



**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

<b>Name of service provider:</b>	Foster Care Ireland
<b>Type of inspection:</b>	Focused
<b>Date of inspection:</b>	10 - 12 February 2026
<b>Lead inspector:</b>	Saragh McGarrigle
<b>Support inspectors:</b>	Catherine Linehan Grace Lynam Nicola Rossiter
<b>Fieldwork ID</b>	MON-0049334

## 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 and 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)<sup>1</sup>, 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* (2003) and advises the Minister and the Child and Family Agency.

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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 *National Standards for Foster Care* (2003).

## How we inspect

As part of this inspection, inspectors met with the relevant professionals involved with Foster Care Ireland and with foster carers. Inspectors observed practices and reviewed documentation such as foster carers' 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) of the service
  - the service director of the service
  - the principal social worker, who also held the designated liaison person (DLP) role
  - the administration manager of the service
- focus groups with:
  - three link workers and one assessor (all are social workers)
  - four foster carers
- observations of:
  - staff team meeting
- the review of:
  - policies and procedures, minutes of various meetings, staff supervision files, audits and service plans
  - a sample of 11 foster carer files
  - A sample of 10 children's files
  - A sample of four staff supervision files
- conversations or visits with:
  - three children and three foster carers.
  - three members of the children's external social work

## **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.

Foster Care Ireland (FCI) is an independent non-statutory fostering agency established in 2016 providing respite, short-term and long-term foster care placements. Service delivery commenced in 2017 when the first match was made. Foster Care Ireland recruits, assesses, trains and supports foster carers to offer a high standard of care to children in need of care and protection.

Foster Care Ireland operates as an autonomous unit within Sorcha Ireland, with a regional focus concentrating on the East coast of Ireland and its hinterlands within range of its head office at Santry.

The work of the Agency is overseen by its Director and a Consultative Committee committed to serving FCI and the service it provides. The Director is the ultimate authority and has delegated the day-to-day delivery of the fostering service to the Service Director.

The Service Director is responsible for the day-to-day management of FCI. The Service Director reports to the Director and informs the Chair of the Consultative Committee. The Principal Social Worker is responsible for the professional oversight and regulatory compliance of the fostering service.

In addition to the professional management team, FCI employs a team of five professionally qualified social workers, a recruitment advisor and administrative staff.

The service is structured to equip and support carers in meeting the needs of children and young people, from infancy through to young adulthood. Foster Care Ireland supports foster carers directly with an assigned professionally qualified social worker, i.e., a link worker who supervises, supports, identifies needs, and arranges for additional training or other inputs to stabilise the placement to the ultimate

benefit of the child and the capacity of the carer. The service provides 24/7 support, delivers training, organises events and support groups. Foster Care Ireland currently has 35 foster care households providing placements for 45 children fulltime and five children who receive respite care.

Foster Care Ireland is committed to building a community of carers with the potential to support one another, celebrate success, share experiences and ultimately normalise fostering among birth and foster children alike to mitigate discrimination and assist their development.

Placements with Foster Care 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. Foster Care Ireland was last audited by the Tusla Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service (ACIMS) in November 2025 and the service was found compliant with standard 16 of the *National Standards for Foster Care (2003)*.

## 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	compliant
Standard 10	Safeguarding and child protection	compliant
Standard 14	(a) Assessment and approval of non-relative foster carers	compliant
	(b) Assessment and approval of relative foster carers	
Standard 17	Reviews of foster carers	compliant
Standard 19	Management and monitoring of foster care services	compliant

**This inspection was carried out during the following times:**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Times of inspection</b>	<b>Inspector name</b>	<b>Role</b>
10 February 2026	09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 10:30hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs	Saragh McGarrigle Grace Lynam Catherine Linehan Nicola Rossiter	Lead inspector Support inspector Support inspector Support inspector
11 February 2026	09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 10:00hrs to 19:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs	Saragh McGarrigle Grace Lynam Catherine Linehan Nicola Rossiter	Lead inspector Support inspector Support inspector Support inspector
12 February 2026	09:00hrs to 16:00hrs 09:00hrs to 15:00hrs 09:00hrs to 14:00hrs 09:00hrs to 15:00hrs	Saragh McGarrigle Grace Lynam Catherine Linehan Nicola Rossiter	Lead inspector Support inspector Support inspector Support inspector

## Children's experience of the service

Children's experiences of this service were established through visiting a sample of three children, who given their young age, were observed in their homes with foster carers. Children's experiences were also established through speaking to seven foster carers, eight Foster Care Ireland staff, and three external advocates and professionals. A review of 11 foster carer's files and 10 children's files, meeting minutes, four supervision records and other documents also provided evidence on the experience of children placed in foster care with Foster Care Ireland. Birth parents were offered the opportunity to speak to inspectors, however no birth parents were available to speak with inspectors during the inspection.

The inspection found that foster carers provided children with caring, safe homes. All foster carers homes had health and safety assessments completed, as part of the assessment to foster. These assessments were repeated at regular intervals, and assessment of the home environment was part of annual unannounced home visits to foster carers. Where issues are identified, Foster Care Ireland worked with foster carers to address them; this included situations where foster carers completed home improvements to ensure their houses were safe. As part of this inspection, inspectors visited three foster carers' homes and met three children, placed with these foster carers. The children presented as happy and comfortable in their homes, with their foster carers. The children were all dressed appropriately and had toys and space to play. Inspectors observed foster carers playing and responding to the children in a loving manner. Foster carers spoke about how much they cared for the children placed with them, and one of the foster carers stated they "couldn't imagine life without them".

Children were treated with dignity and respect, and their rights were promoted. Foster carers understood their responsibility to respect children's right to confidentiality. One foster carer commented that "it's their story, not my story to tell". Foster carers and link workers provided children with information about their rights and how to make a complaint. Children had opportunities to talk about their experiences of their foster placements as part of foster carer reviews, and this was evident on files sampled. Their feedback helped identify areas that could be improved or where additional support was needed for a foster placement. Foster Care Ireland staff identified situations where children needed advocacy and were proactive in supporting older children, or advocating on behalf of younger children.

Children's sense of identity was protected and promoted. Foster Care Ireland provided all children with a 'treasure box', so foster carers could ensure mementos of children's lives in their placements was kept safe. Where children expressed a wish to celebrate religious customs, such as making their first communion, foster carers supported them to prepare for and celebrate such ceremonies. There were examples of foster carers including extended family members of the children in these celebrations. Foster Care Ireland link workers completed life story work with children to help them understand why they were in foster care and to strengthen their sense of identity. When children were placed with foster carers who had a different heritage to them, link workers supported foster carers to meet the children's needs. An example of this type of work was where foster carers were provided with information, products and support to attend to the children's hair and skin needs.

Children's right to contact with their birth family was promoted and supported. Foster carers understood and were proactive in upholding their responsibility to ensure, where it was in children's best interest, that they had contact with their parents and extended family. Some foster carers had siblings placed together with them, which strengthened the children's sense of identity and maintained their relationships. Where siblings were unable to be placed together, but were placed with two of Foster Care Ireland's foster carers, arrangements were made to support regular and meaningful contact between the siblings. Inspectors saw examples where foster carers advocated for children's views to be heard, such as when children said who in their family they wanted contact with.

Inspectors found that children, foster carers and external professional's experiences of Foster Care Ireland service was positive. The feedback from all was that Foster Care Ireland staff provided a safe-child-centred service, focused on meeting the needs of children placed with their foster carers.

Link workers provided therapeutic support to both foster carers and children when specific needs or concerns were identified, including safeguarding concerns. Foster carers told inspectors that they felt comfortable talking to link workers about any worries, concerns or support needs they had. They described link workers as "brilliant" and "incredible advocates for the child". Some talked about how link workers developed good relationships with children by talking and playing with them when they visited foster carers. Foster carers also commented on the good retention levels of staff which meant there was consistent worker for both the foster carers and the children. One commented they were grateful for "the steady ship" of Foster Care Ireland staff.

Foster carers received high-quality support and training to enable them to provide caring placements that met each child's individual needs and safeguarded children, including children presenting with behaviours that challenged. Link workers supported foster carers to use learning from training to support the children placed with them.

Foster carers said that the training they got from Foster Care Ireland helped them in their roles, and many talked about having access to tailored training to address specific issues or needs of the children placed with them. Foster carers also spoke about therapeutic support for both them and the children placed with them, when this need was identified. Foster carers spoke about how they were supported by link workers to put into practice what they learnt in training events. An example of this was when foster carers attended a training course about attachment, link workers then organised a support group for these foster carers, where they could discuss and be supported to put into practice what they learnt.

Foster carers also spoke about how Foster Care Ireland organised events for foster carers to come together and share their experiences. There was regular online forums for this, as well as in person events where all members of foster care households were invited. Foster carers commented on how these events helped both children who were fostered and their birth children develop friendships with others who had similar life experiences. Foster Care Ireland recognised the important role birth children of foster carers played in fostercare placements. These children were engaged by staff from the assessment stage, and throughout foster care placements. Birth children's views were sought at fostercare assessments and foster carers reviews, and there were child friendly tools developed to support staff in this work. Birth children were invited and included in group activities for all foster families, such as a children's rights event, where all the children and foster carers took part in exercises which raised children's awareness of their rights, including the right to make a complaint.

Professionals, outside Foster Care Ireland spoke positively about their experiences of working with the service and of the quality of care the children received. They told inspectors that staff in Foster Care Ireland were very good at keeping open communication; if the child's link worker was unavailable, then the principal social worker would cover, and was knowledgeable about the case. They also spoke about good collaboration between them and Foster Care Ireland link workers. There were examples of completing joint visits with children and foster carers, so pieces of work could be done collaboratively with outside professionals. They reported that Foster Care Ireland managed child welfare and protection disclosures appropriately and provided follow up support for the child and foster carer. Outside professionals commented on the quality of care foster carers provided, "Attachments to foster carers are visible and continue to strengthen". "Children are receiving excellent care" and one professional told inspectors that the child they worked with told them "they love their placement".

## Summary of inspection findings

Placements with Foster Care 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 in order for them to achieve positive outcomes. The service provider must be well governed in order to produce these outcomes consistently.

This report reflects the findings of the focused inspection, which looked at how Foster Care Ireland ensures that foster carers provide a safe, healthy home for children placed with them. The inspection looked at the how the service managed the assessment and approval process of foster carers' ability to provide a safe and caring placement to a child. It looked at foster carers' reviews, which assess foster carers' capacity to continue to provide quality safe foster placements for children and identify supports and training that may be needed for the foster carer. The inspection also looked at child protection and safeguarding by the service and its foster carers. In addition, the inspection looked at the governance, oversight and management systems to assess whether they support a quality, safe foster care service.

In this inspection, HIQA found that, of the five national standards assessed, all five standards were compliant.

Foster carers with Foster Care Ireland were able to provide children with safe, caring experiences in their placements. Children were well cared for, valued, accepted, and supported. Foster carers were supported to meet each child's individual welfare and development needs. Foster carers supported children to maintain contact with family, including extended family, when this was in their best interests. Foster carers recognised the importance of children developing relationships and belonging within their communities and they ensured children had opportunities to engage in a wide range of learning, sport and community activities, dependant on their stage of development. Foster carers' ensured children's day-to-day needs were met, such as being appropriately dressed, and having a variety of nutritious meals. Children's privacy was respected in the home and they had their own bedrooms.

Foster Care Ireland had systems and policies in place to ensure the service kept children safe, and identified and addressed any safeguarding risks for children. Foster carers and staff were knowledgeable and skilled to protect children from abuse and neglect. The service had guidance, policies and training that supported foster carers to understand their responsibilities for child protection and safeguarding. These included *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017)* training and guidance, safe care practices, bullying, missing from care, and managing complex and difficult behavior.

At the time of the inspection, no foster carers had over the number of children placed as permitted under the standards. A range of supports were available to foster carers, including out-of-hours support, respite placements and therapeutic support for children and foster carers.

Staff and foster carers understood their roles as mandated persons, under Children First (2017), and made reports to Tusla when appropriate. However, improvement was required to ensure information about abuse was also reported to the relevant authorities, when required by legislation. Foster Care Ireland had appropriate policies and guidance in place to effectively manage any allegations made against foster carers and had provided information and training about this to staff and foster carers.

Foster Care Ireland ensured that those who applied to be foster carers underwent a comprehensive assessment of their ability to provide a safe, nurturing and stable homes for children who cannot live with their own families. The assessment process and reports were completed to a high standard and well managed. Children were only placed with foster carers who were approved by the foster care

committees. Assessments were completed in line with Tusla's *National Assessment Framework for Foster Care* (2015), and Foster Care Ireland policies and procedures. There was a consistent approach to assessments which meant high quality assessment reports with clear recommendations were sent to foster care committees. There were systems in place to track the progress of applicants, the quality of assessments, and to ensure they progressed within the required timelines.

Foster carers took part in regular reviews of their capacity to provide high quality care to the children placed with them. The frequency of foster carers' reviews, were on the whole, in line with *National Standards for Foster Care* (2003). Where there were delays to foster carer reviews, records showed the reason for delays and that management closely monitored these cases to ensure progress was made. All relevant people were consulted as part of foster carer reviews. Training and support for foster carers also formed part of these reviews. Clear records were maintained of foster carer reviews and the foster care committees were updated after reviews, as required under this standard. When differences of opinion about any element of the reviews arose, an open collaborative approach was taken by the link workers to address and resolve any issues. The foster care committees were advised of any delays in foster carer reviews.

There were good systems in place to ensure that Garda Síochána (police) vetting was routinely updated, and at the time of this inspection, there were no Garda vetting records out of date.

Foster Care Ireland had effective structures in place to ensure the service was led and managed effectively. The management team were experienced and ensured that clear management systems were maintained and improved, as required, to support the delivery of a high quality, safe foster care service. The systems in place allowed for continual review and improvement, when required. There was a risk register, which was used as a mechanism to identify, review, mitigate, and monitor a range of risks in the service. Staff roles, responsibilities, and accountability were clearly defined. Staff demonstrated understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and worked to provide a service to foster carers and children that was of a high standard. Foster Care Ireland had enough resources to meet the needs of the foster carers and children who received the service. There were effective policies and procedures in place, and these were regularly reviewed and updated, when required. While there was an effective complaints policy in place, there was room for improvement of how complaints were recorded. Systems were in place to monitor practice, and review performance of staff, such as through supervision and audits. These systems helped to maintain a high quality foster care service that supported foster carers to provide safe, caring placements for children placed with them.

**Standard 9: A safe and positive environment**

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

Children placed with foster carers in Foster Care Ireland were well cared for, valued, accepted and supported. Foster carers provided safe caring environments that met each child's individual welfare and development needs. Foster carers supported children to maintain contact with family, including extended family, when this was in their best interests. Children had opportunities to engage in a wide range of learning, sport and community activities, dependant on their age and stage of development. Foster carers ensured children's day-to-day needs were met, such as ensuring they had appropriate clothing, and nutritious meals. Foster carers' homes were safe, clean, well maintained, and provided adequate space and privacy for the children placed with them.

Foster Care Ireland ensured foster carers provided children with nurturing and safe homes. The service provided training, information and support to all foster carers to ensure they understood their responsibilities and what was expected of them as foster carers. All children placed with foster carers had safe care plans, signed by the foster carer and link worker, which set out the rules of the household under a range of areas including; how to talk to children, adults and children dressing appropriately, affection and touch, privacy, sexual health education, and the use of digital devices. These plans meant foster carers were clear about what was expected of them and they understood how to ensure children felt well cared for and safe in their homes. Link workers visited foster carers regularly in order to discuss, and monitor how the placements were progressing. This allowed link workers to develop positive relationships with foster carers and provide prompt support if difficulties arose.

The inspection found that there were some placements where children, due to their experiences and complex histories before coming into care, displayed behaviour that challenged. Foster Care Ireland provided these foster carers with additional supports to ensure they could understand and respond in a trauma informed way to the children placed with them. This meant that children experienced placements where they were safe, cared for with affection, they were valued, accepted and supported.

As part of this inspection, inspectors visited three foster carers' homes, and met with the foster carers and children. Inspectors found these homes to be warm and nurturing environments, with space and opportunities for children to play. Inspectors observed that children presented as appropriately dressed and

appeared happy and relaxed in the home. Foster carers were observed to interact with care and affection to the children placed with them.

Where it was appropriate, and part of children's care plans, foster carers supported and facilitated children to have contact with their birth family. This included parents and extended family members, if appropriate. There were examples of foster carers including extended birth family members, such as grandparents and adult siblings in special occasions. There were a number of foster carers who provided placements for sibling groups, thus ensuring these siblings stayed living together. There were also siblings placed with different foster carers within Foster Care Ireland, and these foster carers frequently arranged to meet up to allow siblings to have time together.

The children's sense of belonging and place, both in foster carers' homes and within their community, was supported and celebrated. Foster carers celebrated significant anniversaries and milestones for the children. Foster carers supported children to get involved in a variety of activities, depending on their interests and developmental stage. These activities included swimming, scouts, football, drama, horse riding and gymnastics. Involvement in these activities not only helped children develop friendships within their communities, but also help them to develop new skills, interests and a sense of belonging. Foster carers were proactive in supporting children who were vulnerable or needed extra supports to get involved in such activities.

Children's cultural and ethnic identity was supported in their foster placements. Children were supported to participate in religious ceremonies and celebrations, and where appropriate, their birth families were included in religious celebrations. Foster carers were provided with information and training so they could support and promote children's cultural and ethnic identity.

Foster Care Ireland had systems in place to ensure that foster carers' homes were safe, had enough room for the children placed with them, and were maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. As part of the assessment to become foster carers, all foster carers' homes had health and safety checks completed so that any avoidable risks, including safeguarding risks, were identified and addressed. These assessments also ensured that children's need for privacy and space were met. This check included foster carers' vehicles to ensure legal requirements, such as tax and insurance, were met. These checks were repeated prior to all foster carer reviews. This inspection found some examples where foster carers made changes to their home, as a result of issues identified through health and safety assessments and Foster Care Ireland provided support to address issues that arose.

As part of safeguarding measures, Foster Care Ireland maintained ongoing monitoring of placements through the regular link worker visits to foster carers in their homes, which was further supported by annual unannounced visits to all foster care placements.

This inspection found that children's right to a safe and healthy environment was promoted. Inspectors visited three foster carers' homes, as part of this inspection, and found all of these homes to be warm, safe, cosy environments for children placed with them. Inspectors observed children to be happy and relaxed in these homes.

Children's privacy was respected by foster carers. This was supported through safe care plans which gave directions about privacy for children in their bedrooms and when using the bathroom, as well use of photographs and videos. Children's bedroom were a private space for children, and they could expect that people would knock before entering. There were clear directions in safe care plans about respecting children's privacy when using bathrooms, in line with their developmental abilities. Foster care Ireland's policy on internet safety included direction to foster carers of their legal duty not to disclose confidential information about children in their care. All foster carers completed basic training in internet safety which included information about maintaining private documents securely. Foster carers who spoke with inspectors showed good awareness of the importance of respecting children's privacy. This meant that children felt safe and respected in their placements.

Foster carers provided safe caring homes to the children placed with them. Health and safety checks were completed on foster carers' homes on a regular basis. Additional unannounced visits were a safeguarding measure to ensure the safety and welfare of children placed. Children were supported to maintain contact with family, including extended family, when this was in their best interests. Children had opportunities to engage in a wide range of learning, sport and community activities, dependant on their stage of development. Foster carers ensured children's day-to-day needs were met, such as ensuring they had appropriate clothing, and nutritious meals. Foster carers' homes were safe, clean, well maintained and provided adequate space and privacy for the children placed with them. For these reasons this standard was judged to be compliant.

**Judgment:** Compliant

**Standard 10: Safeguarding and child protection**

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

Foster Care Ireland ensured that foster carers and staff were knowledgeable and skilled to protect children from abuse and neglect. The service had guidance, policies and training that supported foster carers to understand their responsibilities for child protection and safeguarding such as Children First (2017) training and guidance, safe care practices, bullying, missing from care and managing difficult behavior. At the time of the inspection, no foster carers had children placed with them that were over the number as outlined under the standards. There was a range of supports available to foster carers including out-of-hours support, respite placements and therapeutic support for children and foster carers. Staff and foster carers understood their roles as mandated persons, under Children First (2017), and made reports to Tusla when appropriate. However, improvement was required to ensure the service considered their obligations under relevant safeguarding legislation to report an offence to the relevant authorities, where appropriate. Foster Care Ireland had appropriate policies and guidance in place to effectively manage any allegations made against foster carers and had provided information and training about this to staff and foster carers.

When foster carers or staff became aware of child welfare or protection concerns, these were alerted to Tusla in line with legislation and national guidance. Information submitted by Foster Care Ireland, prior to the inspection, showed that 12 child protection and welfare reports were made to Tusla in the 12 months prior to the inspection. All of these reports were closed at the time of the inspection. There had been no allegations or serious concerns made against foster carers in the 12 months prior to this inspection. A review of these records during the inspection showed that foster carers responded appropriately when children told them about experiencing abuse, prior to coming into care. Foster carers ensured both Tusla and their link worker were informed of this information without delay.

All child protection and welfare concerns were appropriately identified and reported to Tusla. The inspection found that foster carers were fulfilling their role as mandated persons and reporting to Tusla on the portal, which meant they were fulfilling their role as mandated persons. They had support from their link workers and designated liaison person (DLP), as required. In respect to Foster Care Ireland child protection and welfare policy, improvements were required to ensure consistent implementation of the child protection and welfare policy. The inspection found that there was one case that was not reported to An Garda Síochána as per Foster Care Ireland's own policy; however the management was assured that Tusla had reported the incident to An Garda Síochána and Foster Care Ireland were working closely with Tusla with regard to safeguarding for the child. On foot of this, the management took it upon themselves to complete a

review and some additional reports were submitted to An Garda Síochána. There was no risk due to the delays with these reports as children were safe, placed with foster carers in the service. Further to this, with regards to the monitoring and oversight of reports to the Gardaí, the management developed a template and standard operating procedure to ensure a more timely process for reports of this nature.

Where safeguarding risks were identified, foster carers, link workers and Tusla social workers worked together to put in place safety plans to mitigate such risks. There were three children with a safety plan in place, at the time of this inspection. A review of these records showed examples of link workers and Tusla social workers meeting jointly with children to talk about the risks and ensure they understood the safety plans that were put in place.

In the twelve months prior to this inspection, there were no allegations made against foster carers. Foster Care Ireland had appropriate policies in place to guide both staff and foster carers should allegations be made. Furthermore, both staff and foster carers had attended a briefing about changes to the Child Abuse Substantiation Procedure (CASP)<sup>2</sup>.

Foster carers with Foster Care Ireland received ongoing training, support and guidance to enable them to provide caring, safe placements for children placed in their care. All foster carers had a link social worker. The link worker's role was to provide support and supervision to foster carers. They regularly met with foster carers in their home, and these were structured meetings, with a number of areas covered including discussing any challenges for the family, whether training was completed, and what additional supports were needed. Foster Care Ireland had a policy of conducting unannounced visits to each foster carer once a year. This provided additional safeguarding assurances.

All children in foster placements had safe care plans. These plans, signed by link workers and foster carers, set out the rules of the household under headings such as use of language, dress, use of photos and videos, bedrooms as private spaces, and how to show affection. Inspectors found these safe care plans to be of high quality and were personalised to each child and foster carer's circumstances. For example where a child needed support with intimate care, the safe care plan included clear guidelines, that were tailored to the particular child and foster carer's circumstances which guided the foster carer in meeting this child's needs safely.

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<sup>2</sup> Child Abuse Substantiation Procedure (CASP) is the process that Tusla has to investigate child abuse allegations, where Tusla may need to inform a third party of potential risks to children. CASP procedure was recently reviewed and updated by Tusla.

Foster Care Ireland had a system in place to identify placements that were at risk at an early stage, in order to proactively support these placements and lessen the risk of placement breakdowns. Situations that identified placements being at risk included, where significant events happened, or difficult situations arose; for example a foster child whose behaviour was challenging, or a foster family who had experienced a significant bereavement. These placements were closely monitored at senior management level, which included reviewing supports provided and seeking updates on the placements. Examples of supports provided included, therapeutic support for the child and foster carer, respite placements and additional training. Where foster carers or the children placed with them needed additional supports, link workers arranged these supports, and resources were provided by Foster Care Ireland, as required.

Foster Care Ireland had a range of safeguarding policies and guides that supported and guided their staff and foster carers, ensuring all abided by Children First (2017) and relevant legislation. These included child safeguarding policies, complaints policy and procedures, protected disclosures policy, and placements risk assessment policy. The service had a child safeguarding statement, which was last updated in January 2026. There was also policies on how to manage bullying issues, missing from care, policy on internet safety, and absent management plans. Staff and foster carers, who spoke with inspectors, demonstrated understanding of their safeguarding obligations.

The *National Standards for Foster Care* (2003) allow for no more than two children to be placed in the same foster home at any one time, except in the case of sibling groups and these are not placed with other fostered children. At the time of this inspection, no foster carers with this service, were above the permitted number of placements in line with foster care standards. Furthermore, foster carers told inspectors that they knew they could say no to a prospective placement, should they feel it did not suit them. One foster carer spoke about how they felt support by their link worker when they said no to a possible placement.

Foster Care Ireland provided foster carers with clear guidance on what actions they need to take if a child goes missing from their care. All children placed with foster carers had an absence management plan, specific to their circumstances, which guided foster carers about what action to take if children go missing. In the twelve months prior to this inspection, there were no incidents where a child went missing from their foster placement.

Foster care Ireland provided clear guidance and support to foster carers about the appropriate way to safely manage and support children who presented with complex behaviour or behaviour that challenged. Records showed that link workers regularly discussed and supported foster carers to manage behaviour in

an appropriate and caring way. There was a strong monitoring and support system in place for these placements, which was an additional safeguarding mechanism for both foster carers and children in the placement.

Foster Care Ireland had a young person's guide to foster care. This was a comprehensive guide for children in foster care that covered a wide range of topics including, safe care such as privacy, bullying, missing from care and complaints. Foster carers undertook to review this guide with children to support them to understand it. In addition, there were events throughout the year where children and foster carers came together, and topics such as children's rights, and diversity were addressed as part of a fun activity day.

In line with Children First (2017), Foster Care Ireland had a Designated Liaison Person (DLP). The service's principal social worker held the DLP role, and when on leave, the service director covered this role. The DLP is responsible for ensuring reporting procedures within the service are followed, so that child welfare and child protection concerns are promptly referred to Tusla. The DLP also acts as a resource person for any staff member or foster carer who has child protection concerns and wants support or advice. Foster carers and staff, who spoke with inspectors, knew who held the DLP role and that they could access support from the DLP when needed.

Children's vulnerabilities were recognised and effective measures were put in place to support foster carers in keeping children safe. An example of this was where if children were allowed their own mobile phones, a safety contract was drawn up between the child, foster carers and the social work department which outlined clear rules to support the child's safe use of technology.

Foster carers and staff were knowledgeable and skilled to protect children from abuse and neglect. The service had guidance, policies and training that supported foster carers to understand their responsibilities for child protection and safeguarding. At the time of the inspection, no foster carers had over the number of children placed as outlined in the standards. As a safeguarding measure, there was a range of supports available to foster carers including out-of-hours support, respite placements, and therapeutic support for children and foster carers. Staff and foster carers understood and carried out their roles as mandated persons, under the Children First (2017). All allegations of abuse were reported to Tusla as per Children First (2017); however improvement was required to ensure information about allegations of abuse were also reported to the relevant authorities as per Foster Care Ireland's safeguarding policy. The service completed a review of all allegations and implemented procedures to make this improvement and increase oversight during the inspection. Foster Care Ireland had appropriate

policies and guidance in place should allegations be made against foster carers. For these reasons this standard was judged to be compliant.

**Judgment:** 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.

Foster Care Ireland ensured that those who applied to be foster carers underwent comprehensive assessments of their ability to provide a safe, nurturing and stable home for children who cannot live with their own families. Assessment reports were completed to a high standard and sent to the local foster care committee, where the applicants reside, with a recommendation. Children were only placed with foster carers who were approved by the foster care committees. Foster Care Ireland employed a social worker who completed the assessments in line with Tusla's *National Assessment Framework for Foster Care (2015)*, and Foster Care Irelands policies and procedures. This consistent approach to assessments resulted in consistent high quality assessment reports with clear recommendations for foster care committees. There were systems in place to allow managers to track the progress of applicants and ensure assessments were good quality and progressed within required timelines. The assessment and approval process served as a safeguarding measure, to ensure that all prospective foster carers were screened and assessed to determine their capacity and suitability to provide a safe and stable home for children placed in their care.

Data provided by the service, prior to inspection, showed that in the twelve months from 26 January 2025 to 26 January 2026, six general foster care assessments were completed. In the same time period, eight foster carer assessments were approved (two of these were assessments completed in 2024 and approved in 2025). At the time of the inspection there were four foster carer assessments ongoing. No applicants were awaiting assessments and there were no children living with foster carers who had not been approved.

As part of this inspection a sample of three foster carer records who had assessments completed and approved, were reviewed. These assessments were found to be comprehensive and good quality, in line with the assessment framework and Foster Care Ireland's own policies and guidelines for assessments. Overall, the inspection found that assessments were completed within the 16 week requirement, and where there was delay, a clear rationale for the delay, in the interest of ensuring a comprehensive assessment was recorded. Records also

showed that at all times the applicants were kept informed of any changes to the assessment timelines. Furthermore, the records reviewed showed that management had regular oversight on the progress of each assessment. This supported, the social worker in carrying out their work, the assessment process and was a quality control mechanism.

Foster Care Ireland had clear policies and procedures in place to ensure the assessment of foster carer applicants was in line with standards and regulations. These policies and procedures supported matching foster carers to the needs of children seeking placements. Foster Care Ireland followed Tusla's *National Assessment Framework for Foster Care* (2015) when carrying out assessments. Staff were supported in this work through a number of supporting policy and template documents. These included a template for recording the assessment sessions with foster care applicants which guides the assessing social worker through the required elements of the assessment framework, in line with Tusla's assessment framework. There was a foster care assessment report template, which aligned with the national assessment framework. This template supported the assessment social worker in preparing reports for the foster care committee's and ensured consistency and quality of reports.

Foster Care Irelands policy on the assessment and approval of foster carers set out in detail the actions to be taken from enquiry to completion of the assessment with the associated timelines for these actions. There was also a template assessment supervision sheet which supported oversight through supervision between the principal social worker and the social worker who conducted the assessments. Foster Care Ireland also had a contract between applicants and the agency, which outlined the expectations of both the applicants and staff during the assessment process, and inspectors saw these in the foster carer records they reviewed.

Applicants received written information about becoming a foster carer, in line with the standard. There was a comprehensive system in place that tracked the assessment process from the time foster carer applicants made an enquiry through to the presentation of the final assessment report to the foster care committee. Applicants, if they wish to proceed after a phone enquiry, are visited in their home by the recruitment staff member. This first visit is an opportunity for applicants to seek further information so they have a clear understanding of fostering and the assessment process. The recruitment staff give applicants Foster Care Irelands comprehensive application pack and talk them through it. This visit also allows the recruitment staff to gather further information about applicants in

advance of a decision being made by all parties as to whether the applicants should proceed to the assessment process. There were weekly recruitment and assessment meetings between the principal social worker, assessing social worker and recruitment officer. These meetings allowed for discussion on various issues that arose and to monitor progress of all enquiries and applicants.

Foster Care Ireland employed a social worker whose primary responsibility was to complete foster carer assessments. There were good systems of oversight and quality assurance in place for these assessments, which ensured they were in line with policy and were to a high standard. Assessments were sent to the foster care committee of the local area where the applicant resided, with recommendations. Foster carers told inspectors they got to view their assessment reports in advance of the foster care committee and were informed that they could attend the foster care committee, which some did.

There were good systems in place to ensure that all applications were in line with safeguarding regulations and standards. Applicants and all people living in the household over 16 years of age were required to undergo Garda vetting. This process was tracked to ensure it was completed.

All assessments reviewed by inspectors showed that assessments included all members of the household. The service had mechanisms for supporting children of foster carers to be involved in the assessment process, this included an information book specifically for birth children of foster carers. Inspectors also noted good quality, child-centred work completed with foster carers birth children, as part of the assessment process.

Foster carers underwent comprehensive assessments of their ability to provide a safe, nurturing and stable home for children placed in foster care. Assessment reports were completed to a high standard, shared with foster carers, and then sent to the local foster care committee, where the applicants reside, with a recommendation. Children were only placed with foster carers who were approved by the foster care committees. Assessments were completed to a high quality standard, in line with Tusla's *National Assessment Framework for Foster Care* (2015), and Foster Care Irelands policies and procedures. There were systems in place to track the progress of applicants and ensure assessments were good quality and progressed within required timelines, and when assessment were outside timelines, reasons for this were recorded. Garda vetting was completed on foster carers and all members of their household who were over 16 years old.

There were contracts for each child placed with foster carers. For all these reasons, this standard is judged to be compliant.

**Judgment:** Compliant

**Standard 17: Reviews of foster carers**

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

Foster Care Ireland ensured that foster carers took part in regular reviews of their capacity to provide high quality care to the children placed with them. Foster carers had their first review one year after a child was placed with them, and then reviews happened every three years, in line with *National Standards for Foster Care* (2003). Garda vetting was routinely updated, as part foster carer reviews, which meant vetting was in line with legislation and standards. Children, parents, Tusla social workers and all members of the foster care household, where appropriate, were consulted as part of these reviews. A review of, and plans for training and support for foster carers formed part of these reviews. Clear records were maintained of foster carer reviews and the foster care committees were updated after reviews, as required under this standard. When differences of opinion about any element of the reviews arose, an open collaborative approach was taken by the social work link workers and management in Foster Care Ireland.

Data submitted by the service, as part of the inspection preparation showed that in the twelve months prior to January 2026, nine foster carer reviews had taken place, and in the previous three years, 33 foster carer reviews were completed. Foster Care Ireland managers advised that there was one foster carer whose review had not taken place within the three years, but this review was in progress. During the inspection six foster carer review records were reviewed, including one which was overdue. Inspectors found that, in all six cases, the required information was gathered in a timely manner and there was a focus on children's experience of foster care. In five of the cases, the reviews were completed within the three year requirement under the standard. In the one overdue case, this was overdue by a few months, and there was a clear rationale for the delay. A date was set for this foster carer review to take place a few weeks after this inspection and inspectors noted that preparatory work for the review was completed. Where foster carer reviews were completed, any decisions or actions identified were followed up by link workers, and recorded in supervision and support records. Additionally, there was a monitoring system in place for all mandatory training, such as Children First to ensure foster carers remained up-to-date with such training.

In the twelve months prior to this inspection, there was no requirement for a foster carer to have an additional review. Such reviews would take place in circumstances such as an unplanned placement ending, a complaint which led to an investigation or after an investigation of an allegation of abuse.

Foster Care Ireland had an effective system in place to ensure that the relevant foster care committee received updates after each foster carer review. When situations arose where the foster carer review would not happen within the required timeframe, the foster care committee was notified.

Foster Care Ireland had policies and guidelines that supported staff and foster carers to complete good quality foster carer reviews in line with the standards. Preparatory work was undertaken by link workers for these reviews to ensure they got the views of all concerned, children, foster carers, child-in-care social workers, and parents, where appropriate, as well as other members of the foster care household. From the sample of records reviewed by inspectors, it was clear that the systems and guidelines in place were effective at ensuring good quality, comprehensive reviews, of how foster carers worked with children in their care. This included whether they had enough support and guidance, their training needs, any significant changes to their circumstances, and children's views of their placements with foster carers.

There was a clear escalation policy in place so staff knew what actions to take if there were delays in receiving reports for foster carer reviews, such as the child and family social worker report. Inspectors saw records of staff following the escalation policy when delays arose in their cases, and oversight of these escalations at management level. Foster Care Ireland had a review report template and a review minutes template, which was used by link workers to support consistent quality approach to records.

There were systems in place to ensure that all foster care reviews were scheduled to take place within the required timeframes. In situations where foster carer review dates were changed, this was monitored and clear reasons recorded about why delays happened. Link workers were notified in advance when foster carers reviews were due, giving them ample time to complete all the necessary preparations. Management maintained oversight of preparatory work for reviews to ensure they progressed in a timely fashion. Where there were risks of delays outside of this services control, escalation guidelines were followed. For example, the link worker contacted the child-in-care social worker in November 2025 to request that the child's feedback form and parents feedback be completed, with a reminder follow-up email in December 2025. A health and safety check and report

was completed with the foster carers in January 2026 and the foster carer's feedback form had been completed in February 2026.

There were systems in place to ensure all Garda vetting for foster carers, and significant adults in their families were consistently up-to-date. This was good safeguarding practice and in line with legislation and standards. As part of this inspection, the vetting tracker and a sample of foster carers' files were reviewed to confirm all Garda vetting for the foster carers and other members of the adult household were up to date.

Foster carers took part in regular, timely, and comprehensive reviews of their capacity to provide high quality safe care to the children placed with them, in line with *National Standards for Foster Care* (2003). Where there was a delay in one foster carer review, a clear rationale was recorded, and a plan was in place to complete this review. Garda vetting for foster carers, significant adults, and those over 16 years old, living in the foster carers' home, was routinely updated, as part of foster carer reviews. Clear records were maintained of foster carer's reviews and the foster care committees were updated after reviews, as required under this standard. When differences of opinion about any element of the reviews arose, an open collaborative approach was taken by the social work link workers and management in Foster Care Ireland. For these reasons this standard is judged to be 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.

Foster Care Ireland had effective structures in place for the management and monitoring of their foster care service. Clear management systems supported the delivery of a high quality, safe foster care service for children and foster carers. The structures ensured that staff roles, responsibilities, and accountability was clearly defined. Foster Care Ireland had enough resources to meet the needs of the foster carers and children who received the service. There were effective policies and procedures in place, and these were regularly reviewed and updated, when required. While there was an effective complaints policy in place, and complaints were managed effectively, there was room for improvement in how complaints were recorded. Systems were in place to monitor practice, and review performance of staff and this ensured that foster carers and children received a high quality service.

Foster Care Ireland had a management structure in place that was effective in managing and monitoring the service. Managers were experienced and competent in carrying out their responsibilities. The chief executive officer (CEO), who was also the chairperson of the consultative committee, had responsibility for governance and oversight of the service. The CEO provided oversight, support and guidance to the service director. The service director, who reported to the CEO, had responsibility for leading service operations, quality improvement, and service development. The principal social worker, who reported to the service director, was responsible for supervision, and support of the social work team (link workers and assessor), and held the role of Designated Liaison Person (DLP), as outlined earlier in this report. The principal social worker also had responsibility for oversight of recruitment of foster carers and referrals of children who needed foster placements.

The service had a consultative committee, which provided a governance and oversight function for the service. The committee provided strategic direction for the service through the review and approval of all policies, monitoring performance metrics and review of any complaints. The committee met every two months in 2025, though this was changing to quarterly meetings in light of the stability of the service. This committee had members with a wide range of experience and expertise to support the governance and oversight of the service, including people with direct experience of the care system and foster care. A review of a sample of committee meeting minutes showed that all aspects of the service was reviewed at these meetings. The management team provided the committee with comprehensive reports on areas such as risks, audits, and service data. These reports showed how the service remained compliant with standards and maintained good practice, as well as identifying and advising on the progress of any required improvements.

There were arrangements in place to ensure continuity of service for foster carers and children, when staff were on leave, and outside office hours. Cover for staff on leave was provided by other team members, the principal social worker, or if required, the service director. Foster carers commented that they found all staff, including managers, were familiar with their individual circumstances so there was consistent quality of service when cover arrangements were in place. An out-of-hours on call system was in place, which meant that foster carers had access to support 24/7. Foster carers knew how to access this support, and those who had used it reported they were satisfied with the support they received.

At the time of this inspection, the service did not have a social worker team leader role in the management structure. This was a change from the last time the service was inspected. A team leader role would typically have responsibility for line management of the social work team, would report to, and support the

principal social worker. Some in management had identified the need for a social worker team leader to strengthen support and supervision of the social work team, particularly in the context of cover when any of the team are on leave, as well as to allow for the principal social worker to have more time to focus on other quality improvements and service development responsibilities.

All staff had clearly defined roles and areas of responsibility. The service had effective systems in place to monitor, supervise and support staff in their work. In addition to the management team, the service comprised of three administrative staff; administration manager, fostering recruitment adviser and fostering administrator. There were five social workers, all who had the role of link worker, and two also had responsibility as a therapeutic lead and an assessor of perspective foster carers. Staff received regular supervision, in line with the service policy. A review of a sample of four staff supervision records showed that supervision ensured staff received regular support, guidance and oversight of their work.

There were a number of effective quality assurance systems and oversight systems in place to monitor the quality and effectiveness of the service. These systems ensured that the needs of children and foster carers were responded to in a timely and appropriate way. These systems also ensured that safeguarding measures, such as Garda vetting and unannounced visits were adhered to. Information gathered through these processes was used to identify areas of good practice and opportunities for improvement. As part of the service plan, a programme of audits was completed during 2025, and where service improvement were identified, action was taken. An example of this was where an audit of foster carer support and supervision records identified the need to improve record keeping. Actions taken to address this included, amendments to the supervision and support template used for recording, and staff completed a workshop on record keeping. At the time of the inspection, inspectors found these records to be of good quality. At the time of this inspection, the 2026 service plan was being finalised.

The inspection found that Foster Care Ireland had effective risk management systems in place to identify and mitigate a wide range of risks. The services risk register categorised risks across seven types, including operational, strategic, finance and compliance. All risks had actions identified to mitigate risks and the register was reviewed regularly. Safeguarding practice was one of the risks identified and detailed actions were in place to mitigate such as, safeguarding processes, training and audits, which this inspection found was up-to-date.

The service had comprehensive systems of tracking various data to ensure the delivery of an ongoing safe service for children, and compliance with standards.

This included a system of tracking when Garda vetting for staff, foster carers and other adult members of foster care households needed to be renewed, as well as when mandatory training such as Children First required renewal. This inspection found these systems were effective and all vetting and mandatory training was up-to-date. The service had monitoring and escalation systems in place to ensure children's documents such as care and placement plans were received from Tusla. Having these systems in place showed that the service was committed to ensuring children and foster carers experience a safe service, committed to ongoing quality improvements. It further supported a culture within the service of accountability, learning and quality assurance.

Foster Care Ireland had service level agreements in place with Tusla, which included reporting and oversight arrangements. Foster Care Ireland managers regularly met with each of the Tusla areas they provided foster care services for, and provided quarterly reports to Tusla. These meetings were used to review individual placements, identify any safeguarding issues and agree actions to address these issues. There were also meetings twice a year with a senior Tusla manager as part of Tusla's governance of private fostering agencies. Records of these meetings showed good discussion about how placements were progressing, and who had responsibility for any follow up actions.

There were systems in place to ensure placements only happened after effective matching process, and with full agreement of the perspective foster carers. This ensured that Foster Care Ireland had no foster carers who had children placed with them over numbers allowed under the standards. Foster carers understood they could say no to a placement if they believed it would not work for them.

Foster care Ireland had sufficient resources in place to support all the foster carers and children placed within the service. All foster carers had link workers and there were contingency plans in place to ensure ongoing support and supervision if link workers were on leave. Both staff and foster carers spoke about how the service director and principle social worker were proactive in supporting them, and were familiar with all of the foster carers and children. Staff told inspectors they felt their caseloads were manageable, allowing them to provide an effective service to the foster carers they were assigned to, as well as the children in these placements.

While the service had comprehensive complaints policies and procedures in place, there was room for improving how complaints were recorded. The service had a clear complaints policy and procedure that guided anyone who wished to make a complaint on any aspect of the service. There was also a protected disclosures policy and procedure in place for staff, and staff reported they were familiar with this. Additionally, the service had complaints policy and guidelines for children,

which both foster carers and link workers explained to children at regular intervals. At the time of the inspection, the service reported that there had been no complaints made about the service in the previous 12 months. However, there was one complaint raised and recorded as 'negative feedback', rather than a complaint. Management advised this was in line with the wishes of the complainant who did not want to formalise the complaint. This complaint was managed and resolved in line with level one of the complaints policy, and clear records were kept. There was an acknowledgement from the service director that it would be more useful to categorise such issues as complaints, which can serve as opportunities for learning and reflection for the service.

The service kept comprehensive register of all children placed with the service, as well as register of all foster carers. There was effective systems in place to ensure this register remained up-to-date. There was a secure information system in place to maintain all records of the work completed with foster carers and children by the service.

Foster Care Ireland had a range of policies, procedures and guidelines that provided clear direction to staff and foster carers and underpinned safe and consistent practice across the service. The services policies, procedures and guidelines for the delivery of foster care services were aligned to relevant legislation, regulations and national standards. The service's child protection and welfare policy was comprehensive and gave clear direction to both staff and foster carers about their responsibilities to protect children. This policy also detailed a range of other policies and procedures that supported safeguarding within the service. These policies and procedures included unannounced visits policy, internet safety, significant events and risk assessment of placements. As outlined earlier in this report, inspectors noted how these policies were adhered to and both staff and foster carers had clear understanding of their responsibilities. Policy, guidance and procedures were reviewed and updated regularly with oversight from the consultative committee.

Good communication and oversight was supported through a series of meetings in the service. There were consultative committee meetings, management meetings, staff team meetings and meetings with staff responsible for recruitment and assessments. A review of minutes of these meetings showed that they provided ongoing oversight and monitoring of the service, as well as a means for reviewing and updating staff on changes and learning. Meeting minutes showed clear set agendas and records of decisions and actions made as well as tracking of actions.

There were systems in place to ensure placements only happened after assessment of matching and with full agreement of the perspective foster carers.

These systems also ensured that no foster carers had children placed with them over numbers allowed under the standards.

There were effective structures in place for the governance and management of Foster Care Ireland, which meant children and foster carers received a high quality safe foster care service. There was effective oversight of the identification and management of risk and clear mitigations in place to manage risks in the service. Staff and management roles, responsibilities and accountability were clear and well monitored. There was enough resources to meet the needs of the foster carers and children who received the service. There were effective up-to-date policies and procedures in place. While there was an effective complaints policy in place, there was a need to improve how complaints were recorded which was acknowledged by management. Systems were in place to monitor practice, and review performance of staff and this ensured that foster carers and children received a safe high quality service. For these reasons this standard is judged to be compliant.

**Judgment:** Compliant

Appendix 1:

National Standards for Foster Care (2003)  
and

Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>3</sup> Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations, 1995

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