were afforded an opportunity to make changes or add comments before it was presented to the foster care committee. Some foster carers chose to attend the foster care committee review while others declined this option, and the inspection found this decision was recorded on the foster carers file. The decision and outcome of the foster care committee was communicated to foster carers, and this was also recorded on the foster carers file. Families who had commenced with placements following approval had signed contracts on file for each child placed.

An observation of the assessment team's monthly meeting was carried out. The inspection found assessments in progress were discussed and foster carers who were identified for additional training were referred to the social care team. Likewise, assessments which were not progressing were also discussed and the rationale for this was recorded. The meeting overall was found to include good

discussion of the status of assessments, rationale for decision making and identifying appropriate next steps.

Inspectors noted the assessment process was tracked and overseen by principal social workers and the CEO, and supervision of assessing social workers was recorded on a specific template which allowed for discussion at each stage of the assessment. An assessment tracker also included the stages of assessment and recorded details of delays or additional information which may have been required to complete the assessment. Foster carers told inspectors how assessing social workers were considerate and sensitive in their approach to carrying out the assessment. Inspectors noted that where delays occurred, there was a clear rationale outlined for this; however, assessments were completed for the most part in line with the required timeframes. All members of the household were included in the assessment and thorough checks, including Garda Síochána (police) vetting, were carried out. An assessment supervision document included all the elements of the assessment process to be completed, and this was reviewed at regular intervals by the supervising social work team leader.

Foster carers received a detailed and comprehensive welcome booklet which outlined Five Rivers Ireland policies and procedures with regard to multiple aspects of the service; including information on the matching process, frequency and timing of reviews, disruptions in foster care placements, safe care family policy, safeguarding children, support and supervision, training, on-call supports, child protection, definitions of abuse, role of mandated persons, as well as many other policies. Foster carers reported feeling informed and supported on their fostering journey with Five Rivers Ireland through the appreciation days which are held to celebrate the work and commitment of foster carers and families.

Assessing social workers and team leaders said they were confident the team were skilled in completing assessments. Staff told inspectors of the positive impacts of using a trauma informed approach and noted this in the quality of assessments; with assessing social workers identifying more therapeutic approaches to assist with creating a safe space with carers, allowing for more in-depth and reflective conversations. The inspection found the assessment forms were read by at least two staff and discussed at fortnightly meetings to ensure all elements of the report had been considered and completed in full, prior to signing and submission to the foster care committee. This meant thorough assessments were being completed by Five Rivers Ireland and were collectively agreed when being put forward to the foster care committee for approval.

Five Rivers Ireland carried out thorough assessments of prospective foster carers in line with policies and procedures. Assessments were completed in a timely manner, they provided thorough analysis of an applicant's capacity to foster and

were completed by suitably qualified assessing social workers, with effective oversight and monitoring by senior management. Appropriate checks were completed including Garda vetting and all applicants were provided with access to review their assessments and were invited to make changes prior to submission to the foster care committee. Applicants were informed of the outcome from the foster care committee and received a detailed handbook of the policies and procedures within Five Rivers Ireland on approval. There were signed up up-to - date contracts in place for each child placed in a foster home. It is for this reason this standard is deemed compliant.

Judgment: Compliant

Standard 17: Reviews of foster carers

Foster carers participate in regular reviews of their continuing capacity to provide high quality care to assist with the identification of gaps in the fostering services.

Reviews of foster carers were completed in line with the *National Standards for Foster Care* (2003), and in line with foster care committee policy, procedure and guidance. Foster carers had their first review completed within one year of their first placement and at subsequent three yearly intervals following this. Five Rivers Ireland had a policy in place which outlined the scope and requirements of the review process, including consultation, formal review and presentation to the committee. Five Rivers Ireland held clear records of the review process and the preparation work completed. Training plans were updated and renewed Garda vetting applications were submitted for each review. All relevant members of the household were consulted where appropriate as part of the review process.

Data submitted by Five Rivers Ireland prior to inspection showed that 51 reviews were completed in the previous 12 months. During the inspection, six foster care review records were reviewed. These contained a mix of reviews completed one year after the first placement, those at three yearly intervals and one which was carried out due to an unplanned placement ending. The inspection found that of the six reviews, two were delayed. However, an appropriate rationale was provided, and this was recorded on foster carer's files, such as an unplanned placement ending or a delay in the foster care committee meeting. Updated Garda vetting checks were completed for all reviews, as well as updated medicals and health and safety checks of the home environment. This was an effective safeguarding practice to support the ongoing delivery of high-quality safe care to children in foster placement.

The inspection found the process of foster care reviews was thorough and link worker reports provided a good description and analysis of the quality of the care provided to children. There was overall good tracking of the review process in case

management to ensure adherence to the national standards. Reports included a high standard of analysis with regard to the foster carer's ability, fostering experiences, training, vetting, health and safety checks, medical status of carers and the impact of disruptions, where relevant. The voice of the child was prioritised and their views of their placement with foster carers were appropriately captured in reports. One child who spoke with inspectors reported feeling safe in their placements and would rate their carers 'ten out of ten'. Another child stated Five Rivers Ireland were 'good at choosing foster carers' and 'wouldn't change anything' about the placement or the foster carers. Another child described their placement as their home and told inspectors that their foster carers supported them to navigate peer relationships.

Five Rivers Ireland policy on reviews described the role and responsibility of the link social worker to collate all information relevant to the carer's suitability. Foster carers were advised from the time of approval of what to expect from the review process. Foster carers, birth children and children in placement were provided with their own review forms to complete, and these were available for review during the inspection. Review meetings were attended by the link worker and foster carers and were chaired by a social work team leader. Reviews considered all available information and provided a recommendation on the foster carers ongoing suitability and capacity to continue providing safe care to children. A record of foster carers training was included as well as an analysis of any further training which foster carers might require, relevant to the challenges they may be experiencing in caring for some children. Five Rivers Ireland had a system for tracking training and a review of case management found that link workers regularly reviewed and discussed training with foster carers during support and supervision visits. This mechanism ensured any challenges which arose during the placement could be promptly addressed and foster carers received support to upskill to meet the assessed needs of the children placed with them.

Foster carers spoke positively about the review process and being clear about what Five Rivers Ireland expected of them. Foster carers described receiving good support and spoke highly of the care and consideration shown by link workers during the process. The inspection found the link workers reports to be detailed and comprehensive. Reports included details of open discussions with carers on challenges encountered during placements and how these were addressed and responded to. The inspection found that foster carers countersigned reports and on occasions made changes or included additional information, and reports were signed off by team leaders prior to submission to the foster care committee. From the sample of files reviewed, the systems in place for tracking the quality and completion of foster care reviews were found to be effective at ensuring children were appropriately safeguarded. Accurate and up-to-date records were held in respect of the reviews for each of the foster carer's files reviewed, with clear

decisions from the foster care committee clearly recorded. For example, recommendation of psychology input and inclusion of multidisciplinary team support to meet the individual needs of a child. Children's social workers were also notified of decisions and recommendations. One social worker who spoke with inspectors reported excellent communication from Five Rivers Ireland and prompt sharing of information.

The inspection found Five Rivers Ireland carried out reviews of foster carers in line with national standards and additional reviews were carried out where required. Link worker reports were completed to a high standard and provided a detailed account of a foster carers capacity to continue to foster. Preparatory work was completed in a timely manner and included the views of all household members. Reports were submitted to the foster care committee, and foster carers were informed of decisions and recommendations. Records held by Five Rivers Ireland were maintained to a high standard and provided assurances that foster carers were continually reviewed by the service to ensure foster carers were continuing to provide a high-quality service. It is for these reasons this standard is deemed compliant.

Judgment: Compliant

Standard 19 : Management and monitoring of foster care services

Health boards have effective structures in place for the management and monitoring of foster care services.

Five Rivers Ireland had governance and oversight arrangements in place to support the delivery of foster care services. The service was led by the chief executive officer with the support of a senior management team who were suitably qualified and experienced to ensure the service was run in line with the national standards and regulations. Five Rivers Ireland had clear policies and procedures in place for promoting the safety and welfare of children with clear guidelines on how to respond to safeguarding concerns. However, as detailed under standard 10, the service had a number of gaps in relation to the practice of unannounced home visits, the oversight of foster carers implementation of safety plans as well as the timely identification and reporting of child sexual exploitation concerns, which had not been identified. Following fieldwork, assurances were sought in respect to standard 19 as follows:

- Monitoring and oversight of unannounced home visits and the quality assurances systems in place to ensure these are occurring in line with the organisations policy and the oversight of this.
- Details of the mechanism in place to ensure effective monitoring and review of safety plans and the quality assurance systems in place to ensure these

are tailored to the individual needs of children and reflect all identified risks in relation to the child.

- Details of robust governance and oversight arrangements in place to ensure all staff and foster carers are familiar with their responsibilities and knowledge of child sexual exploitation and the mandatory reporting procedures to ensure the service provided is safe and appropriate to children's needs.
- Identification and monitoring of risks and the mechanism in place to ensure timely action is taken to address concerns as they arise.

A number of trackers were used as part of the governance and oversight arrangements in Five Rivers Ireland; however, these did not capture the concerns as listed above. Following the inspection, Fiver Rivers Ireland provided satisfactory assurances and outlined a clear plan to come into compliance with this standard.

The management structure in Five Rivers Ireland consisted of a chief executive officer, four principal social workers (PSWs), finance manager, social care manager and training specialist, and an education specialist who provided consultation support to the families and staff. The chief executive officer had responsibility for all aspects of the service which included safeguarding, finance, monitoring, recruitment, growth of the service, supervision and working relationships, and keeping families and children safe. Three of the four PSWs had dual roles and also functioned as the designated liaison person (DLP) for their respective regions. The majority of the senior management team were in post for many years and were experienced and confident in their roles and responsibilities. An extensive social care team, assisted by input from the multidisciplinary team, was also in place to support the work carried out with families. The principal social workers had oversight and responsibility for the social work teams and reported directly to the CEO on all matters. The CEO reports to a board of directors and provided monthly updates when attending meetings.

The senior management team met on a monthly basis. Standard agenda items included governance updates, regional manager's reports and director's reports, as well as finance, staffing and policies and procedures. Minutes were recorded in a clear and detailed format with clear actions arising from discussions. The principal social workers also met monthly, and the inspection found records of meetings varied in format and quality; attendees or minute takers were not always recorded, and records were found in general to be brief, sometimes limited to one page with no specific action noted in respect of some agenda items. For example, 'review of trackers' is listed as a rolling agenda item on six of the records reviewed and only two recorded whether the tracker was reviewed. The inspection found from a review of a sample of the principal social worker meeting minutes, that actions discussed or completed were not consistently recorded in the minutes of the meeting. Other items on the agenda were discussed, and actions agreed but

follow up of these items was not always reflected in the next meeting and therefore progress or completion could not be tracked through the minutes. For example, an action regarding a list of paperwork is recorded on one record and does not feature on the agenda at the next meeting. The quality of the minutes meant it was difficult to determine if all required actions were completed. However, the CEO told inspectors that actions at principal social work meetings were monitored through a separate meeting tracker.

As designated liaison persons, principal social workers also met monthly in this capacity. The meeting focused on the status of new and ongoing allegations, welfare concerns, issues raised, child protection and welfare reports and retrospective abuse disclosures. Other items discussed in this forum included learning and development, escalation policies and DLP workshops for foster carers and staff. The principal social workers reported these meetings were central for decision making and in identifying any additional action which was required. A sample of nine records were reviewed, and the inspection found these meetings occurred regularly, were well attended and were comprehensive in detail. Outcomes and updates were recorded and this allowed for tracking concerns. As mentioned, the DLP tracker was also maintained and this contained extensive detail; however, it lacked important details such as the date when it was last amended, therefore the most up-to-date information was not easily identifiable on this document. This was raised with principal social workers and they noted there was a version history in place to review all information if required.

Quarterly meetings with Tusla formed part of the governance arrangements in Five Rivers Ireland. The CEO and PSWs reported these had become more infrequent and more recently non-existent in some areas. The inspection found this directly impacted on the escalation policy in Five Rivers Ireland as documents for some children's files remained outstanding. For example, an absence management plan and an up-to-date care plan from a child in care review which took place in March 2025 had not been received at the time of the inspection. This case was escalated following inspection and Five Rivers Ireland provided assurances that the outstanding documents had since been received and were now stored on the child and foster carer's file. Additionally, the CEO confirmed they had requested in writing to reconvene governance meetings to assist with re-establishing appropriate pathways for reporting and escalating issues where relevant.

Five Rivers Ireland provided continuity of service to foster carers when link workers were on leave. Foster carers reporting receiving direct calls from link workers to advise of an alternative point of contact and commented that everyone was helpful and supportive and were familiar with the foster carer's circumstances

during the period of cover. Foster carers were satisfied with the arrangement and were familiar with how to access supports when their link worker was unavailable.

A supervision policy was in place which stated supervision would occur at four-to-eight-week intervals depending on the staff role and which outlined the requirements and expectations of supervision. A sample of ten supervision records were reviewed during the inspection, and these were found to be of mixed quality and occurring at intervals of approximately every six to eight weeks. Two of the records sampled contained clear discussions and actions, for example, evidence of supervision visits being carried out in line with policy, plans to complete audits, and discussions regarding training and well-being; while other records were limited and lacked accountability and evidence of practice in line with policy. The inspection found variation in the quality of supervision across all records reviewed and while individual case management was recorded separately and stored on foster carers' files, supervision records for staff required improvement. For example, one record did not include any actions arising from discussion and therefore actions were not tracked or followed up in subsequent supervisions. Other supervision records reviewed by inspectors found gaps in recording of the total number of foster carers discussed, lack of reference to visits to foster carers including announced and unannounced visits. Albeit such information can be found in other mechanisms, there was no evidence of oversight of such visits in supervision. The inspection found the service did not have a system for auditing the quality of supervision. Management told inspectors they could access this information on their system if necessary; however, there was no mechanism whereby this routinely occurred. This meant gaps in the quality of records was not routinely reviewed or checked by management.

A system for tracking Garda vetting was in place and was found to be effective at ensuring any upcoming renewals were identified and progressed. While two renewal applications were in progress at the time of the inspection, management had oversight of this. Likewise, a tracker for mandatory training was also in place and allowed management to have oversight of training which was due to expire and training which was to be completed. The inspection found these records were maintained to a good standard and where training needs were identified, there was a plan in place for this to be completed.

Five Rivers Ireland maintained a risk register which included current and ongoing risks in the service. Responsibility for this was held by the CEO and was found to be up-to-date and reflective of risks at the time of the inspection.

Information booklets were provided to children of foster carers and to children when being placed with foster carers. The inspection found these were out-of-date and required updating as they identified the operations manager, who had retired

more than 12 months previous, as the point of contact for children who wish to make a complaint or express a concern. As a result, children were not being provided with accurate information, and action to address this had not occurred. Following the inspection the CEO confirmed that this booklet had been updated, and the up-to-date information was circulated to foster carers and children.

Foster carers were required to complete bi-monthly reports in line with Five Rivers Ireland policy. These reports aimed to provide a child with a record of their journey through foster care and to provide information to take with them for the future. A sample of nine bi-monthly reports were reviewed. The inspection found the reports varied in quality and were not consistently completed. Some foster carers provided child-centred records which celebrated achievements and highlighted positives, while others were presented as a catalogue of appointments and in some cases foster carers did not complete such reports.

Five Rivers Ireland were a long-established service who shared a vision for delivering a high-quality service. The service had clear policies in place to support the safeguarding needs of children and various governance arrangements in place to assist with this. However, the inspection found improvements were required. The oversight and governance mechanisms were not strong enough to identify and respond to all safeguarding concerns; such as the oversight of unannounced home visits, effective monitoring of foster carers implementation of safety plans, staff and foster carers understanding of child sexual exploitation and consistent implementation of safeguarding policies, and oversight in respect to the quality of staff supervision. It is for these reasons this standard was deemed to be not compliant.

Judgment: Not compliant

Appendix 1:

National Standards for Foster Care (2003) and

Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations,² 1995

Standard 9	A safe and positive environment
Standard 10	Safeguarding and child protection
Standard 14(a)	Assessment and approval of Non-relative foster carers
Regulations Part III, Article 5 Part III, Article 9	Assessment of foster parents Contract
Standard 17	Reviews of Foster carers
Standard 19	Management and monitoring of foster care services
Regulations Part IV, Article 12 Part IV, Article 17	Maintenance of register Supervision and visiting of children

² Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations, 1995

Compliance Plan for Five Rivers Ireland Non-Statutory Foster Care Service OSV – 0004248

Inspection ID: MON-0049519

Date of inspection: 24 March 2026

Introduction and instruction

This document sets out the standards where it has been assessed that the provider is not compliant with the National Standards for Foster Care, 2003.

This document is divided into two sections:

Section 1 is the compliance plan. It outlines which Standard(s) the provider must take action on to comply. In this section the provider must consider the overall standard when responding and not just the individual non compliances as listed in section 2.

Section 2 is the list of all standards where it has been assessed the provider is not compliant. Each standard is risk assessed as to the impact of the non-compliance on the safety, health and welfare of children using the service.

A finding of:

- **Substantially compliant** - A judgment of substantially compliant means that the provider has generally met the requirements of the standard but some action is required to be fully compliant. This finding will have a risk rating of yellow which is low risk.
- **Not compliant** - A judgment of not compliant means the provider has not complied with a standard and considerable action is required to come into compliance. Continued non-compliance or where the non-compliance poses a significant risk to the safety, health and welfare of children using the service will be risk rated red (high risk) and the inspector have identified the date by which the provider must comply. Where the non-compliance does not pose a risk to the safety, health and welfare of children using the service it is risk rated orange (moderate risk) and the provider must take action *within a reasonable timeframe* to come into compliance.

Section 1

The provider is required to set out what action they have taken or intend to take to comply with the regulation in order to bring the centre back into compliance. The plan should be **SMART** in nature. **S**pecific to that regulation, **M**easurable so that they can monitor progress, **A**chievable and **R**ealistic, and **T**ime bound. The response must consider the details and risk rating of each regulation set out in section 2 when making the response. It is the provider's responsibility to ensure they implement the actions within the timeframe.

Compliance plan provider's response:

Standard 9: A safe and positive environment Foster carers’ homes provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for children or young people.		Judgment: Substantially Compliant	
Outline how you are going to come into compliance with Standard 9:			
Health and Safety Checks:			
Action	Person responsible	Completion date	Status
Audit completed by the CEO on 25 th March 2026 which evidenced that all Health and Safety checks for actively fostering carers were in date. However, while one Health and Safety check was signed, the additional section in relation to control of dogs, was missing signatures.	Chief Executive Officer	25 th March 2026	Completed
Obtain missing signature on control of dog’s section of one Health and Safety Check.	Principal Social Worker	30 th March 2026	Completed
Family Safe Care Policies:			
Action	Person responsible	Completion date	Status
Update our compliance tool on Five Rivers Database to include Health & Safety Checks and Family Policies. This will ensure we remain in compliance with standard 9.	Principal Social Worker	30 th March 2026	Completed

Update two Family Safe Care Policies which were out of date.	Principal Social Worker	30 th March 2026	Completed
Monthly audit of Family policies and Health and Safety Check to be commenced using the Compliance Tool on Five Rivers Database.	Principal Social Worker	30 th March 2026	Completed and Ongoing
Update compliance tool to provide RAG ratings in real time. This provides colour coded notice of any documents which are overdue (Red), due within next 4 months (Amber) and in date (Green).	Principal Social Worker	30 th March 2026	Completed and Ongoing

Standard 10: Safeguarding and child protection Children and young people in foster care are protected from abuse and neglect.		Judgment: Not Compliant	
Actions taken to come into compliance with Standard 10:			
Training:			
Action	Person responsible	Completion date	Status
Existing training tracker maintained to ensure all mandatory training for foster carers and staff is up to date.	Principal Social Worker, Link Social Worker	30 th March 2026	Completed and Ongoing
Safety Plans:			
Action	Person responsible	Completion date	Status
All Safety Plans are noted and overseen on the DLP tracker.	Principal Social Worker	30 th March 2026	Completed and Ongoing
Safeguarding section of the case supervision template updated to include a specific Safety Plan section and to reflect the Compliance Tool on Five Rivers database. This will better	Principal Social Worker	9 th April 2026	Completed and Ongoing

evidence the oversight of the implementation of safety plans.			
Unannounced Home Visits:			
Action	Person responsible	Completion date	Status
Compliance tool in place to track unannounced home visits.	Principal Social Worker	30 th March 2026	Completed and Ongoing
CEO completed full audit of unannounced home visits of all families on 24 th March 2026 which evidenced 97.6% compliance with agency policy on unannounced visits. The remaining 2.4% of families had unannounced visits completed.	Chief Executive Officer	9 th April 2026	Completed and Ongoing
Five Rivers give assurances all unannounced visits with active Foster Carers will be completed within the expected 12 month timeframe, as per our policy.	Principal Social Worker	9 th April 2026	Completed and Ongoing
Immediate action taken by PSW & LSW to complete outstanding unannounced home visits	Principal Social Worker & Link Social Worker	9 th April 2026	Completed and Ongoing
A review of the 2.4% of carers case files that did not have an unannounced visit, has satisfied the CEO that regular planned visits and regular phone calls did take place during the inspection period in line with the level of foster care being provided by the foster carers. This supports safeguarding in relation to the children and young people placed with these families. In one instance visits were fortnightly with additional weekly phone calls.	Principal Social Worker, Chief Executive Officer	9 th April 2026	Completed and Ongoing

Reporting of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Concerns:

Action	Person responsible	Completion date	Status
CSE training being scheduled with Tusla monitoring officer for all FRI staff.	Principal Social Worker	9 th April 2026	Completed and Ongoing
All resource material relating to identifying CSE and the mandatory reporting procedures were reissued to staff along with other training resources	Principal Social Worker	9 th April 2026	Completed and Ongoing
All cases are discussed by Link Workers with their Team Leaders during supervision. The Team Leader supports the Link Worker in identifying any safeguarding concerns, including risk of CSE.	Principal Social Worker, Link Social Worker	9 th April 2026	Completed and Ongoing
Review of current Child Protection and Child Sexual Exploitation procedures which satisfied the CEO that these are effective. All cases of CSE within the organisation have been reported in line with Tusla Child Sexual Exploitation Procedures.	Chief Executive Officer	9 th April 2026	Completed and Ongoing
All foster carers to be reminded of the importance of reporting all concerns through available lines, such as on call, link worker and Tusla portal if necessary.	Principal Social Worker, Link Social Worker	9 th April 2026	Completed and Ongoing

Actions taken to remain compliant with Standard 10:**Training provided to FRI Staff and Foster Carers:**

Action	Person responsible	Status
Targeted online safety training completed with Young Person following recent concern. This will be provided for any additional young people who require it.	Social Care Worker	Completed and Ongoing
Training provided on new Case Supervision templates linked to compliance tool.	Principal Social Worker & Link Social Worker	Completed and Ongoing

Targeted online safety training scheduled with external practitioner with one foster family to include individual work with foster carers and children placed.	Principal Social Worker, Link Social Worker	Completed and Ongoing
Safeguarding and Child Protection:		
Action	Person responsible	Status
Weekly safeguarding meeting implemented for PSW's and CEO to discuss all safeguarding concerns. This is in addition to the existing Designated Liaison Person (DLP) meetings.	Chief Executive Officer, Principal Social Worker	Completed and Ongoing
Compliance reports are produced monthly and are discussed at monthly PSW meetings with minutes taken.	Principal Social Worker	Completed and Ongoing
Discussion held with all staff in relation to requesting outstanding absence management plans from Tusla and section added to revised case supervision sheets.	Principal Social Worker	Completed and Ongoing
In line with best practices, a look back review will take place on an escalated case following the conclusion of the Child Abuse Substantiation Procedure (CASP) investigation.	Principal Social Worker	Ongoing

Standard 19: Management and monitoring of foster care services Health boards have effective structures in place for the management and monitoring of foster care services.		Judgment: Not Compliant	
Actions taken to come into compliance with Standard 19:			
Management and monitoring:			
Action	Person responsible	Completion date	Status
A new compliance audit system was implemented to include all aspects of compliance. This facilitates instant real time oversight for management, social workers and support staff. Support and guidance have been	Chief Executive Officer, Principal Social Worker	30 th March 2026	Completed

provided to staff and management in how to use the compliance tool. CEO completed full audit of unannounced home visits of all families on 24 th March 2026 which evidenced 97.6% compliance. CEO completed subsequent audit of all unannounced visits with families and is satisfied of 100% compliance.	Chief Executive Officer	9 th April 2026	Completed
Training provided for all staff on the correct use of the new Compliance tool on Five Rivers Database.	All staff	9 th April 2026	Completed
Case Supervision Sheets updated to reflect the updated compliance tool. This includes record of last unannounced visit with family.	Principal Social Worker	9 th April 2026	Completed
Review of Five Rivers Ireland safeguarding policies, which are in line with all Tusla requirements, Children First Act 2015 and Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017, and Tusla Child Sexual Exploitation Procedure. The CEO is satisfied these policies are effective.	Chief Executive Officer	9 th April 2026	Completed
Five Rivers Ireland are engaged with all new Tusla regions following the Tusla reform, to re-establish Governance meetings.	Chief Executive Officer, Principal Social Workers	9 th April 2026	Completed and ongoing
All Schedule 1 offences are now recorded separately on the DLP tracker.	Principal Social Worker	9 th April	Completed and Ongoing

Actions taken to remain compliant with Standard 19:

Management Oversight & Monitoring of Risk:

Action	Person responsible	Status
Weekly safeguarding meeting implemented for PSWs and CEO to discuss all safeguarding concerns and to ensure robust management and oversight. This is in addition to the existing Designated Liaison Person (DLP) meetings.	Chief Executive Officer, Principal Social Worker	Completed and Ongoing

Refresher training on the Garda Vetting process.	All staff	Completed and Ongoing
Principal Social Workers have reviewed staff supervision and are satisfied that actions are clearly set out and follow through from previous supervision.	Principal Social Worker, Link Social Worker	Completed and Ongoing
Safety Plans:		
Action	Person responsible	Status
DLP tracker updated to include data on all safety Plans.	Principal Social Worker	Completed and Ongoing
Principal Social workers sign off on all Safety Plans. This is completed at each stage of implementation, review and close of safety plans. As a result, an improved quality assurance system is now in place to review quality and effectiveness of safety plans. Compliance reports are compiled monthly and discussed at the monthly Principal Social Workers Meeting. The CEO also has oversight of these. These are shared with Team Leaders to discuss with their teams.	Principal Social Worker Chief Executive Officer, Principal Social Worker	Completed and Ongoing Completed and Ongoing
Case Supervision:		
Action	Person responsible	Status
Updated compliance reports also evidence case supervision sheets which detail actions agreed for each family, during the supervision meeting.	Principal Social Worker, Link Social Worker	Completed and Ongoing
Individual supervision sheets updated to include list of social workers current cases.	Principal Social Worker, Link Social Worker	Completed
Five Rivers Ireland undertake to complete an independent full quality audit of supervision records.	Chief Executive Officer, Principal Social Worker	Ongoing

Oversight updates:

Action	Person responsible	Status
Principal Social Worker meeting minutes updated to include all actions agreed.	Principal Social Worker	Completed
Foster Carer Handbook to be replaced by a Digital Information Hub.	Chief Executive Officer	Ongoing

Section 2:

Standards to be complied with

The provider must consider the details and risk rating of the following standards when completing the compliance plan in section 1. Where a standard has been risk rated red (high risk) the inspector has set out the date by which the provider must comply. Where a standard has been risk rated yellow (low risk) or orange (moderate risk) the provider must include a date (DD MM YY) of when they will be compliant.

The provider has failed to comply with the following standards(s).

Standard	Judgment	Risk rating	Date to be complied with
Standard 9: A safe and positive environment Foster carers' homes provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for children or young people.	Substantially Compliant	Yellow	30 th March 2026
Standard 10: Safeguarding and child protection Children and young people in foster care are protected from abuse and neglect.	Not Compliant	Red	9 th April 2026
Standard 19: Management and monitoring of foster care services Health boards have effective structures in place for the management and monitoring of foster care services.	Not Compliant	Red	9 th April 2026

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