



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:	Announced
Date of inspection:	13 – 15 February 2023
Fieldwork ID:	MON-0038934
Lead Inspector:	Lorraine O'Reilly
Support Inspector(s):	Rachel Kane Mary Lillis Sabine Buschmann

About this inspection

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 requirements of quality 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 continual improvement so that children have better, safer services.

HIQA is authorised by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth under Section 69 of the Child Care Act, 1991 as amended by Section 26 of the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2011 to inspect services taking care of a child on behalf of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) , including non-statutory providers of foster care.

This inspection was a focused inspection of Fostering First Ireland (FFI) to assess eight of the national standards.

How we inspect

As part of this inspection, inspectors met with the relevant professionals involved with

FFI and with foster carers. Inspectors observed practices and reviewed documentation

such as foster carer's files, children's files and relevant documentation relating to the areas covered by the specific standards against which the service provider was inspected.

The key activities of this inspection involved:

- the analysis of data submitted by the service provider
- interviews with:
 - the director of the company
 - the placement support manager
 - three team managers
 - four guardians ad litem
 - six child in care social workers
 - one representative from an advocacy service
- focus groups with:
 - 10 link workers
 - 10 foster carers
 - three team managers
 - two principal social workers
- observations of:
 - monthly business meeting
 - recruitment, retention and training meeting
- the review of:
 - policies and procedures, minutes of various meetings, staff supervision files, audits and service plans
 - staff supervision files
 - a sample of 21 children's and 21 foster carer files
- conversations or visits with:
 - a sample of seven children, two family members and six foster carers.

Acknowledgements

HIQA wishes to thank parents, 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.

The Service Provider

FFI provides a range of services including emergency, short-term, respite, general and specialist foster care placements. It has been in operation in Ireland since 2005 and receives referrals from all 17 Tusla areas. FFI is a social enterprise and is part of Key Assets – The Children’s Services Provider, an international provider of children and family social services that operates in over 10 countries.

FFI has one director who reports to the CEO of Key Assets Europe, two principal social workers, a business support manager, a financial controller and a quality and training manager who reports to the director. The two principal social workers have responsibility for different aspects of the service. One principal social worker has responsibility for practice and compliance and they line manage three social work team managers, an education support officer and a children’s services manager. The second principal social worker has responsibility for carer approvals and placements and has oversight of foster carer recruitment, the screening of potential foster carers, foster care assessments and foster care reviews. Several members of the staff team report to the various team managers and they include link social workers, social care workers, an education support officer, an assessments supervisor, a foster carer recruitment officer and business support officers. The quality and training manager is responsible for quality assurance and training.

Data provided by FFI prior to inspection showed that the service had 124 foster care households and, at the time of the inspection, they provided foster care placements for 160 children. Foster care households were located nationwide across Ireland. Placements with FFI were 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. FFI was last audited by the Tusla Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service (ACIMS) in July 2021. The focus of this quality assurance review was on the management of serious concerns and allegations of abuse or neglect against foster carers in line with the Tusla Interim Protocol. The report found that FFI had a robust system in place for the management, governance and oversight of serious concerns and the allegations of abuse or neglect against foster carers. However, some action was required in relation to serious concerns and it was noted in the ACIMs report that FFI had plans

to address these actions.

Please see Appendix 2 for FFI's organisational chart.

Compliance classifications

HIQA will judge whether the foster care service has been found to be **compliant**, **substantially compliant** or **not compliant** with the regulations and or standards associated with them.

The compliance descriptors are defined as follows:

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

Substantially compliant: a judgment of substantially compliant means that the service is mostly compliant with the standard and or regulation 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 regulation and or 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 service 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 service 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 8	Matching carers with children and young people	Compliant
Standard 10	Safeguarding and child protection	Compliant
Standard 15	Supervision and support	Compliant
Standard 16	Training	Compliant
Standard 18	Effective policies	Compliant
Standard 19	Management and monitoring of foster care services	Compliant
Standard 21	Recruitment and retention of an appropriate range of foster carers	Compliant
Standard 25	Representations and complaints	Compliant

This inspection was carried out during the following times:

Date	Times of inspection	Inspector	Role
13 February 2023	09:00hrs to 17:00hrs	Lorraine O'Reilly	Lead Inspector
	09:00hrs to 17:00hrs	Rachel Kane	Support Inspector
	09:00hrs to 17:00hrs	Mary Lillis	Support Inspector
	11:00hrs to 17:00hrs	Sabine Buschmann	Support Inspector
14 February 2023	09:00hrs to 17:00hrs	Lorraine O'Reilly	Lead Inspector
		Rachel Kane	Support Inspector
		Mary Lillis	Support Inspector
		Sabine Buschmann	Support Inspector
15 February 2023	09:00hrs to 17:00hrs	Lorraine O'Reilly	Lead Inspector
		Rachel Kane	Support Inspector
		Mary Lillis	Support Inspector
		Sabine Buschmann	Support Inspector

Children's experience of the foster care service

Children's experiences were established through speaking with a sample of children, parents, foster carers, external advocates and professionals. The review of case files, complaints and feedback also provided evidence on their experience. Inspectors spoke with seven children, 16 foster carers, six child-in-care social workers and four guardians ad litem. A guardian ad litem refers to an individual appointed by the court to represent the best interests of a minor child in legal proceedings. From what inspectors were told and observed, it was clear that children's rights and diversity was promoted and children were treated with dignity and respect.

Children's rights were promoted by staff, management and foster carers. Children's right to participation and education were actively promoted within the service. For example, FFI had a children's resource team who met every month and children's participation was discussed. This team consisted of social care workers and an education support officer. The role of this team was to encourage engagement and work in consultation with children. In addition to this, FFI had an active children's participation group. Several events were organised by both the resource team and the children's participation group in the 12 months prior to the inspection. Examples included trips away for children, an intercultural day and various group activities. Staff and children told inspectors about the important work that takes place within the children's participation group and how it promotes hearing the voices of children in care. During the inspection, the participation group received a national award for their work on promoting culture and diversity within FFI.

Overall, children were positive about their foster care placements. When children spoke with inspectors, they highlighted how positive their placements were and how much they liked living in their foster homes. They told inspectors that foster carers supported them, they liked where they lived and felt like part of the family. Children who spoke with inspectors described their experiences in care as follows:

- They "helped me in every way they can"
- There is "loads of room, loads of teddies, books and toys"
- "I hope others find the right place like I did"
- "I'd give them 1000 out of 10".

Children also spoke about the staff at FFI as "so sweet", "amazing" and "very helpful". Children told inspectors that they were aware of independent advocacy services. One young person said they did not need it because their foster carer "got me help when I needed it". Where appropriate, children were supported by staff and their foster carers to maintain contact with their families and their friends. The child's right to recreation was promoted by FFI and supported by foster carers. Children participated in activities such as basketball, dancing as well as socialising with friends.

Foster carers provided positive feedback about FFI. They told inspectors they were happy with the level of support provided and that this was invaluable to them. They spoke very highly about the level of formal, informal supports and training they received from FFI. They also told inspectors that their whole family was supported, including their birth children as well as children placed with them in foster care. There were various activities planned throughout the year, as well as a training calendar which was made available to all foster carers in advance.

Inspectors spoke with other family members of foster carers about their experience of FFI. They spoke very positively about the foster care placement and one family member told inspectors that children were safe and well cared for. This highlights FFI promoting children's rights to having an adequate standard of living and to be protected from abuse and harm.

External professionals reported positive and regular contact with service managers, frontline staff and with foster carers. They reported joint working relationships were collaborative and child-focused and that the service pro-actively sought feedback and opportunities to strengthen working relationships. Social workers that spoke to inspectors described how they are treated as part of the team when working with FFI and that they often do home visits together. They described how the link social workers get to know the children in placement as well as the foster carers they support. External professionals told inspectors the foster care service demonstrated a strong commitment to foster carers and children and it was responsive in its approach to ensuring foster carers were supported to provide high quality care in order to achieve good outcomes for children.

Summary of inspection findings

Placements with FFI were 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.

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 a focused inspection, which looked at eight standards. The standards included matching carers with children and young people, safeguarding and child protection, supervision and support, training, effective policies, management and monitoring of foster care services, recruitment and retention of an appropriate range of foster carers and representations and complaints.

Overall, this inspection found that FFI provided a high quality service to their foster carers and the service was compliant with the inspected standards. FFI promoted the rights of children placed with the service, it was clear that children's voices were listened to and their opinions were respected.

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

- eight standards were compliant

The inspection found that FFI had a number of areas of good practice and some minor areas for improvement. Areas of good practice were demonstrated in all of the standards.

FFI had good governance arrangements and structures in place to ensure the delivery of a high quality service. FFI was well led, organised and well resourced. Senior management meetings took place fortnightly and other management meetings took place monthly which showed there was good oversight of support and supervision provided to foster carers and staff.

FFI had comprehensive business plans in place for 2022 and 2023 which set out the service's objectives in order to improve service delivery. The inspection found that there were areas of good practice and progression with regards to the business plan. The objectives were regularly reviewed and there was good oversight from management. It was clear that FFI had met their objectives in 2022 and were striving for continuous improvement through the implementation of their business plan for 2023.

There were effective monitoring systems and quality assurance systems in place. The senior management team had oversight of all evaluations and audits within FFI. Learnings from audits and reviews were communicated to all staff and changes to systems were implemented as needed. For example, a review of the safe care policy and changes to this aspect of the assessment process were made to improve safeguarding of children.

With regards to governance, an area for improvement identified by inspectors was the consistent implementation of the respite policy.

FFI had policies and procedures in place to promote the effective and safe delivery of their service. These were reviewed in a timely manner and policies were updated in line with legislation, regulations and standards. Staff were made aware of changes

made to policies and procedures and these were discussed at team meetings. FFI had a range of mechanisms in place to seek feedback and listen to the voice of foster carers and children. For example, foster carers suggested that internet safety becomes a mandatory training, and FFI took this feedback on board.

FFI had a matching process and policy in place. Overall, matching was of good quality and was overseen by senior management. From speaking with staff and reviewing files, the assessments of both the foster carers capacity and the needs of children were considered in a fair and respectful way. It was clear from records reviewed that the views and opinions of children were sought and considered as part of the process. Information on files was carefully documented, up-to-date and reflective of any change in circumstances. When placements occurred in a planned way, matching meetings occurred between FFI and the social work departments. Matching documents were also on foster carer files which demonstrated the careful planning of placements.

FFI had a range of safeguarding measures in place which promoted the protection and safety of children. Inspectors found that FFI adhered to policies and procedures that they had in place to protect children and systems were in place to ensure adherence to the relevant Tusla protocols. A review of files showed that FFI's mechanisms for keeping children safe were effective and concerns were managed appropriately and in a timely manner. Senior management had good oversight of all critical incidents through a range of audits, reviews and trackers that were in place. There were good safeguarding practices in place for foster carers. Policies and procedures in relation to child protection and safe guarding were shared with and explained to foster carers.

FFI provided foster carers with a high level of support and supervision. Foster carers felt confident that they would be supported in a holistic way which considered the needs of children placed with them, their own needs and those of their families. Foster carers were supported to maintain contact with children's families when this was in children's best interests. This was documented on foster carer files and it was evident that foster carers used the online portal to send updates to their link workers about family contact. This was a new initiative and was an area of good practice to ensure that foster carers maintained regular contact with their link social workers.

FFI offered an array of supports to foster carers and children such as; regional carer support groups, respite and access to therapists, education officers and social care workers. Foster carers' children were invited to events such as summer and Christmas fun outings and requests could be made for them to access support from the education officer and social care workers also. Foster carers were supported to apply for enhanced placements when required. An area of good practice found in the inspection was in the support and supervision of foster carers, involving birth children in activities and ensuring children's voices were heard.

FFI had a comprehensive training strategy in place for foster carers and staff. There were opportunities for joint training for foster carers and link social workers. There was a learning and development strategy in place which ensured foster carers participated in mandatory training as well as training specific to their needs and the needs of children in their care. This meant that foster carers were provided with additional training ensuring that they were provided with the necessary skills and knowledge to strengthen placements and achieve better outcomes for children. The service completed training evaluations every year which helped them to plan and develop the training strategy further. There were good records maintained of training completed by staff and foster carers. It was clear that the service recognised the importance of training and staff pro-actively encouraged and supported foster carers to participate and engage in learning and development. An area of good practice was that joint training was taking place with both the link social workers and the foster carers. Another area of good practice was the service had a scheme in place to support foster carers to purchase laptops to complete online training and to also attend meetings. Foster carers and staff spoke with inspectors about this being a very positive and valued initiative.

The service demonstrated a strong and positive commitment to the recruitment and retention of foster carers. There was a recruitment and retention strategy in place which had been reviewed prior to the inspection. Several recruitment drives involved experienced foster carers sharing their experiences of fostering. In addition, the service acknowledged their foster carers through a variety of events, celebrations and awards. For example, their birthdays and various milestones were acknowledged, including their one-year milestone in fostering.

Complaints were managed effectively with good oversight by the senior management team. Children, birth parents and foster carers were informed about how to make a complaint and were supported by link social workers in doing so. Children had developed a child-friendly booklet that explained to children what a complaint was and what action they could take. The service also recorded expressions of dissatisfaction and these were also responded to appropriately. The sample reviewed by inspectors were managed well and in a timely way.

FFI pro-actively sought to work collaboratively with foster carers, children and external agencies to continuously improve service delivery. FFI promoted children's rights through the children's participation group and through other supports available such as educational, therapeutic and social supports. Staff and management told inspectors that there was good levels of support and teamwork within the service, this contributed to the provision of a high quality service to foster carers, children and their families.

Standard 8: Matching carers with children and young people

Children and young people are placed with carers who are chosen for their capacity to meet the assessed needs of the children and young people.

FFI's approach to matching children with foster carers had a human rights focus which was reflected in its work undertaken with families and children. From speaking with staff and reviewing files, the assessments of both the foster carers capacity and the needs of children were considered in a fair and respectful way. Information was carefully documented, up to date and reflective of any change in circumstances.

There was good oversight and management of matching foster carers with children. Matching checklists were signed off by social work team managers and these were placed on foster carer files. These documents also reflected children's right to receive an appropriate placement where their rights were promoted and also documented the child's views about the placement.

The majority of matching of children with foster carers was effective. Matching was based on an assessment of children's needs and their care plan. Consideration was given to which foster carers were best placed to ensure children's needs were met. Matching was discussed at professional meetings and appropriate information shared. While managers acknowledged that sometimes there was limited information about children made available in emergency situations, they proceeded to match children based on the information available to them at the time. There was ongoing contact with social work departments to gather further information and to discuss the needs of the children placed with foster carers.

Data provided by the service prior to the inspection noted that there were 14 children awaiting approval of long term approval from the foster care committee. Long term placements were for children who would remain in their foster care placement rather than returning home to their own families. The service had contacted the relevant professionals to discuss the importance of long term matches of children to ensure they were prioritised to promote children's right to stability within their placements. There had been 19 approvals of long term placements in the 12 months prior to the inspection which was positive for children remaining in care as this meant that there was stability for those placements.

Placements were reviewed and reassessed where circumstances changed. For example, when foster carers personal circumstances changed or children's needs changed and placements required additional support, arrangements were put in place. At the time of the inspection, there were 22 children in special foster care placements. Examples of additional supports included direct work with children, additional educational support for children and enhanced payments for foster carers. Supports

were documented on case records and they were also recorded in escalation trackers to ensure foster carers were supported as required.

There was a formal matching process in place. All foster carers were providing care in accordance with their approval status. Matching was based on child's needs and information was exchanged at professional meetings. For this reason, the service was judged as being compliant with this standard.

Judgment: Compliant

Standard 10: Safeguarding and child protection

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

The service had a child protection and welfare policy which set out how all employees and foster carers in FFI work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in accordance with the statutory guidelines and standards. The policy identified that FFI staff and foster carers were mandated persons under the Children First Act 2015. The policy also identified one of the principal social workers as the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the quality and training manager as the deputy DLP in accordance with *the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017)*. The child protection and welfare policy was updated in January 2023 to include all staff's responsibility to ensure they are familiar with the Tusla Child Abuse Substantiation Procedure (CASP) 2022.

FFI had a Child Safeguarding Statement in line with national policies, standards and legislation. The statement was reviewed in January 2023. It contained all required information and a comprehensive risk assessment identifying areas of risk and the list of procedures in place for managing these risks. The list of principles within the safeguarding statement included the service's commitment to ascertaining the wishes and feelings of children in their care or with whom they work, informing them of their rights, helping them put forward their views and keeping them fully informed. This meant that the service promoted children's right to safety and their right to protection.

Following the implementation of Tusla's CASP 2022 policy and the Tusla Interim Protocol for managing concerns and allegations of abuse or neglect against foster carers and section 36 (relative) foster carers (2017) being stood down, FFI reviewed and updated their policy on allegations against foster carers, child protection and welfare policy and incident management policy. Staff and Managers informed inspectors of the challenges in regard to the stepping down of the Tusla Interim

Protocol for managing concerns and allegations of abuse or neglect against foster carers and section 36 (relative) foster carers (2017). However, from the sample of allegations and the serious concern reviewed, inspectors found that the service continued to implement their own policies and procedures in relation to allegations.

Allegations, serious concerns and complaints about foster carers were addressed in a timely manner and allegations were managed in line with *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017)*. There was evidence of good communication and collaboration between FFI and the children's social workers. Information given to the inspectors showed that there were six allegations and five serious concerns made against foster carers in the 12 months prior to the inspection. Inspectors reviewed two allegations and one serious concern and found they were categorised correctly and received an appropriate response to ensure the safety and welfare of children. One of the two allegations reviewed met the threshold for CASP, therefore, Tusla had responsibility for this investigation.

Records reviewed by inspectors found that FFI supported the foster carer through the investigation process and external support was also offered. In relation to the second allegation reviewed, a timely strategy meeting between Tusla and FFI was conducted where it was agreed that the statement made by the child did not meet the threshold for an allegation. The plan from this strategy meeting was appropriate, for example, it included updating the safety plan for the child and providing further training for the carers. The serious concern reviewed by inspectors was appropriately responded to and reported to Tulsa by FFI. At the strategy meeting it was agreed that the concerns reported were not child abuse concerns and were determined as serious welfare concerns. FFI then implemented their own procedure for managing serious concerns. The relevant foster care committee was notified about this serious concern and the outcome of the assessment. The outcome of the assessment was that none of the incidents amounted to a serious concern. A plan was put into place for FFI to proceed with a foster carer review.

FFI maintained good oversight of all allegations and serious concerns. The principal social worker with responsibility for child protection maintained a tracker of all allegations and serious concerns. The principal social worker also completed a quarterly incident overview report and inspectors reviewed an overview of incidents report for 2022. The report identified that there had been an increase in incidents from the previous year and identified factors that may have influenced this. The senior management team had a thorough schedule of reviews in place which included; the risk register, the complaints log and the allegations log. Inspectors saw reviews and discussions of these in senior management team meeting minutes.

Data provided to inspectors showed that there were three households who had placements exceeding the standards in 2022. Inspectors sampled one of these households for review where two siblings were placed with another child. Approval

from the relevant foster care committee was sought and received before the third child was placed. Inspectors were told that foster care committee approval for the other two placements exceeding standards was also in place before the children were placed. This meant that foster carers only cared for children whom they were approved to care for, prioritising children's right to safe care and protection.

There were three incidents of children placed with the service going missing from care in 2022. Inspectors reviewed all three of these incidents which were managed appropriately by the service adhering to their missing children policy and by following the national policy, HSE (Tusla) An Garda Síochána joint protocol Children Missing from Care (2012).

There were good safeguarding practices in place for foster carers. FFI had a comprehensive safe care policy and procedure in place. All foster carers had a safe caring plan which was completed during their assessment. These plans were updated prior to each foster carer review, or more frequently if needed. A safety plan was also completed for each child at the beginning of the placement. Inspectors found on reviews of files sampled, that there were safety plans in place for each child and they were updated following significant events.

Furthermore, as part of the service's supporting and supervising foster carers policy and procedure, at least one visit to the foster care household per year was unannounced in order to ensure safeguarding of the child. This policy also stipulated that the link social worker meets with the child in the foster home in the first two weeks of placement and then at least quarterly afterwards. Both the case files reviewed by inspectors and the interviews with foster carers and children confirmed that this was happening in practice.

FFI foster carers received the mandatory *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017)* training and the service had systems in place in order to track when refresher training was required and took appropriate steps to ensure this was completed. Foster carers spoken to by inspectors were aware of their role as mandated persons in line with *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017)*.

The service had an effective system in place for updating An Garda Síochána (police) vetting for foster carers and other relevant persons every three years. Inspectors reviewed the service's tracker and foster carer files which showed that foster carers and relevant others had up-to-date Garda vetting.

The service had clear and robust systems in place to promote the safety of children in all aspects of service provision. Any incidents such as child protection concerns, allegations or serious concerns were responded to and reported in a timely and appropriate manner. Foster carer reviews took place where required and unannounced visits were carried out as per FFI policy. Both staff and foster carers

received the necessary training to enable them to respond appropriately to any child protection concerns. For these reasons, FFI was deemed to be compliant with this standard.

Judgment: Compliant

Standard 15: Supervision and support

Approved foster carers are supervised by a professionally qualified social worker. This person, known as the link worker, ensures that foster carers have access to the information, advice and professional support necessary to enable them to provide high quality care.

All foster carer households with FFI had a link social worker allocated to them who provided information, advice and support to the foster carer and their family. The fostering team comprised of 11 link social workers and three team managers. The three teams provided support to foster carers across the country. From a review of foster carers files and through focus groups with carers and link social workers, it was clear that all link social workers were in regular contact with the foster carers allocated to them either weekly or bi-weekly. Foster carers were visited more regularly than was required by regulations. Link social workers also met with birth children and the fostered children in the placement. Feedback from foster carers through the focus group and interviews was very positive about the support they received from their link social worker. External professionals also commented on the high quality of support and supervision provided to foster carers.

From reviews of case files and feedback from foster carers, it was clear that there was effective communication between link social workers and foster carers. As part of their induction, foster carers were informed of all policies and procedures. Policies and procedures such as, child protection, safe caring and allegations were explained to foster carers by the link social workers. Children were provided with a complaints booklet and link social workers met with them to explain the process. Both children and foster carers were also provided with information on independent advocacy services. FFI's new information technology system had a foster carers portal for carers to record information and updates about the child in placement. Inspectors saw that foster carers were provided with updates about service developments as well as upcoming events through emails and newsletters.

Inspectors found clear and comprehensive evidence of formal supervision in all of the files that were sampled. The supervision records reviewed were in line with the service's policy and procedures for support and supervision of foster carers. The

supervision policy stipulated that a minimum of monthly supervision was to be provided to foster carers by link social workers. In some circumstances where placements were settled and long term, supervision was bi-monthly in accordance with the policy. Where supervision visits did not go ahead a clear rationale was provided for this and contact remained consistent.

From the sample of files reviewed by inspectors for this purpose, supervision agreements were in place and on the foster carer's files. A formal supervision template was used to record supervision visits. The template was comprehensive incorporating the needs of carers, the needs of their family and the needs of the children in their care. It was also part of the service's policy that link social workers meet with the children in placement at least quarterly to get their views and to give the child the opportunity to get to know them. The files reviewed by inspectors showed that good levels of support were provided to foster carers that addressed a variety of issues and challenges for foster carers and children.

A system of cross cover was in place for when link social workers were off for more than one week. This was organised and overseen by the team managers and principal social worker. While this ensured that families continued to receive support when their link social worker was not at work, it also meant that families could potentially meet a number of different workers and this would require a review in terms of the impact on a case by case basis.

A range of other supports were provided to foster carers including specialist support for those caring for children with complex needs. Link social workers actively promoted and supported learning and development through a variety of training courses. As well as training in relation to safer caring, training was provided in areas such a trauma, attachment and equality and discrimination. Regional monthly carer groups were facilitated where foster carers could share their experiences and build up a support network. Link social workers facilitated these meetings and used the space to update carers of any developments, training and events.

Foster carers also had access to therapeutic staff to support them regarding the children in placement. Foster carers told inspectors that social care workers carried out direct work with children when extra support was needed. An education support officer was also employed by the service and provided an array of supports for both children and foster carers from group work to individual support. FFI operated an out-of-hours service to support carers to deal with emergencies that may arise outside of office hours and at weekends. This provision supported foster carers with challenging situations such as when children made an allegation or went missing. All foster carers could also avail of respite as a means of supporting them and the child in placement.

Foster carers birth children were also supported by the FFI children services team. The team consisted of a children services manager, two social care workers and an educational support officer. Foster carers and children spoke positively about this support. Birth children were provided with direct support on an individual basis. They were met with as part of induction so they could ask questions about fostering and what it meant for their family. Link social workers met with birth children during routine home visits. There were also groups for birth children which took place throughout the year. There were two groups for different age groups which had various themes depending on the time of year and children's interests.

All foster carers had a link social worker and received regular supervision. Additional supports were provided to foster carers when required. Support groups as well as an out-of-hours service were in place. Foster carers were also provided with an opportunity to give feedback through an annual survey. The link social workers and managers in the service ensured that foster carers had access to the information, advice and professional support necessary to enable them to provide high quality care to children. It is for this reason that the service was judged to be compliant with this standard.

Judgment: Compliant

Standard 16: Training

Foster carers participate in the training necessary to equip them with the skills and knowledge required to provide high quality care.

FFI had a clear and effective training strategy in place for foster carers and staff. There were opportunities for joint training for foster carers and link social workers. There was a learning and development strategy in place which placed value in active learning as part of the development of foster carers which promoted better outcomes for children placed in their care. For example, it detailed the training required at applicant phase, for newly approved foster carers, refresher training in specialist areas, renewable training and joint training with staff. Mandatory training was required to be completed prior to being approved as a foster carers. The strategy also placed an emphasis on additional training specific to the needs of foster carers and of children in their care.

A training calendar was in place which staff and foster carers were aware of and actively involved in participating in. It was structured to ensure mandatory training

was completed as a priority and then other training events were also scheduled throughout the year.

It was clear that learning and training were promoted within the agency with staff being supported to participate and complete various training programs. All staff had completed specific therapeutic training which they then in turn rolled out to foster carers. In the 12 months prior to the inspection, there were 10 joint training events for link workers and foster carers. This meant that children placed in foster care were provided with a consistent approach to care which both the foster carers and the link social workers were familiar with.

Based on analysing trends, the service had developed specific support for foster carers who had not parented before and to all new carers. This was developed by reviewing placement breakdowns which identified that some were linked to foster carers being new to fostering and lacking in their experience in caring for children before fostering. This meant that foster carers were provided with additional information, skills and support with the aim of preventing placement breakdowns and ensuring foster carers were provided with necessary knowledge to strengthen placements.

There was a comprehensive induction provided to new link social workers. Induction included pre-boarding, corporate induction, IT induction and role induction. Role induction included becoming familiar with their job description, core tasks and responsibilities, supervision policy, child protection policy and child safeguarding statement. As part of their role, link social workers maintained training records for foster carers and these were on the foster carers files.

The service completed training evaluations every year. The 2022 evaluation found that foster carers were becoming more familiar with using online training and this was suitable to meeting their training needs. In total 328 training sessions were recorded for foster carers in 2022. All training completed was recorded in foster carer records.

In the previous 12 months, the assessment team carried out assessments which resulted in the approval of 17 foster carers. Prospective foster carers were required to complete various induction training sessions and mandatory training prior to approval. Foundations for fostering training was run seven times throughout 2022. Introductory courses in the areas of attachment and parenting also occurred. In 2022, the screening process for those entering assessment included an assessment of information technology (IT) skills. This was put in place in response to the increase in online training, attending meetings and other online requirements such as recording on the carer portal which began this year.

Ongoing training areas included attachment, adolescent development, Children First, de-escalation, developmental trauma and grief and loss in foster care. From the

evaluation of training in 2022, the service's goals included the continuation of online training as it was seen to meet the needs of foster carers and to monitor mandatory training through the carer database which was reported on a quarterly basis to senior management for oversight.

The service had a foster carer consultation group which recommended online learning of mandatory courses, in particular that of online safety. Foster carers who spoke with inspectors said that the service placed an emphasis on the importance of training. They gave the example of training about internet safety and how valuable it was for them.

FFI had a foster carer learning and development strategy in place. This was aligned to the company's strategic plan. The strategy identified the various training requirements at the different stages of development of foster carers. FFI ensured foster carer participation and made training accessible for them. Mandatory training was completed as required in addition to other training sessions to meet the individual needs of foster carers to best support them in their journey of fostering. This service was deemed to be compliant with this standard.

Judgment: Compliant

Standard 18 : Effective Policies

Health boards¹ have up-to-date effective policies and plans in place to promote the provision of high quality foster care for children and young people who require it.

The service had effective policies and plans in place to promote the provision of a high-quality foster care service. The agency's policies, procedures and guidance documents for the delivery of foster care services were aligned to relevant legislation, regulations and national standards. The service had comprehensive business plans in place for 2022 and 2023 which outlined objectives to improve the quality of the service. On-going reviews of the business plans were clear across a range of meetings including team meetings for front line workers, business meetings and senior management meetings. The management team ensured policies and procedures supported the delivery of safe, child-centred services. Regular management meetings ensured timely communication about changes in policy. Foster carers were also kept

¹ These services were provided by former health boards at the time the standards were produced in 2003. These services are now provided by the Child and Family Agency (Tusla).

up to date and informed about relevant developments through regular contact and supervision with their link social worker as well as through a newsletter.

The area had systems in place to review policies and procedures. Since the last HIQA inspection in 2021, the service had updated nine policies. There were review dates recorded for all policies. For example, FFI had an escalation policy in place that was updated in January 2023. The escalation policy gave clear guidance to all staff on the types of issues that should be subject to escalation and on how and when escalation should proceed. Inspectors saw evidence of issues being escalated in meeting minutes and in some of the files sampled. Link social workers and team managers that inspectors spoke to were aware of the escalation policy and explained how team managers and senior management escalate issues such as unallocated cases and delays in care plans being sent.

The service had policies and procedures for managing representations and complaints made by children, their families and foster carers. The policies and procedures were provided to children, families and foster carers who were made aware of how to make a representation, complaint or provide feedback to the service by the link social workers. Information on complaints was accessible and explained verbally to all parties. It was clear from focus groups with link social workers and managers that staff were knowledgeable about the complaints policy and procedure and that they supported foster carers and children to voice their opinions and give feedback about the service.

Gaps in access to some specialist services, such as occupational therapy and psychology provision, had been identified by staff, management and foster carers. This resulted in the agency funding additional specialist services for foster carers and children to ensure their needs were met and placements were supported. Furthermore, to mitigate against this risk, senior managers had escalated this issue to the various service areas. Escalations were clear on children's files as well as recorded on an escalation tracker.

To ensure compliance with policies and standards, the service completed an annual report of audits in March 2022. This meant there was good managerial oversight of the various audits which had occurred throughout 2021. In total, there were 15 audits completed both internally and externally. They included areas such as foster care assessments, foster care reviews and placement breakdowns. Areas of good practice and areas for improvement were identified with recommendations made to improve the quality of the service. One area for improvement, identified in the audit report, was in relation to long-term matching for children remaining in foster care. The audit report recommended that long-term matching should be raised with link social workers as a learning piece; this had been actioned at the time of this inspection by FFI.

It was the responsibility of the senior management team to ensure adherence to FFI's policies and procedures. The culture within the service promoted accountability across all staff levels as all staff were required to familiarise themselves with the policies and adhere to them. Managers were satisfied that staff had a good understanding of policies, procedural and practice requirements. Frontline staff reported good governance in implementation of policies to ensure they were both responsive and appropriate. Social work and social care practices were consistent with their policies and procedures, this meant that foster carers and children received an overall good quality and consistent service.

There was good practice in how FFI involved foster carers in quality improvement relating to procedures in the service. For example, the service reviewed the supervision and support form that link social workers completed with foster carers to see what improvements could be made. The form was comprehensive and captured the support provided to foster carers as well as tracking statutory pieces of work such as mandatory training for foster carers.

FFI had a carer consultation group comprised of foster carers and staff members including senior management. The purpose of the group was to provide a forum for consultation with foster carers on relevant policy and strategy and to have an input into the annual business plan. The group also provided a forum where themes from carer groups are considered and responded to. One of the foster carer's told inspectors that internet safety training is now mandatory for all foster carers and this came from a recommendation from the carer consultation group. The service also sought feedback from foster carer's through an annual survey.

Children were provided with a forum to give their feedback through the children's participation group. Link social workers informed inspectors that the children in this group contributed to the development of the service's information booklets which helped children to understand their rights and how to get help when they need it.

The service recognised its duties to children and families from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The service had made efforts to engage members of various communities to assist with their recruitment and retention of foster carer's strategy. The child's right to information was valued and promoted with efforts made to produce policies and information leaflets in accessible, child-friendly formats. For example, children were involved in producing a guide for foster carers in terms of promoting children's culture. FFI held an inter-cultural day during the summer which was set up by the children's participation forum. The service provided training to foster carers on equality and discrimination. This indicated to inspectors that FFI promoted anti-discriminatory practices in order to create a safe and inclusive environment for all foster carers and children. It was clear from the data provided to inspectors that foster carers from ethnic minority groups had been recruited by FFI.

FFI had up-to-date effective policies and procedures in place to promote the provision of high quality foster care for children. Policies and procedures were reviewed in light of changing needs. FFI implemented a comprehensive business plan in order to effectively improve service delivery. FFI also pro-actively sought to work collaboratively with foster carers, children and external agencies to continuously improve service delivery. It is for these reasons that FFI were deemed to be compliant with this standard.

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.

There were strong governance arrangements and structures to ensure the delivery of a high quality service. The management team had implemented effective systems to manage and monitor the service and there were several layers of governance to ensure the service was safe and effective.

The service was well led and organised. The management team consisted of a director, two principal social workers, a business support manager, financial controller, quality and training manager, team manager for assessments, placements and marketing manager, children's services manager and three social work team managers. The director reported to the board of directors on a quarterly basis. There was good collaborative working between senior management and middle management who demonstrated understanding of each manager's responsibilities, a commitment to quality improvement and improved outcomes for children.

The service was organised effectively, it was adequately staffed and well resourced. The service had recently increased its staffing from two teams of link social workers to three. This was due to an increase in foster carers with the agency and to accommodate FFI's future plans to expand. The children's services team included social care workers and an education support officer who engaged in direct work with children and young people. The service employed two therapists to support foster carers and children when required.

Overall, there was good management oversight of the support and supervision provided to foster carers and of case decisions. Team managers signed off on documents such as safety plans, review forms and matching forms. Staff supervision encompassed the case supervision process also. These records were comprehensive

and gave an overview of the quality of work and support to children and foster carers.

Frontline staff were held to account by management. Supervision records reviewed by inspectors found that supervision happened on a regular basis and was of a good quality ensuring that managers had effective oversight of cases and staff received adequate support when needed. The staff team consisted of experienced and new staff. New staff were provided with a thorough induction to ensure that they gained the necessary knowledge and skills to support carers. Frontline staff told inspectors that management including senior managers and the director were very accessible and supportive. The principal social worker responsible for assessments told inspectors that contracted social workers were provided with supervision mid-way through the assessment process. They were also offered group supervision and were provided with individual support through phone calls and emails when necessary.

FFI had a policy and procedures in place to identify placements which were at risk of breakdown, and to ensure that all possible efforts were made to reduce the likelihood of this happening. Inspectors saw regular reviews and discussions of possible placement breakdowns across various meeting minutes. The service convened placement support meetings when placements were at risk of breaking down. When placements did break down, placement breakdown meetings were carried out. Inspectors reviewed the minutes of four placement breakdown meetings. Placement breakdown reports were sent to Tusla, the foster carer and the relevant foster care committee in each of the four files reviewed.

The service maintained a register of the panel of persons approved to act as foster carers in each county in order to comply with the Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations 1995. It included a list of approved foster carers, their address, contact details, their approval details, and the date of their approval as well as other relevant information specific to each carer. The register was reviewed on a monthly basis by the senior management team.

Records reviewed by inspectors showed that policies and procedures were effectively implemented in the service. However, there was one instance in which improvements were needed to ensure that the respite policy was fully adhered to. This was in relation to the involvement of children in respite planning. After the inspection, assurances were sought by inspectors about the implementation of the FFI respite policy. Managers provided satisfactory assurances about actions that had been taken in children's best interests.

FFI had comprehensive business plans in place for 2022 and 2023. These plans set out six organisational objectives;

- to deliver a continuum of care to improve outcomes for children, young people and families

- to be entrepreneurial, business focused, and data led
- to create a culture of continuous improvement, strong communication and building of knowledge
- to contribute in to public policy, research and systems change
- to provide quality services in new and innovative ways
- to support capacity building, through partnerships and within marginalised communities.

Inspectors reviewed various meeting minutes, for example, team meetings, business meetings and senior management meetings which showed discussions and reviews of the business plan objectives and any actions that required follow up. Overall, FFI had met their objectives in 2022 and were striving for continuous improvement through the implementation of their business plan for 2023.

There were effective monitoring systems in place but one tracker required updating. Several trackers were maintained, reviewed and audited to allow senior managers, including the director to monitor the progress of complaints, allegations and serious concerns, critical incidents and escalations. During the inspection, inspectors found that this tracker was not up to date, three closed escalations were still recorded as open. The director assured inspectors that this was an administrative error and that these escalations had been fully actioned. The director ensured the escalation tracker was updated by the end of the inspection.

The service had a risk register in place, which identified relevant risks for the service, this was well maintained, up to date and had appropriate measures in place to mitigate against the risks. A principal social worker had oversight of all critical incidents by maintaining a tracker, which was reviewed on a monthly basis and they reported to the senior management team. Inspectors reviewed a comprehensive incident review for 2022 where trends were identified and discussed, and further actions agreed by the senior management team.

FFI had effective quality assurance systems in place. The service had a quality assurance and service improvement framework in place. The senior management team had oversight of all evaluations and audits within the service and were responsible for conducting regular audits within each of their assigned areas of management. The quality assurance and training manager was also responsible for the programme of internal audits. Learnings from these audits and review processes were shared across the staff teams, and changes to systems were implemented as needed. An example of this was seen where an internal audit on safe care documents such as safety plans for foster carers and children was carried out. This led to a planned review of the safe care policy and changes to this aspect of the assessment process to emphasise the work done with foster carers in the area of safe care throughout their fostering journey and to help ensure safer care and safeguarding of children. Frontline staff gave positive feedback to inspectors on the system of audits

in place in the service describing how the quality and training manager completes monthly checks and then makes recommendations on changes that need to be made.

A new information technology system had been implemented in the service in December 2022. This was where foster carer and children's files were held. FFI carried out a full audit on all files in the months prior to the launch of the new system to ensure that all records would be transferred to the new system. The system had built in features that aided oversight and monitoring such as a traffic light system for when records were outstanding or needed to be updated. The case records that inspectors reviewed did not always reflect when a new link social worker was assigned to the carer household; even on a short-term basis. This meant that although there may be other link social workers assigned to work with families; this was not evident on the foster carers files. However, the cross-cover system was held and managed by the social work team managers with oversight by the principal social worker and the new database system captured where changes in link social worker took place.

FFI had clear and effective management and governance systems that enabled regular review of service provision. Management actively monitored performance in its review of service plans, through meetings and case supervision. Regular senior management meetings took place which ensured that the director and principal social workers had a comprehensive overview of the service and oversight of all aspects of the service. These meetings monitored critical incidents, placements at risk of disruptions, recruitment processes and progress and assessments of foster carers. Inspectors observed one of the business meetings and found it demonstrated an effective governance and oversight system that reported on all aspects of the fostering service.

Exit interviews were offered to all carers exiting the agency. The response to exit interviews was poor; managers were aware of this and plans had been put in place to try to improve carer's participation in exit interviews going forward.

As previously mentioned in this report, FFI was last audited by the ACIMS team in July 2021. The focus of this audit was on FFI's management of serious concerns and allegations of abuse or neglect against foster carers in line with the Tusla Interim Protocol, 2017. The report outlined actions requiring follow up by FFI which were completed at the time. It was clear that allegations and serious concerns were managed appropriately during this inspection. FFI reported to ACIMS on a quarterly basis. These reports contained quantitative information on the number of children in placement, number of complaints received from children, number of allegations by children against carers or members of carer's family and significant events.

The service director, principal social workers and team social work managers met with Tusla service areas on a quarterly basis. Minutes of these meetings reviewed by

inspectors showed comprehensive discussion of placements and any additional supports needed, placement endings or breakdowns, complaints and allegations. This showed that there was good collaborative working between FFI and Tusla.

FFI had entered into service level agreements (SLA's) with Tusla. During this inspection, inspectors reviewed two SLAs in place between Tusla and FFI which specified the provision of a standard general foster care service and the provision of enhanced foster care therapeutic placements.

Staff and managers demonstrated an openness to learning from feedback, complaints, inspection processes, internal reviews and placement breakdown meetings. Findings from previous HIQA inspections were implemented, for example, it was decided that a safety plan would be put in place for all children placed with the service. The service sought feedback from carers through an annual survey and throughout the year for specific issues. The carers consultative group trialled the new carers online application which is part of the new information technology system and gave feedback on this before it was rolled out for all foster carers. Tusla social workers and other external professionals described to inspectors how FFI was open to receiving feedback and working together to achieve positive outcomes for children.

FFI had effective governance and management systems in place. FFI continuously planned to improve through service planning and quality improvement initiatives. The risk management systems in place supported FFI to provide a safe and effective service. For these reasons FFI was deemed to be compliant.

Judgment: Compliant

Standard 21: Recruitment and retention of an appropriate range of foster carers

Health boards are actively involved in recruiting and retaining an appropriate range of foster carers to meet the diverse needs of the children and young people in their care.

FFI had recruitment and retention strategies in place for foster carers. There were effective systems in place with a dedicated recruitment and assessment team providing oversight of this part of the service. There were various retention strategies in place which acknowledged foster carers for various milestones and occasions. The retention strategy had been reviewed to further drive service improvement for foster carers.

From what inspectors reviewed, recruitment enquiries were acknowledged within one day and this was in line with their policy. The FFI website also allowed potential

foster carers to self-screen which has reduced the amount of enquiries. Management had effective oversight through an enquiry and placement tracker as well as the recruitment and assessment team meeting on a regular basis.

The recruitment and assessment team met on a fortnightly basis since 2021. Inspectors observed one of their meetings and the agenda items included recruitment, enquiry queries, training, assessments, approvals and reviews. All foster carers involved in the assessment process were discussed at this meeting about how the assessment was progressing, any concerns arising, any need to extend timeframes and scheduling the date the assessment will be presented to the Foster Care Committee. There was good follow-up discussion in meetings with satisfactory tracking of required actions. This meant there was good managerial oversight of what needed to happen to ensure recruitment was timely and effective.

The range and effectiveness of recruitment campaigns was considered by the service. COVID-19 resulted in FFI having to adapt quickly to moving fully online and being responsive. During COVID-19 restrictions, potential foster carers submitted a video of themselves and of their home which gave the information required to assess if they should be invited to apply to become foster carers. These had returned to in-person home visits at the time of the inspection.

FFI had creative methods in place to recruit and engage potential foster carers. FFI ran a number of events in 2022 regarding same. For example, a new office phone system resulted in enquiry calls being more easily directed to the fostering advisor who was recruited in 2021.

Experienced foster carers were involved in the recruitment of potential foster carers. FFI involved foster carers in events to share information and to share their stories with potential foster carers. FFI recruited foster carers from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Data provided by FFI prior to the inspection indicated that 17 households were from different cultural backgrounds. Training offered to foster carers also included diversity and inclusion to further support them in their role in providing care.

FFI had a number of effective retention initiatives to support foster carers to continue fostering. Foster carers told inspectors they were appreciative of such initiatives and FFI recognised foster carers commitment to fostering.

There were further examples of good practice which showed the service's commitment to retaining foster carers. A carer consultation group was established and remained active with good participation. Foster carers spoke positively about the group and told inspectors they were heard and their views were acted upon. There were family activity days, various training events, children's participation events and

acknowledgments of various occasions such as birthdays, Christmas as well as losses experienced by families.

A review of the four-year retention strategy from 2018-2022 had occurred and had various suggestions and ideas as to how to further drive retention initiatives moving forward. They included the newly implemented carer portal to increase communication and exploring ideas as to how to further highlight achievements and appreciation and well-being of foster carers, their birth children and children placed with the service. An overview of ongoing recruitment was reviewed quarterly by the senior management team.

The service had a range of recruitment and retention strategies in place which foster carers provided positive feedback about; including involving experienced foster carers in recruitment campaigns. While the service had sufficient foster carers to meet demand, recruitment was actively ongoing to increase the availability of placements for children. Enquiries were responded to in a timely manner and engagement with foster carers was tracked with good oversight. Where possible, children were placed in their local community. The service was judged as compliant with this standard

Judgment: Compliant

Standard 25: Representation and complaints

Health boards have policies and procedures designed to ensure that children and young people, their families, foster carers and others with a bona fide interest in their welfare can make effective representations, including Complaints, about any aspect of the fostering service, whether provided directly by a health board or by a non-statutory agency.

The service had policies and procedures in place which were clear and responsive to managing representations and complaints made by children, their families and foster carers. The policies and procedures were available to children, families and foster carers who were made aware of how to make a representation, complaint and provide feedback to the service. Information was provided in written format as well as being provided verbally to all parties. The complaints policy outlined the procedures in place if someone was not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint. This showed that FFI had good processes in place and were open to feedback from foster carers and children.

Children's right to make a complaint was promoted and supported by FFI. Children in foster care and staff had developed a child-friendly information booklet about complaints. It described what to do if children are unhappy about anything when they

are living with their foster family. It described what a complaint was, what children can make a complaint about, who they could complain to, how to make a complaint and what happened when one was made. The link social workers talked through this booklet with children after they moved into their foster homes. The booklet included the contact details for the service for during office hours and for the after-hours service.

The service had good tracking and oversight of complaints. A designated complaints manager was a nominated senior manager who ensured that complaints were dealt with promptly and effectively. They also ensured that all staff were aware of the policies and procedures. An example of good practice was that the tracker for complaints captured expressions of dissatisfaction as well as complaints. This meant that anything causing concern for a foster carer or child in care was taken seriously. Information on the tracker included categories such as the date of the complaint, who would oversee the complaint, the date it was completed, the outcome and whether the complainant was satisfied. Complaints were then reviewed by senior managers who provided oversight of the management of them.

Information provided by the service prior to the inspection noted that there had been eight expressions of dissatisfaction made by children and foster carers during the 12 months prior to the inspection. Three of these were sampled by inspectors. They were responded to in a timely manner, all actions taken were clearly recorded and documented both on case records and on the complaints tracker. One of those reviewed by inspectors remained open at the time of the inspection and was receiving an appropriate response from the management team.

The number of foster carers who completed exit interviews when leaving the service required improvement. Although the service offered exit interviews to foster carers, they told inspectors they planned to review the current practice. Foster carers feedback was captured in other ways such as in placement breakdown meetings and termination of appointment reports. This demonstrated that FFI recognised the importance of receiving feedback and learning from it.

Information provided by the service indicated it had received 26 compliments during the 12 months prior to the inspection. They were received from foster carers, parents and external stakeholders complimenting the service for the support foster carers, parents and children received, quality of reports and also the appreciation shown to foster carers.

Foster carers and children were aware of independent advocacy services available to them. They spoke with inspectors about the services and this information was also recorded on case records. This showed that FFI were aware of and promoted children's right to advocacy and ensured that children and foster carers were aware of the available services to them.

The systems captured the complaints being made by foster carers and children. There was good oversight of the identification, recording, management and resolution of complaints. There was a culture of continual improvement where complaints were used to plan, deliver and review the service delivery. Children and families were aware of policies and got copies of them. The service was deemed compliant with this standard.

Judgment: Compliant

Appendix 1:

National Standards for Foster Care (2003)
and

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

Standard 8	Matching carers with children and young people
Regulations Part III, Article 7	Capacity of foster parents to meet the needs of child
Part III, Article 7 ³	Assessment of circumstances of the child
Standard 10	Safeguarding and child protection
Standard 15	Supervision and support
Standard 16	Training
Standard 17	Reviews of Foster carers
Standard 19	Management and monitoring of foster care services
Regulations Part IV, Article 12	Maintenance of register
Part IV, Article 17	Supervision and visiting of children
Standard 21	Recruitment and retention of an appropriate range of foster carers
Standard 25	Representations and complaints

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

³ Child Care (Placement of Children with Relatives) Regulations, 1995

Appendix 2:

Fostering First Ireland (FFI) as on 23rd January 2023

