



**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:	Fostering First Ireland
Type of inspection:	Focused
Date of inspection:	24 – 27 November 2025
Lead inspector:	Adekunle Oladejo
Support inspector(s):	Grace Lynam Catherine Linehan Nicola Rossiter
Fieldwork ID	MON-0048564

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)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* (2003) and advises the Minister and the Child and Family Agency.

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

This inspection was a monitoring inspection of Fostering First Ireland (FFI) to monitor compliance with the National Standards for Foster Care, with a focus on the 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 Fostering First Ireland, children and foster carers. Inspectors observed practices and reviewed documentation such as foster carers' 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 company
 - the quality and learning manager of the company
 - the placement and marketing manager
 - two child in care social workers
- focus groups with:
 - two principal social workers, one was the designated liaison person²
 - four team managers
 - nine link social workers
 - nine foster carers
 - five children placed in foster care
- observations of a:
 - core group meeting³
 - foster care support group meeting
 - foster carer review meeting
- the review of:
 - policies and procedures, minutes of various meetings, staff supervision files, audits and service plans

² Person responsible for ensuring that reporting procedures within an organisation are followed, so that child welfare and protection concerns are referred promptly to Tusla.

³ Refers to an interagency group jointly responsible for implementing and reviewing plans and interventions for children including monitoring of risks and progress.

- a sample of 25 foster carer files
- a sample of five supervision files

- conversations or visits with:
 - a sample of three children and eleven foster carers.

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.

Fostering First Ireland (FFI) is an independent fostering agency founded in 2005 and celebrating twenty years in the provision of high quality fostering services and adjunct services. Fostering First Ireland is part of the Key Assets Group, an international provider of children and family social services that operates in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Northern Europe.

Fostering First Ireland's key activity areas are to recruit, assess and provide wrap around support to foster carers across a range of fostering services. These offerings include short-term, bridging, respite, general, enhanced, bespoke foster care placements, supported lodgings and aftercare placements. Referrals are received from each of the 17 Tusla areas and young people are then matched with foster carers based on their identified needs. Foster carer households are located across every county in Ireland. The approval of foster carers rests with Tusla through local Foster Care Committees (FCC)⁴.

The FFI multidisciplinary team (MDT) service provides a wide range of assessments to children and adults for both Tusla and the Health Service Executive (HSE). These include child psychological assessments, parenting capacity assessments, disability assessments, multidisciplinary assessments and assessments of need. Fostering First

⁴ A foster care committee is a prescribed group that meets to make recommendations regarding foster care applications and to approve long-term placements.

Ireland's social work assessment service is also commissioned by several Tusla areas to undertake section 36 assessments⁵ and foster carer reviews.

Fostering First Ireland is led by a CEO who reports to the chairman of the Key Assets Group. The senior leadership team comprises of a principal social worker for practice and compliance, a principal social worker for approvals and placements, a business support manager and MDT service director. The financial controller and quality and learning manager also report directly to the CEO.

The principal social worker for practice and compliance line manages the three social work teams, children's services and therapy service. The principal social worker for carer approvals and placements has responsibility for the placement team, foster carer recruitment, and foster carer approvals and reviews including the external social work assessment service. Fostering First Ireland has a reputation for the provision of well supported family placements. The company's ethos is based on the principle that 'every child deserves to grow up in a safe and loving home'. The company take pride in ensuring that children are happy and afforded opportunities in care to thrive emotionally, socially and academically.

Fostering First Ireland's strategic plan 2025-2027 identifies the company vision 'to be a leading trauma-informed organisation which fosters respect, belonging, and acceptance. Recognising the harmful impact of trauma on the health and well-being of children, families, and communities, our commitment is to create safe, inclusive environments to build resilience and promote healing and growth.'

Data provided by FFI prior to the inspection showed that the service had 136 foster care households and, at the time of inspection, they provided foster care placements for 186 children. These foster care households were located in various geographical areas in Ireland. There were four vacant foster care placements at the time of the inspection and these could take six children. Seven households exceeded the *National Standards for Foster Care (2003)*⁶ and there were 22 children in those placements. Forty-one child protection and welfare concern notifications were made about children in foster care in the previous 12 months and none were opened at the time of the inspection. There were seven allegations and nine serious concerns against foster carers during the same period, three allegations and three concerns were opened at the time of the inspection. No concern or allegation had been upheld in the previous 12 months, while one serious concern had been notified to the foster care committee during this period.

⁵ Assessment to determine if a family member can provide care for the child.

⁶ Standard 10.6- outlines that generally no more than two children are 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. The foster care committee must approve any departure from this practice in advance of the placement.

There were 13 general foster care assessments completed in the 12 months prior to the inspection and all were approved. Seven general foster carers were undergoing assessments at the time of the inspection and one foster carer had transferred into the service. In addition, 42 foster carer reviews had taken place in the previous 12 months and four additional reviews were held.

Placements with FFI 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. Fostering First Ireland was last audited by the Tusla Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service (ACIMS) in April 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
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:

Date	Times of inspection	Inspector name	Role
24 November 2025	09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 10:30hrs to 17:30hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs	Adekunle Oladejo Grace Lynam Catherine Linehan Nicola Rossiter	Lead Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector
25 November 2025	09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 18:00hrs	Adekunle Oladejo Grace Lynam Catherine Linehan Nicola Rossiter	Lead Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector
26 November 2025	09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 08:30hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 15:30hrs 09:00hrs to 17:30hrs	Adekunle Oladejo Grace Lynam Catherine Linehan Nicola Rossiter	Lead Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector
27 November 2025 (Remote)	09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs 09:00hrs to 17:00hrs	Adekunle Oladejo Grace Lynam Catherine Linehan Nicola Rossiter	Lead Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector Support Inspector

Children's experience of the service

Children's experiences were established through speaking with a sample of eight children, 20 foster carers, and 20 professionals. The review of 25 foster carer case files, five staff supervision files, complaints, feedback and observation of the service activities relevant to the scope of the inspection also provided evidence on the experience of children in foster care with Fostering First Ireland.

From what inspectors were told by the children, their foster carers, staff and other professionals, in addition to the records reviewed and what inspectors observed, it was clear that FFI promoted children's rights and safety at every level. Children placed with FFI were placed with committed foster carers who were valued and effectively supported to ensure that children's safety needs were met and that their welfare was protected and promoted. Foster carers and staff were knowledgeable about how to recognise and respond to children's safeguarding needs.

All foster carers, children and professionals who spoke with inspectors expressed positive views about the service provided by FFI. Children said that they felt safe and that they were happy in their foster care homes. They told inspectors that their views were regularly sought and that they were facilitated and supported to engage in day-to-day activities that were important to them, such as contact with families and friends. Children spoke to inspectors about their hobbies and interests and said that they had the opportunity to pursue these.

All children seen by inspectors presented very happy and content in their placement. They were open and chatty and presented as well cared for. Foster carer's homes visited by inspectors were welcoming and homely with a happy atmosphere and relaxing interaction observed between children and their foster carers. Further comments made by the children included:

- "I like it here"
- "the food is the best thing"
- "foster mum is always here for us"
- "I stayed with a friend for the weekend"

All foster carers spoke highly of the staff, in particular their link social workers. They said that they were supported by their link social workers to maintain good quality and safe placements for the children in their care, to a high standard. Some foster carers described the provider as 'amazing' and 'fabulous'. One foster carer stated that the provider "goes out of their way" to meet the children's needs and another added that "all the staff are very committed, we are like a team". This demonstrated that children benefitted from foster carers who were well supported. All foster carers spoken with said that they had a link social worker who were very accessible and that they were visited and contacted by their link social worker regularly. Foster carers described their link social workers in positive terms such as 'brilliant' and 'very supportive'. One foster carer commented that their link social worker "knows me well" and another one said that their link social worker "knows so much, it feels like she is living in our house". They said that they could talk to their link social workers about any worries or concerns with regard their role as foster carers, and they were confident that their link workers would do their best and provide necessary support. One foster carer said that "FFI have plugged the gaps which makes our jobs much easier". This showed the service's commitment to meeting children needs.

All foster carers told inspectors that they were aware of who to contact outside of the working hour and found this beneficial. They also spoke positively of the foster carer support group and they all stated that they had attended this and met other foster cares which they all found helpful. One foster carer said that "it is useful to have a safe space to share fostering experience with other foster carers". All foster carers expressed positive views about their access to training to support them in their fostering role and in meeting the care and support needs of the children, including their safety needs. Foster carers said that their learning and development needs were supported by their link social worker who explored this with them on an ongoing basis and ensure that they had a good understanding of the child's needs and required skills to effectively meet them.

All foster carers told inspectors that they participated in a comprehensive assessment of their ability to carry out the fostering task, prior to their approval and the placement of a child. A foster carer described their assessment as "very, very thorough" and said that the assessment "left no stone unturned" and that it "went through everything" because "it is for the safety of the children". Similarly, foster carer's views about the reviews of their continuing capacity to provide safe and high quality care to children was very positive. They told inspectors that FFI was a learning organisation that was always looking to improve. They stated that agreed actions or learning needs arising from their reviews were promptly implemented without delay. They stated that FFI regularly sought their feedback about the service improvement. Comprehensive assessment and reviews of foster carers in FFI contributed to a safe and effective service for children.

Professionals who spoke with inspectors reported that they were very happy with FFI as a service. They stated that children were placed in a safe and nurturing environment and that there were adequate arrangements in place for a partnership approach that supported the effective safeguarding of children. All professionals said that link social workers and foster carers advocated on behalf of children and that staff and managers within FFI were always available and accessible. One professional said that “FFI go above and beyond to support children’s placement in foster care”.

Overall, records reviewed by inspectors demonstrated that children were provided with rights-based, high quality and child-centred service that meets their safety needs. Safeguarding policies and practices respected children’s rights and promoted their welfare. Staff and foster carers recognised their role as advocates for the children and understood their legal obligations as mandated persons in line with *Children First: National Guidance on the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2017)⁷. The provider recognised and ensured that children’s placements were informed by the foster carers’ capacity to meet the child’s assessed need, including safeguarding needs. Foster carers were assessed and approved and their continuous capacity was regularly reviewed in line with standards and regulations.

Summary of inspection findings

As previously noted in this report, placements with Fostering First 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 monitoring inspection, which looked at how the provider ensures that foster carers provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for children in foster care. The inspection also focused on the assessment of foster carers’ ability to provide care and meet children’s need, including their approval to become a foster carer. It looked at the reviews of foster carers’ continuing capacity to provide high-quality care and also assessed how

⁷ National policy document which assists people in identifying and reporting child abuse.

children were protected and safeguarded from abuse. In addition, the inspection looked at the governance and management structures in place to support the delivery of a consistently high quality, safe foster care service.

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

- five standards were compliant

Fostering First Ireland recognises children's rights to safety and aim to place all children in nurturing households with foster carers who have the capacity to keep them safe and healthy. Health and safety checks were carried out on foster care households as part of their assessment to become a foster carer, including that of their vehicles to ensure all legal requirements were met. These were repeated during the foster carers' reviews. The provider had developed a guidance for foster carers to ensure that the placement was safe to care for children. In addition to this, they had put measures in place for the ongoing monitoring of the accommodation to ensure that they were safe, adequate, maintained to a good standard and reflected the children's need for privacy.

The provider ensured that children were cared for with affection, and that they were valued and accepted. Children's rights and diversity were respected and their welfare was promoted. Children's developmental needs were met and they were supported with their emotional wellbeing and their educational needs. Adequate considerations were given to their personal preferences, cultural, ethnic and religious and dietary needs. Contact with families and friends were supported and promoted, as appropriate.

Appropriate considerations were given to the suitability of the foster care home to meet the needs of children being placed through a thorough matching process. However, health and safety check of foster care homes did not reflect particular considerations for children with disabilities with regards the foster care home environment. Notwithstanding, this inspection found no impact of this on children as the needs of children with disabilities were consider within the matching process.

Fostering First Ireland had effective policies and guidance in place to keep children safe and protect them from all forms of abuse. Child protection and welfare (CPW) concerns, serious concerns and allegations against foster carers were managed appropriately, and in a timely manner. Staff and foster carers worked collaboratively with the child's allocated social worker to ensure that safeguarding concerns received appropriate response and that the safety and the welfare of children was paramount. Staff and foster carers had received mandatory training in Children First (2017) and they made joint report to Tusla in line with the

provider's policy and national guidance. Staff and foster carers understood their role as mandated person under Children First Act (2015). While staff and foster carers reported allegations of abuse to Tusla as per Children First (2017), the requirement to report certain concerns in respect to allegations of abuse to An Garda Síochána, as outlined in the provider's policy was not consistently implemented. During the inspection the CEO reviewed this and all relevant reports were made to An Garda Síochána as required. No child in the service was impacted as a result of this as FFI had attended strategy meetings as required, and were assured that Tusla would make the relevant notifications to An Garda Síochána.

Fostering First Ireland had a comprehensive written policy on the assessment and approval of foster carers with associated guidance that supported the implementation of the policy. All foster carers participated in a thorough and comprehensive assessment of their ability to provide a safe and caring home for children. This also included a comprehensive assessment of their capacity to meet the needs of children, including their safeguarding needs. The provider had effective systems of oversight in place to ensure that assessments were robust and of good quality. All Foster carers were approved by the foster care committee (FCC) of the local area where they resided. Assessments and approval of foster carers were conducted in line with regulations and standards. Appropriate checks were completed and foster carers were formally approved by the FCC prior to the placement of children. There were written contracts for children placed with foster carers.

Foster carers participated in regular reviews of their continuing capacity to provide high quality care. Reviews were completed in line with timeframe set out in the national standard and they were comprehensive and good quality. Additional reviews were held following concerns. Recommendations following foster carers' reviews were implemented to promote better outcomes for children. Outside of the formal review cycle, appropriate arrangements were in place to monitor the performance of foster carer and ensure their continuous capacity to provide safe and consistent care to children. Although, two foster carers' reviews were overdue at the time of the inspection, clear rationales were recorded for the delay, which were outside the control of the provider.

There were governance structures in place for the management, monitoring and delivery of a high quality foster care service. Governance systems included responsive quality assurance and service improvement frameworks to monitor performance, assess the quality of the service and evaluated compliance with policies and national standards. These included a continuous cycle of audit, planning, evaluation and service improvement actions. Foster carers and children's feedback were also taken into account to inform service planning and delivery.

There were effective risk management systems in place which supported FFI in providing a safe foster care service. Fostering First Ireland had a suite of policies and procedures that guided staff practices. Staff received effective supervision in line with the provider's policy. The service was adequately resourced, well-led and had clear lines of accountabilities and responsibilities.

Standard 9: A safe and positive environment

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

Children were placed with foster carers that keep them safe and healthy. They were cared for with affection and FFI ensured that children placed with their foster carers were valued, accepted and supported. The provider promoted children's rights to live in a safe and nurturing home that protected their welfare and ensured that their developmental needs were appropriately met and their personal preferences were considered and provided for.

There were systems in place to ensure that foster care homes were safe, well maintained and adequate for the number of people living there. Data provided prior to the inspection showed that a health and safety check had been completed in 56 households in the previous 12 month. Fostering First Ireland completed a health and safety check of the foster carer's home as part of their assessment to become a foster carer, including their vehicles to ensure all legal requirements were met. This was to establish that the foster carer's home and their immediate environments were free of avoidable hazards that might expose children to risk of injury or harm and that children needs for privacy and space were met. This check was repeated during the foster carers' reviews. There were appropriate arrangements in place for the ongoing monitoring of the foster home such as link social worker supervision visits and unannounced visits to ensure they were safe. Where concerns emerged around the foster care home, they were addressed appropriately, in a timely and supportive manner.

Fostering First Ireland demonstrated a good understanding of their role in ensuring that children were provided with a safe, healthy and nurturing home. The provider had developed a guidance for foster carers to ensure that the foster placement was safe for the children in their care. This guidance outlined the requirements, minimum standards and expectations of good practice for foster carers with regards their home including holiday homes and homes abroad, the garden, car, household pets and the requirement for first aid kits. The guidance also informed the health and safety checks and pet questionnaires that were completed as part of the foster carers assessment and review process. This inspection found that foster carers adhered to this guidance and safety requirements were generally complied with.

The inspection found that Fostering First Ireland ensured that staff and foster carers were appropriately skilled and had a good understanding of children's needs. Staff and foster carers received training appropriate to their role, and these were reflected in many areas of practice. Foster carers received training in the providers therapeutic model of care that recognised children past histories and focused on building safe caregivers relationship. In addition to the mandatory training in areas relevant to safeguarding, such as health and safety awareness, online safety and first aid. Bespoke training were also provided to foster carers to enable them to meet the complex or additional needs of children, as required. Staff attended joint training with foster carers in the area of life story work and attachment to support shared understanding of children's need and this ensured a consistent approach to meeting these needs.

While the suitability of the foster care homes was formally considered as part of their assessment and reviews, and the appropriateness of placements to meeting the individual needs of children was considered in the context of the matching process, the health and safety check of foster care homes reviewed by inspectors did not reflect particular considerations for children with disabilities with regard the foster care home environment. However, there was no impact of this on children found during the inspection.

Foster carers provided a stimulating environment and opportunities for play and learning for children. Children seen by inspectors during visits to foster carer's homes presented in appropriate clothing and were observed engaging in different activities such as homework and playing of musical instruments. Children's rights and diversity were respected with appropriate consideration given to personal preferences, cultural, ethnic and religious, including special dietary requirements.

Children were supported to live a healthy and happy life. Staff and foster carers were strong advocates for children to ensure their needs were effectively met. They worked collaboratively with children's allocated workers and other professionals on an ongoing basis. When there were safeguarding concerns, FFI ensured that these were addressed in a child-centred manner and provided additional support to children, in line with their assessed needs in order to promote placement stability and better outcome for children.

Fostering First Ireland had measures in place to ensure that children's developmental needs were met. These were achieved through the promotion of a consistent and nurturing relationship between foster carers and children that was underpinned by a trauma-informed approach. Further to this, there were a range of tailored supports across different domains such as an education officer who supported children with their educational needs and therapeutic support for children and foster carer's emotional wellbeing, as required.

The provider, together with the foster carers, aimed to ensure that children were supported to maintain family links, friendships and interests and to develop new relationships, as appropriate. Foster carers told inspectors that they regularly facilitated the children's contact with their families and friends. Some children who spoke with inspectors said that they had access with their families and that they had opportunities to develop social peer groups and friendships, including spending time with their peers.

Overall, FFI ensured that children were placed in foster carers' homes that were safe and provided nurturing environment and opportunities for play and learning. Health and safety checks of the foster carer's home and their vehicles were completed and appropriate arrangements were in place for the ongoing monitoring of the foster home, including supervision and unannounced visits. Children were valued, supported and their rights including the needs for privacy and space were respected in their foster care home. Children were supported to maintain links with their friends and families, when appropriate. Individualised care was provided by foster carers that took account of children's personal preferences, cultural, ethnic, religious and dietary requirements. It is for these reasons that this standard is 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.

Fostering First Ireland had ensured that child protection and welfare (CPW) concerns, including serious concerns and allegations against foster carers were addressed in a timely manner. Staff and foster carers worked collaboratively with the child and family agency (Tusla) to ensure that safeguarding concerns received an appropriate response and that the safety and wellbeing of children was central to all decisions made. Staff and foster carers had received mandatory training in Children First (2017) and made joint report to Tusla, as appropriate. They understood their role as mandated person under Children First Act (2015). The provider had a suite of safeguarding policies and relevant guidance which set out how staff and foster carers worked together to promote the safety and welfare of children.

Data submitted prior to the inspection showed that 41 child protection and welfare concern reports were made in the 12 months prior to the inspection; none of these allegations were opened at the time of the inspection. There were seven allegations and nine serious concerns against foster carers during the same period, three allegations and three concerns were open at the time of the

inspection. No concern or allegation had been upheld in the previous 12 months and one additional foster carers' review had been held following serious concern.

Inspectors reviewed a sample of nine concerns, including CPW, serious concerns and allegations against foster carers and found that there were effective systems in place to ensure that concerns and allegations were identified, reported, recorded, and effectively managed and tracked until a final outcome was reached. The inspection found that when allegations were made against a foster carer, they were informed as appropriate in writing of the concerns and the actions being taken to address them.

There was evidence of good communication and collaboration between FFI and the children's allocated social worker and joint home visits were completed as necessary. FFI supported the foster carer when allegations were made against them, this support was provided during the assessment process and external support was readily available, as required. Furthermore, an additional foster carer review was held following a serious concern; this reflected appropriate actions to prevent further occurrence which were promptly implemented and FCC was notified.

Managers had a good oversight of all concerns. Planning or strategy meetings were held to review information and discuss pathways for the management of concerns and decide the next step, including the consideration and referral of concerns to the child abuse substantiation procedure (CASP). While discussions were held during planning and strategy meetings with regard to notifications to the Gardaí of suspected child abuse; documents reviewed outlined that the child in care allocated social worker was tasked with this reporting responsibility and safeguarding measures were put in place for the child. However, FFI staff were not consistently implementing their policy in relation to reporting child protection and welfare concerns to the Gardaí, as required. Managers told inspectors that such notification were made by the child's social worker and there was no impact on the child as a result, as safeguarding measures were put in place at all time. As noted previously in this report, all reports in relation to allegations of abuse that met the threshold were reported to An Garda Síochána during this inspection.

Fostering First Ireland had a suite of safeguarding policies and guidance in place to support implementation of Children First (2017) and relevant legislations, including for the management of concerns that did not meet the threshold of mandatory reporting to Tusla. These included incident management policy, safe caring policy and procedure, complaints policy and procedure, whistleblowing policy and procedure, guidance on protecting children from bullying, policy for the management of allegations against foster carers under CASP, and child protection and welfare (CPW) policy. These policies and procedures adhered to international

human rights instruments, regulations, national policy and evidence-based guidelines. For the most part, staff practice demonstrated adherence to these. Policies and guidance documents were up-to-date and supported staff and foster carers in the delivery of a safe and quality care to children. For example, the CPW policy and the policy that underpinned the management of allegation against foster carers under CASP clearly set out areas of responsibilities across all levels, including foster carers with regards the management of concerns and provided guidance for the reporting of concerns to Tusla. This meant that reporting procedures were clear for both staff and foster carers.

The provider had appointed a PSW as the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in accordance with Children First (2017). The inspection found that the DLP was fulfilling their responsibilities which included ensuring that concerns were reported to Tusla and that appropriate records were kept of any concerns. Fostering First Ireland had a child safeguarding statement that had been developed in line with the requirements of relevant legislation and national policies. The statement demonstrated FFI commitment to safeguard children from harm, it placed children rights to safety at the core of the service and reflected the best interest of the child as the paramount concern. The statement was reviewed in July 2025 and contained all required information and a comprehensive risk assessment that clearly outlined areas of risk and the list of procedures in place to manage these.

Fostering First Ireland had good safeguarding practices in place that aligned with the provider's and national policies. Information and the background history of children were appropriately shared with foster carer prior to their placement. Link social workers made regular visits to foster carer's homes and it was evident that children were seen during some of these visits. Staff and foster carers who spoke with inspectors demonstrated a commitment to the safeguarding and protection of children. All foster carers had up-to-date mandatory training in Children First and they were knowledgeable about their responsibility as mandated persons in reporting child protection concerns. Foster carers were supported at the start of their fostering journey to develop a family safe care plan for their household.

Family safe care plan recognised safe caring as a key element in promoting children's welfare, and in reducing the risk of caring practices that might lead to mistaken allegations against foster carers. Foster carers were also provided with mandatory training in safe care and information on safe caring. The family safe care plan was reviewed at foster carers' reviews and annually during the foster carers' overview meeting or when there was a new placement of a child as required. Further to this, in order to ensure that foster carers were meeting their responsibilities, one unannounced visit a year was conducted by a member of the management team and link social workers to the foster carer's home.

In addition, all children placed with FFI foster carers had a safety plan developed between their foster carers, the link social worker and the child's social worker. This plan set out the appropriate actions needed to keep children safe. It integrated the family safe care plan and any additional safeguarding concerns such as the children's vulnerabilities and included any special consideration such as the management of missing incident. Person responsible for implementing actions was identified and timeframes were clearly set out. Children safety plan were monitored, reviewed and updated regularly.

Children's vulnerabilities were recognised and effective measures were in place to support foster carers and promote children's safety. Foster carers were provided with mandatory training in a trauma-informed therapeutic approach, including guidance on the appropriate use of sanction. This strengthened their understanding of children's need and help children feel safe, regulate emotions and build trust. Children were provided with information to support them in developing the knowledge, self-awareness, understanding and skills for self-care and protection including their rights, taking into consideration their age and stage of development.

Foster carers and link workers responded appropriately to significant events regarding children and ensured that the allocated child in care social workers was kept informed. Absence management plans were present in the sample of files reviewed. There was one episode of children missing from care, this was reviewed by inspectors and it was found to be effectively managed, in line with the agreed protocol. Similarly, complaints made by either the children or relevant others such as foster carers were appropriately managed, in line with the provider's policy.

Data provided for the inspection showed that seven households exceeded the national standards. Inspectors reviewed a sample of two of these households and found that the capacity of the foster carers to care for additional children was appropriately taken into account and an assessment was completed that considered risks and matching suitability for the proposed placement. In one of the two cases reviewed for this purpose, the foster care committee was informed and had approved the placement of the additional child prior to the placement. Approval was sought shortly after the placement in the other case. Foster carers told inspectors that they were aware of their right to refuse a placement.

Fostering First Ireland placed a strong emphasis on promoting the link between foster carers and the national organisation that provides supports and advocacy for foster carers. All foster carers who spoke with inspectors were aware of the counselling service that they could avail of if required. There were effective measures in place to ensure that foster carers had access to respite care, counselling and out-of-hours service.

Overall, FFI had effective policies and guidance in place to keep children safe and protect them from all forms of abuse. Guidance and training were provided to foster carers to enhance their knowledge of the children's need and to support them in caring for children in a trauma-informed manner that recognised their individual vulnerabilities. Overall, child protection and welfare concerns, allegations and serious concerns were managed well. However, ongoing oversight of reporting of allegations of abuse that meet the threshold to the relevant authorities as per legislative requirements and the provider's policy, is to be monitored. Link social workers provided a high level of support to foster carers with respect to allegations of abuse, concerns and complaints. Further to this all staff and foster carers were trained in Children First and they were clear on their role as mandated persons. It is for these reasons that this standard was deemed 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.

Fostering First Ireland ensured that fostering applicants were subjected to, and participated in a thorough and comprehensive assessment of their ability to provide a safe and caring home for children. Fostering First Ireland had a comprehensive written policy on the assessment and approval of foster carers with associated practice guidance that supported the implementation of the policy. This aligned with Tusla's *National Assessment Framework for Foster Care* (2015). The policy objective was the assessments of the ability of foster care applicants to carry out the fostering task and included a detailed exploration of the applicant's personal history, experience, skills and ability to meet the needs of children, including safeguarding needs, within the context of the wider household and support networks. Assessments were carried out by independent social workers on behalf of FFI. There were effective systems of oversight and quality assurance mechanisms in place to ensure that assessments were robust before they were sent out to the foster care committee (FCC) of the local area where the applicant resided, with recommendation.

Data provided by FFI showed that 13 general foster care assessments were completed in the 12 months prior to this inspection and all were approved. At the time of the inspection, seven general foster carers were undergoing assessments. There were no applicant waiting for assessment or assessment waiting to go to the FCC. Inspectors reviewed a sample of four assessments that had been

approved in the last 12 months and found them to be highly comprehensive and good quality. Foster care applicants participated in the assessments of their suitability to become a foster carers. The assessments provided a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the foster carer's ability to provide foster care and included key areas such a previous history, training needs, employment, education and their motivation for fostering.

The inspection found that Fostering First Ireland ensured that foster care applicants received written information and a clear explanation of the assessment process, in line with the national standard. These included the criteria against which they would be assessed and available support. The assessing social worker completed a number of visits to the foster carer applicant's home. Assessments included the applicant's household, all family members including children, in accordance with their age, stage of development and individual needs. These assessments included interviews with the applicants, their family members, their referees and other relevant parties. In addition to these, a number of checks were undertaken on each applicant and relevant members of their household. All prospective foster care in FFI attended a pre-approval training to provide them and their families with information about what they could expect from fostering and what FFI expected of foster carers.

Overall, practice with regard foster carer assessments reflected a strong compliance with the requirements of the regulations and standards and commitments to keep children safe. There were evidence of checks on all files reviewed. These were child protection area checks and garda vetting completed for all adults living in, or with significant unsupervised access to the foster carer's homes, checks with relevant authorities in other countries where the applicants had previously lived, health and safety check, two references, medical assessment and pet questionnaire in relation to controlled breed of dog. In addition, comprehensive risk assessments were completed in relation to the foster carer's identified support person who was willing and able to provide practical as well as other support to the carer. This meant that children were placed with foster carers who had been assessed as having the necessary qualities and competencies to provide safe and high quality care and who were best suited to meet their individual needs.

There were appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure that the progress of the assessment was regularly discussed with the applicants. A midway meeting was held between the applicants, the assessing social worker and the assessment supervisor. The purpose of this meeting was to provide feedback to the applicants about how the application was progressing and to explore any issues arising with plans agreed to address these. Assessments were completed within the specified 16 weeks of formal application in all but one of the four files reviewed, there were

clear rationales for the delay in the remaining one and the applicant was informed of the reason. Fostering First Ireland had a robust policy in place that detailed the procedures to be followed for foster carers transferring from another service. There had been one transfer from another service in the previous 12 months prior to this inspection and this was managed effectively.

Effective systems were in place to provide oversight of the assessment process. The assessment supervisor maintained an oversight of all foster carer assessments and supervised the assessor to ensure that the assessments were thorough and of good quality. The PSW for the recruitment and assessment team reviewed assessment reports to ensure that they were comprehensive and ready to be sent to the foster care committee. The recruitment and assessment team meetings were held every two weeks where assessments and approval were discussed in detail. In addition, a sample of monthly business meeting record reviewed by inspectors demonstrated additional oversight of the assessment process including the monitoring of the stage and current status of assessments and approvals. The CEO held the overall responsibility in relation to the final decision to forward an assessment to the relevant FCC for consideration and this provided an additional layer of oversight.

Fostering First Ireland ensured that prospective foster carers had access to their assessment report before recommendation was made. They were given the opportunity to exercise their rights to add their own comments to the report for the consideration of the FCC. There were clear procedure in place that outlined timeline for the completion and sharing of assessment report with the applicants. Records reviewed demonstrated that foster care applicants were provided with the assessment report prior to it being submitted to the FCC and they were invited to meet the FCC considering their application. Foster carers and FFI were informed of the decision of the FCC in writing.

Following approvals, appropriate arrangements were in place for the handover of newly approved foster carers from the assessment team. A handover meeting took place between the assessor and the identified link social worker for the newly approved foster carers. This meeting supported the link social worker and newly approved foster carer to develop a shared understanding of areas for development, learning needs and expectations of FFI from the foster carers. When a placement was made with foster carers. Fostering First Ireland ensured that formal written contracts were in place in respect of each child, in accordance with regulations and standards and this was found on all foster carers files sampled. Foster carers were provided with a copy of the contract.

Overall, FFI foster care applicants participated in a comprehensive assessment of their ability to provide safe and quality care to children. The assessments and approval of foster carers whose file were reviewed by inspectors were in line with regulations and standards. Appropriate checks were completed and Garda vettings were on file. Foster carers were formally approved by the FCC prior to the placement of children and there were written contracts for children placed with foster carers. For this reason, the 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 to assist with the identification of gaps in the fostering services.

Foster carers in FFI participated in regular reviews of their continuing capacity to provide safe, high-quality care to children. Overall, the first review took place one year after a placement was made and at three-yearly intervals thereafter, in line with the national standards. Comprehensive three-yearly reviews included updated Garda vetting as required. Additional reviews were held following serious concerns or child protection concerns. Outside of the formal review, the provider had an effective system in place to monitor the performance of foster carer and ensure their continuous capacity to provide safe and consistent care to children. Fostering First Ireland demonstrated great commitments to quality improvement and recommendations following foster carers' reviews were implemented to promote better outcomes and safeguarding for children.

Data submitted prior to the inspection showed that 42 foster carers' reviews had been held in the previous 12 months and 130 reviews held in the past three years. Four additional reviews were conducted for reason such as a serious concern, an early review following a welfare concern, change in a foster carer's circumstance and an unplanned placement ending. Data submitted showed that three foster carers have not had their reviews within the required timeframe. One of these had been completed before the inspection and dates had been set for the remaining two reviews to be completed and there were valid reasons for these delays. The provider had a system in place to monitor foster carers' reviews due dates and ensured all required reports were completed.

Inspectors reviewed a sample of five foster carers file for the purpose of establishing the service's adherence to the national standards with regards foster carers' review. The inspection found that there were good practices and effective systems in place that ensured that the review process considered the foster carers performance, their training needs, any significant changes in their circumstances

and the adequacy of support provided to them. The link social workers prepared a report in consultation with the foster carers and members of their household which outlined their experience of fostering, either since they had the first child placed with them or since their last review. Further preparatory work was undertaken to obtain the views of children in the placements and their social workers.

Inspectors observed a foster carers' review meeting and found the process to be thorough and child-centred. The review meeting was attended by the foster carers and their link worker and was facilitated by an independent reviewing officer (IRO). The foster carer's review appropriately considered the foster carers continuous capacity to meet the needs of the children, and also focused on the support and training needs of the foster carer. Foster carers told inspectors that they were given the opportunity to read the content of the report and add their own comments, if required. Review reports were submitted to relevant foster care committees including all supporting information for consideration. Outcomes of reviews were notified to the foster carer as well as the children's allocated social workers, as required.

There was an effective system in place to track the progress of actions and recommendations, including training and support agreed. The learning coordinator in consultation with the link worker ensured that the learning needs arising from foster carers review were effectively met. The progress of identified learning was monitored and tracked to completion through foster carers' supervision. The link worker maintained clear and detailed records of the review meeting including discussions, decisions and recommendations made.

The provider had effective arrangements in place to identify foster carers learning needs and monitor progress in the intervening period between their reviews. Foster carers learning and development was closely monitored and considered during regular supervision with their link social workers. In addition, an annual overview meeting took place between the link social worker and the IRO in relation to foster carers whose reviews were not due. Samples of records of these meeting reviewed by inspector showed that discussion were held in relation to foster carers' strengths and progress with regard their development as foster carer. It also considered any issues arising from the previous review. Where additional learning needs were identified, these were implemented in a timely manner and record of this meeting was shared with the foster carer. This meant that the provider had gone above the requirements of the standards and the review of foster carer's performance was not confined to only when they were formally due.

Additional reviews of foster carer following serious concerns or allegations were timely, comprehensive and good quality. They included the views of all relevant people, including the child and their social worker. Appropriate recommendations were made such as changes to the foster carers' approval status. There were evidence of additional support provided to the foster carers that considered their learning and development needs. Reviews focused on safeguarding children and were promptly notified to the FCC and recommendations were implemented as required.

Foster carers participated in regular reviews of their continuing capacity to provide high quality and safe care to children placed with them. Reviews completed were comprehensive and of good quality. Additional reviews were held as required following concerns. There were effective systems in place to oversee the scheduling of reviews and to ensure they were completed in a timely manner, in line with standards. While there were two foster care reviews overdue at the time of the inspection, rationales were recorded for the delay and a date had been set for their completion. It is for these reasons that this standard is deemed as 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.

Fostering First Ireland had effective structures in place for the management, monitoring and delivery of a high quality foster care service. The provider had robust governance systems in place which included a responsive quality assurance and service improvement frameworks that supported the provider's commitment to providing a safe and good quality services to children and foster carers. There were effective systems in place to monitor and measure performance and the quality of the service. These comprised of a continuous cycle of auditing, planning and evaluation. There was a suite of policies and procedures to guide staff practices in the delivery of a quality, safe fostering service to children. Fostering First Ireland was well-led, adequately resourced and staff were appropriately held accountable.

Accountability for the delivery of the service was clearly defined, and there were clear lines of responsibility at individual, team and management level. The service was led by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), who reported to the board of directors on a quarterly basis. As previously outlined in the profile of the service, the senior leadership team consisted of the CEO, two PSWs, business support

manager and the multidisciplinary team service director who all reported to the CEO. The financial controller and quality and learning manager also reported directly to the CEO. There were four team managers, a children's services manager and a placement and marketing manager who reported to their respective PSWs. Team managers supervised and supported teams of link social workers, social care workers and the assessment team. Team managers were experienced social work and social care practitioners who provided clear guidance to staff and were committed to providing safe, good quality services to children.

There were governance and management systems in place that promoted the delivery of safe, high-quality, child-centred care. The provider had implemented measures for the auditing and monitoring of significant areas of practice, including safeguarding practices. Learning from audits was effectively shared with the staff team and improvements were made to the service. For example, where an audit had identified a gap in the expected level of contact between a link social worker and foster carers, appropriate actions were taken to address this. The inspection found that the management team strived for excellence in safeguarding children through quality assurance and service improvement systems underpinned by an ongoing cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation and improvement.

Fostering First Ireland had systems in place for gathering and analysing information about the service, these supported managers to monitor the quality of the service and safety of care provided. Information was gathered on all areas of the service including foster care reviews, placement breakdowns and children's additional needs. There were number of meetings that provided ongoing monitoring and oversight of every aspects of the service. These included monthly business meeting where discussions took place around the service activities and a review of key performance indicators including those relevant to the scope of this inspection, such as foster carers' assessments, approvals and reviews.

Each team had their own regular meetings which were well attended by managers and front line staff and records of each were documented and retained. Records of these team meetings reviewed by inspectors reflected an agenda relevant to the function of each team such as additional measures to support placement at risk and training for foster carers. Follow up actions and the person responsible for implementing them were identified. In addition, regular meetings were held with different Tusla service areas whereby updates were provided on children in placements with FFI and any issues such as children's additional needs, allegations and concerns were also noted. This illustrated that FFI's collaboration with external stakeholder was focused on safeguarding and wellbeing of children placed in their service.

Fostering First Ireland was proactive in continuous quality improvement. Managers across the service maintained good oversight of areas of the service including, safeguarding practices. Oversight and monitoring was carried out on a routine basis. The provider had developed an annual schedule of audits, inspectors found that these had supported senior managers who held oversight of all auditing processes to self-identify gaps and put effective measures in place to address these.

The quality and learning manager coordinated and planned all audits which took place routinely at set intervals. For examples, team managers conducted regular audits in areas such as child safeguarding which included audits of safety planning and reviews of safety plan as well as unannounced visits. An audit of foster carers assessments and reviews was completed twice a year. Each service audit encompassed both quantitative and qualitative findings and reflected learning and action plans with the person identified for implementing identified actions. In addition, an annual review of audits and action plans was compiled by the quality and learning manager to identify emerging themes and outline recommendations for policies and practice, as required. Inspectors reviewed an annual report of audit of allegation and welfare concerns against foster carers and placement breakdowns for 2024 and found these to be of good quality with clear analysis evident. Areas for improvement identified had been implemented in 2025.

The provider demonstrated vision and direction for the service. They had developed a business plan for 2025 that clearly set out clear priorities and objectives for the service and included further embedding trauma-informed practices into the service delivery model. In addition, there was a learning and development strategy for 2025 – 2028 and this was aligned to the business plan for 2025. For example, the strategy clearly set out the objectives of increasing the knowledge and skills of staff and foster carers to enhance their competence to deliver safe and quality care to children. Evidence reviewed by inspectors found that the provider was on course to meeting this objective in line with the target date.

The provider had policies and procedures in place for dealing with complaints, concerns and allegations in a timely manner and these aligned with Children First (2017), national policy and relevant legislation. In addition, there were systems in place for tracking, monitoring and overseeing the progress of complaints, investigations into child protection and welfare concerns, allegations or serious concerns against foster carers until final outcome was reached. As previously noted under standard 10, at the time of the inspection, concerns that met the threshold were reported to Tulsa by staff and foster carers. However, managers told inspectors that Tulsa made the relevant Garda notifications with regard child abuse concerns and therefore FFI did not make reports to An Garda Síochána, as

required. The inspection found there was a lack of oversight and governance in respect to staff consistently implementing FFI policy in this regard. However, appropriate plans were in place to safeguard children and there was no impact on them as a result of this. During the course of the inspection, the management reviewed all allegations of abuse and the required reports were made to the Gardaí.

There were effective risk management systems in place for the identification, management and regular reviews of risks in the foster care service including safeguarding concerns in respect of children in placement. Examples of these were self-harming behaviour, serious injury and accidents. The provider maintained an up-to-date risk register and samples reviewed by inspectors demonstrated appropriate control measures with regard corrective and preventative actions identified to mitigate the impact. An example of these included review and update of children's safety plan which was communicated to relevant parties, as required. It was clear from records reviewed that learning from incidents was used as an opportunity to improve children safeguarding.

Incidents were promptly notified and appropriately managed. Data submitted for the inspection showed that there were 68 adverse events in the 12 months prior to the inspection. These incidence varied in significance and impact and included allegations of abuse, medication errors, public order matters and an episode of a child missing from their placement. A sample reviewed during the inspection showed that they were notified in a timely manner, effectively managed and closed as appropriate.

There were appropriate systems in place to escalate risks, incidents and issues both internally and externally. There had been seven internal risks and 54 external risk escalated in the last 12 months. Staff who spoke with inspectors demonstrated a good knowledge of the provider's escalation policy and what to do if they had any concerns. Inspectors reviewed examples of incidents such as unmet needs of children, risk of placement disruption, long-term matches and delays in receiving children social worker report for foster carers' review being escalated internally with management responses received and also externally escalated when appropriate.

Staff who spoke with inspectors understood their roles and responsibilities. They were supported to do their jobs well and are knowledgeable about structures and systems in place to support them. Staff at all levels had consistent and competent line managers from whom they could seek advice and support, communicate risks or concerns and develop their skills.

Staff were held to account by their manager. Staff supervision took place on a monthly basis and samples reviewed by inspectors were comprehensive and high quality. Supervision was clearly recorded on a template and it reflected key discussions around staff learning and development in line with the business objectives, including the impact of learning on practice. Inspectors reviewed examples whereby manager explored the application of learning in day-to-day practice and how this supported the promotion of positive outcomes for children. Supervision also provided an additional layer of oversight of the service to the managers and there were evidence of discussion of safeguarding issues such as serious concerns, complaint and any unmet needs of children. Follow-up actions were agreed and implemented, as required.

An annual performance development review (PDR) was held for individual staff to review performance, individual contribution and identify learning and development needs. This set out the summary of supervisions held throughout the review period and included overall performance assessments and discussions on whether agreed objectives had been met. The performance development review was effectively used to align staff's learning and development needs to the overall business plan and objectives including ensuring excellence in service delivery and becoming a trauma-informed organisation.

Fostering First Ireland had comprehensive arrangements in place for supporting foster carers. Each foster care household had an allocated link social worker, who provided them with an ongoing support and they communicated regularly with children's allocated social workers to ensure that the child received safe and effective care. Foster carers told inspectors that their link social worker was in regular communication with them and there was a support group where they could engage in shared learning with other FFI foster carers, including building an informal network of support. Foster carers said that membership of this group had benefited them in their fostering role. Inspectors found that enhanced placement supports such as therapeutic services and social care support were available to children and their foster carers, as required. Foster carers said that they were informed when their link social worker was not available and they knew who to contact if required.

Foster carers were consulted with and this informed the service improvement approach including foster carers learning and development needs. There was a foster carer consultation group whose membership included service managers and foster carers. The foster carer in this group brought themes and suggestions from their support group to the management team for response. The inspection found that feedback from this group had been utilised to inform service improvement, for example, online safety training had been made mandatory for foster carers based on feedback from this group. In addition to this, there was a participation group

for children in FFI foster care aged 12 to 16. This forum provided children opportunity to connect, take part in activities and share their ideas. Feedback and contribution from this group had been implemented to improve the service. For example, children in the participation group had developed a booklet to provide advice and guidance to foster carers.

Fostering First Ireland had a service level agreements with Tusla that specified the service offered and the monitoring arrangements in place. These agreements were subject of negotiation and extension at the time of the inspection. Tusla's alternative care and monitoring services had conducted an announced audit of FFI in April 2025. Finding from this indicated that the service was compliant with the standard 16 which outlines that foster carers participate in the training necessary to equip them with the skills and knowledge required to provide high quality care. In addition, there were quarterly governance meeting between FFI and Tusla and this provided opportunities to communicate and discuss any relevant issues including compliance with Children First (2017).

The provider's information system supported good oversight of the service and facilitated effective record keeping and good communication. The provider maintained a register of all foster carers within their service as required by regulations. Records of foster carers were kept up-to-date and used to inform planning and evaluation of the quality, effectiveness and safety of the services.

Overall, FFI had a team of competent and skilled managers that demonstrated leadership within the organisation. There were governance and management systems in place. The provider had an established quality assurance and service improvement framework that supported provision of a safe and effective service. All staff received formal supervision and comprehensive records of these were kept. There were risk management systems in place which effectively supported the identification and management of risks. For these reasons, this standard is deemed to be compliant.

Judgment: Compliant

**National Standards for Foster Care (2003)
and
Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations,⁸ 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

⁸ Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations, 1995

**Published by the Health Information and Quality Authority
(HIQA).**

For further information please contact:

Health Information and Quality Authority

George's Court

George's Lane

Smithfield

Dublin 7

D07 E98Y

+353 (0)1 8147400

info@hiqa.ie

www.hiqa.ie

© Health Information and Quality Authority 2025