



An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service

Non-Statutory Foster Care Agency

Monitoring ID:	07
Year:	2026

Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service
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Monitoring Report

Year:	2026
Name of Agency:	Orchard Fostering
Dates of monitoring visit:	27th, 28th and 29th July 2026
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1. Foreword

The Child and Family Agency is responsible for providing services for children who require care outside of their families of origin. This care is provided in a variety of settings, and Tusla is responsible for ensuring that this care is of a high standard for the protection and support of these children. Tusla may also commission the provision of foster care placements by non-statutory, voluntary or private, fostering agencies. The non-statutory foster care agency is required to adhere to the legislation, regulations and standards in respect of the provision of foster care within the state and demonstrate adequate knowledge of same. Tusla- Child and Family Agency was established on the 1st January 2014, legislated under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, and is now the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. The Child and Family Agency is overseen by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality.

Tusla has responsibility for a range of services including provision of alternative care placements for children requiring protection and support including statutory foster care services. For both statutory and non-statutory foster care services Tusla retain their statutory responsibilities to children placed with these services. The approval of foster carers is the responsibility of the Tusla Foster Care Committee (FCC). Tusla and non-statutory foster care agencies are accountable for the provision of safe and effective care to these children.

The internal responsibility for governance is the ultimate responsibility of the non-statutory agency providing the foster care service. The non-statutory foster care agency will, however, be subject to the normal monitoring and inspection arrangements as outlined in the regulations and legislation, undertaken by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and where appropriate by HIQA.

The monitoring of non-statutory foster care agencies by Tusla, Child and Family Agency is required by the “National Standards for Foster Care, 2003” Standard 24.6 to ensure compliance with the Placement of Children in Foster Care Regulations, 1995. The objective of the monitoring process is to provide assurance about the quality of care, challenge poor performance and promote improvement and safeguard the rights of young people in care.

This duty is undertaken by the Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service as part of the Children’s Services Regulation which is a sub directorate of the Quality and Regulation

Directorate within Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. The service is committed to carry out its duties in an even handed, fair and rigorous manner.

As part of the Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Services schedule of monitoring visits of private foster care agencies in 2026, a thematic review of Standard 10 – Safeguarding and Child Protection, is being completed from Q1 onwards.

This monitoring visit will set out to determine if the agency works to ensure that children and young people in foster care are protected from abuse and neglect in line with Standard 10, Safeguarding and Child Protection, National Standards for Foster Care (2003).

Information was gathered through reviews of the foster carer files, interviews with relevant people and through a review of questionnaires returned by active foster carers within the agency.

Acknowledgements

The monitoring officers would like to acknowledge the staff and management of Orchard Fostering and the foster carers who took the time to complete questionnaires, participate in interviews and for their co-operation during the monitoring process.

1.1 Profile of the Foster Care Agency

Orchard Fostering is a non-statutory fostering agency that was established in 2008. This foster care agency currently provides nationwide foster care services and offers a diverse range of placements including short-term, respite, general, supported lodgings and enhanced foster care placements for children and young people aged between 0-18 years. The fostering service currently receives referrals from all Tusla regions.

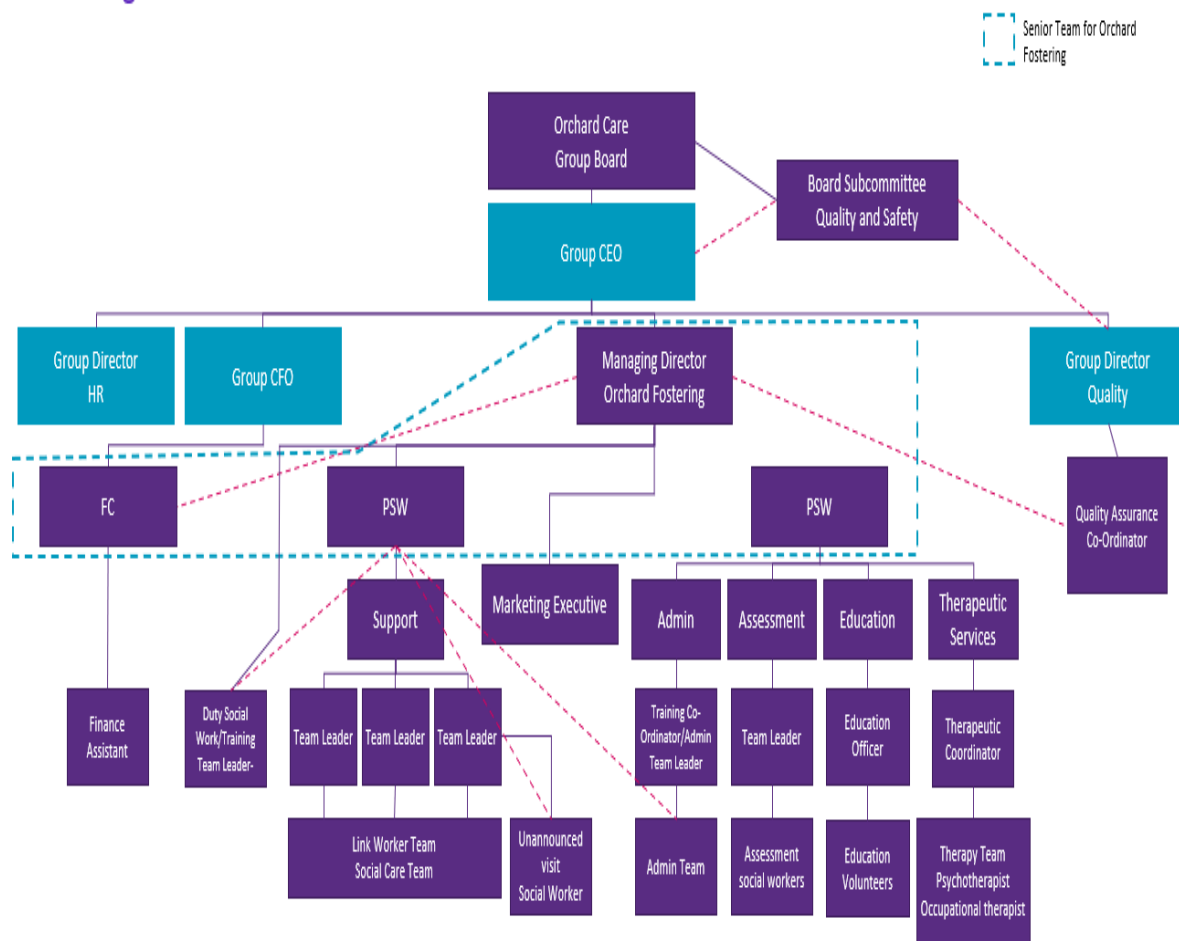
This agency's office is based in Dublin. They undertake the recruitment, assessment, training, supervision and support of foster carers.

As of the 26th June 2026 the data returned by the fostering agency stated that there was 111 foster care households approved with the agency, 94 of these were active foster carers, four were active with availability for placement, three were active with availability for respite placements and ten carer families were inactive.

The organisational chart under Figure 1 describes the management and team structure in place in this service.

Figure 1: Organisational Structure of Orchard Fostering

Organisation Chart



1.2 Methodology

This monitoring report sets out the findings of an announced monitoring visit carried out over three days in July 2026, to assess the agency's compliance with Standard 10 of the National Standards for Foster Care, 2003. The agency was notified of the intention to conduct this monitoring visit on the 29th June 2026.

The following documents, data sets and information was requested:

1. Organisational chart for the agency.

Documents

2. Most recent HIQA report if one completed since the last ACIMS monitoring visit.
3. Policies on child protection and safeguarding, including safe care (if applicable).
4. Policy on the management of allegations and welfare concerns against foster carers.
5. Policy on training including mandatory training.
6. Policy on foster carer reviews.

Data sets

7. Number of active carers with the agency as of the 26th June 2026.
8. Number of foster carers subject to the child abuse substantiation procedure (CASP) from the 26th June 2025 to the 26th June 2026.
9. Number of carers subject to allegations of abuse and / or welfare concerns (not subject to CASP) from the 26th June 2025 to the 26th June 2026.
10. Training statistics on child protection, safeguarding and mandatory training completed by foster carers from the 26th June 2025 to the 26th June 2026.
11. Number of additional foster carer reviews undertaken following outcome of allegation / welfare concern from the 26th June 2025 to the 26th June 2026.
12. Number of carers where there is an ongoing assessment following allegation / welfare concern as of the 26th June 2026.
13. Number of carers subject to an ongoing safety plan due to allegation / welfare concern against any member of the foster carer household as of the 26th June 2026.
14. Any internal trackers of allegations / concerns against foster carers to evidence management oversight.
15. Number of child protection and welfare report forms (CPWRF) submitted to Tusla by Orchard Fostering from the 26th June 2025 to the 26th June 2026.

This report is based on a range of monitoring activities including review of the following information on the 27th, 28th and 29th July 2026:

- ◆ A sample of foster carer household records. Monitors reviewed 14 foster carer household records - this equated to 14.9% of the active foster carers within the agency and was in line with the standard operating procedure for conducting monitoring visits.
- ◆ Relevant policies, procedures, audits and trackers.
- ◆ Foster carer questionnaires completed and submitted during the timeframe of the monitoring visit. All foster carers were afforded the opportunity to submit a questionnaire and return via post or email. A total of seven completed questionnaires were returned and reviewed. This equated to a further sampling of 7.4% of foster carer households.
- ◆ Written communication from one young person cared for by Orchard Fostering.

Interviews with relevant persons that were deemed by the monitoring team as to having a bona fide interest in the operation of the service;

- ◆ Managing director and principal social worker (PSW) (joint interview)
- ◆ Fostering link worker x 6 (group interview)
- ◆ Foster carers x 2

1.3 Summary of Monitoring Findings

In summary, the monitors found that Orchard Fostering was operating in compliance with standard 10 of the National Standards for Foster Care, 2003. This was evidenced in foster carer records such as training provision, supervision records, in interviews with foster carers and in foster carer questionnaires returned. Monitors found that there were robust oversight and governance arrangements in place to ensure agency compliance with safeguarding procedures and assessment of allegations and concerns. Monitors found that the agency was operating in line with good practice and relevant standards.

2. Analysis of Findings

2.1 Safeguarding and Child Protection

Standard 10

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

Safeguarding

Monitors reviewed policies and procedures governing practice and found appropriate policies in place to promote safeguarding and child protection. The agency had updated policies on child protection, recruitment, and training for staff and carers. Pre-approval, all applicants underwent a national and international vetting process where relevant, reference checks and a comprehensive assessment process to assure the agency of the applicants' suitability to the role. Staff in the agency underwent national and international vetting (where relevant), were provided with induction on appointment to their position in the agency and had a personal learning plan (PLP) to ensure adherence to updated training. All social work staff, including link and assessing social workers were registered with CORU, Ireland's Health and Social Care Professionals Regulator. Social care staff working in the agency had initiated the process of registering with CORU and evidence of same was provided. There was an updated child safeguarding statement displayed in the public office, and this identified the designated liaison person (DLP) and relevant person for the agency.

The agency maintained a document for the tracking of Garda vetting for all carers, members of their support network and staff. Monitors found through a review of a sample of foster carer records and a review of this tracker that Garda vetting was obtained prior to applicants being approved or staff being inducted and was updated every three years. This was embedded in policy and practice. Monitors found that there were a small number of carers whose vetting was approaching expiry and evidence was provided to demonstrate that the process of renewing the vetting had begun and communication with carers to remind them of the process and the timeline in which it was to be completed. Where Garda vetting renewal was being awaited, there was an affidavit signed by the carer was on file noting they had no convictions or criminal charges pending. As part of the monitoring visit, monitors attended the quality assurance meeting where Garda vetting, was discussed as part of the agenda. Monitors identified one incident where a disclosure was made on a Garda vetting notification and following internal discussion no follow up was deemed necessary. Prior to the finalisation of this report, this matter was addressed with an appropriate action plan implemented.

The training policy stated that all carers were mandated to complete the Children First e-learning programme (based on the Children First Act, 2015 and the Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2017), mandated persons e-learning module and first aid as part of their personal learning plan. Senior management in the agency maintained a training tracker which identified the refresher date for each of the above training courses. Monitors found that Children First training was in date for all carers except for one, whose training certificate expired one day prior to the monitoring visit. This instance was escalated and monitors were provided with the updated training certificate prior to the completion of this report. Mandated persons training was in date for all carers. First aid training was refreshed and in date for all carers except for three. One had completed the training course in a different setting and was in the process of obtaining the certificate for inclusion on the tracker, one carer was out of the country, and the third instance was escalated for discussion with the team leader and link worker during their supervision. In interview, foster carers noted that link workers discussed training with them on a regular basis during support and supervision sessions.

The agency maintained a risk register which was updated on a weekly basis. This register took account of risks from across the agency including outdated training. The register categorised risks into high, medium and low risks with associated actions, risk rating scores and control measures.

As a further aid to safeguarding, the agency completed annual unannounced visits to each foster carer by a social worker specifically appointed to carry out this role. This was guided by policy and embedded in practice.

Monitors found that all foster carer applicants completed the preparation for fostering training prior to approval. A review of this training course evidenced that guidance and training was provided to all applicants on safe care practices, recognising and reporting signs of abuse, understanding and managing challenging behaviour and maintaining a record of the foster care placement. In interview carers stated that they attended the training course prior to approval and gave anecdotal evidence of its benefits in terms of preparing them for the fostering journey. Monitors found that observation sheets were completed by the facilitator of the training course identifying any potential gaps in understanding or additional supports that may be required for individual applicants should they be approved for fostering. These observation sheets formed the basis of the foster carers initial learning plan.

Monitors found that there were a range of information pathways provided to foster carers to inform them of the appropriate use of sanctions and best practice to manage dysregulated behaviour. These included the preparation for fostering training course, a handbook provided to foster carers on approval, and post approval, the discussions on safe care practices and the completion of the safe care plan. This was confirmed by fostering link workers in interview and evidence of same was found on foster carer records. A review of the foster carer handbook provided to all carers stated that physical punishment and all forms of humiliating sanctions were forbidden with emphasis being put on connection and understanding the reason behind the behaviour. Foster carers in interview spoke of the emphasis on understanding the trauma experienced by children and young people and being trauma informed.

Monitors found that particular attention was given during the preparation for fostering training on the reasons why children and young people may require an alternative care placement and the vulnerabilities that accompany such experiences. In interview foster carers spoke confidently about their awareness of bullying both in person and online and stated that they were confident in the supports offered by Orchard Fostering in identifying and managing these concerns.

Monitors reviewed foster carer records and found that prior to children being placed, relevant information was provided to enable carers make informed decisions on their ability to meet the needs of the child within their home environment, taking into account the needs of their own children and family. Where written information was provided to prospective carers, this was password protected to safeguard the child's privacy. Monitors found a range of identified safeguards to ensure a suitable match between the needs of the child and the skills of the carers. These included pen pictures, preplacement meetings and the completion of matching checklists. In interview, foster carers were confident in their ability to say no to the potential placing of a child where they felt they would not be in a position to safely care for them. One foster carer noted that their link worker reiterated that they should take the time they needed to ensure that the placement was a good match for their home and family. In interview, social workers responsible for the assessment of applicants confirmed that the right to decline a potential placement also formed part of their discussions with applicants prior to approval.

Safeguards in operation following a child moving to live with a foster family included the development of a safe care plan and the completion of an absence management plan (AMP). Monitors found these documents supported the carers to safely care for the child in their

home and provided guidance and advice on what to do should a child go missing from their care. The development of AMP's remained the responsibility of the allocated Tusla social worker. AMP's were evidenced for those records sampled as part of the monitoring visit and these were found to be signed by the carer. The principal social worker (PSW) held an escalation log for AMP's which were requested from the relevant social work departments but were still outstanding. For children where an AMP was outstanding, foster carers knew to contact the on-call manager for Orchard Fostering and seek additional guidance and advice.

Monitors were advised that there was only one instance of a sibling group of two children and a third unrelated child being placed together. This was forwarded to the relevant Foster Care Committee (FCC) for discussion and approval. A copy of the approval email was on file. Additionally, there were two further instances of three unrelated children being placed together. Both circumstances were forwarded to the FCC for consideration and approval. The relevant approval letters were on record.

As evidenced in the data set, there were three foster carers active with availability for respite care where required. Foster carers had access to the Orchard Fostering out of hours consultation service offering guidance and advice to foster carers on whatever issue was presenting. In interview the foster carers stated they were aware of this service and had used it when necessary. Additionally, Orchard Fostering had developed their own therapeutic services team including a psychotherapist and occupational therapist. They also had an education officer and education volunteers, appropriately vetted, offering support to foster carers on a range of presenting issues.

Child Protection.

Monitors reviewed a suite of policies in place for the management of allegations of abuse and welfare concerns in relation to children in care regarding past or current incidents. These were found to be aligned to procedures devised by Tusla Child and Family Agency, in line with Children First, the National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2017.

Monitors found that from the point of application right through assessment, foster carers were advised of their role as mandated persons and as stated above, post approval all foster carers had completed training in the role of the mandated person and this was refreshed every three years. Where children in their care made disclosures of abuse or neglect, foster carers were facilitated to submit child protection and welfare report forms (CPWRF) through

the Tusla portal. In interview one foster stated that if they needed to, their link worker would support them to submit a CPWRF.

In October 2024, Tusla launched CASP V2. This procedure amended and updated how allegations and welfare concerns against foster carers were processed. Monitors found that all fostering link workers for this agency were provided with training on this new procedure. This was evidenced in email communication and in team meeting minutes for the agency. In interview, fostering link workers were familiar with the process to be followed and their role as advocates for the foster carers concerned. To provide clarity regarding the new process, a booklet “Foster Carers – A Guide to Allegations” was produced by Tusla Child and Family Agency in 2025 and provided to all statutory and non-statutory foster care providers with the understanding that a copy of this booklet was to be given to each foster carer and discussed with them within one year from its implementation date. Monitors found that this booklet was distributed via email to each foster carer in the service of Orchard Fostering in September 2025. Monitors found that fostering link workers were in the process of raising and discussing this booklet with carers in their supervision meetings. Post this monitoring visit, the PSW stated that this was again raised with all fostering link workers and the booklet was to be discussed with all foster carers at their next supervision and support session to ensure completion prior to October 2026. A review of the questionnaires returned to monitors found that all responding carers were familiar with the process should an allegation be made against them. In interviews with two foster carers, both responded that they understood the new process and had received the booklet.

Within the timeframe of the dataset for this monitoring visit, there were two allegations of abuse or neglect which were referred to the CASP process. Monitors reviewed both of these records and found good collaboration with relevant social work teams from Tusla Child and Family Agency. There were comprehensive minutes recorded of each stage of the process and evidence that the foster carers were supported by the fostering link workers. It was noted that Orchard Fostering facilitated membership of the Irish Foster Carers Association (IFCA) for all its foster carers post approval and monitors found that foster carers were advised and encouraged to avail of the services offered by IFCA as they navigated the CASP assessment process. A variety of legal and therapeutic supports were made known to the foster carers should they have wished to avail of them.

Monitors were informed that there were twelve carers subject to allegations of abuse or welfare concerns that did not meet the criteria for referral to CASP during the timeframe for this monitoring visit. Monitors reviewed a sample of six of these records and found good

evidence of carers being advised in person and in writing of the concern. The records evidenced that fostering link workers advocated for the timely assessment of the concerns and there was good collaboration with Tusla Child and Family Agency. Safety plans, developed under the Signs of Safety approach, were devised considering all children residing in the foster carers home and signed by the foster carers, allocated Tusla social worker and fostering link worker.

The agency maintained a document to track the progress and stage of each allegation and / or concern identified. Monitors reviewed this tracker and found that it was updated regularly and contained all relevant information needed for managers to have governance and oversight of all issues, including qualitative and statistical information to facilitate analysis and tracking. Additionally, the agency met with an appointed senior manager from Tusla Child and Family Agency on a quarterly basis and shared information relating to ongoing CASP assessments, allegations not subject to CASP and progress re same.

There was an updated policy on the facilitation of foster carer reviews. This was in line with the amendment to the Policy, Procedure and Best Practice Guidance document made in March 2023. Monitors found there was one additional foster carer review undertaken following the outcome of concerns within the timeframe. There was evidence that foster carers were facilitated to read the report being presented to the FCC and where they disagreed with the findings, they were facilitated to submit their own report and seek legal advice should they wish to do so. All other foster carer reviews sampled were completed in line with best practice guidance.

There were instances where concerns were expressed about a foster carer that did not meet the threshold for assessment. On two occasions, monitors found there was limited recording on when this information was shared with the carers. The principal social worker assured monitors that information of this type was always shared with carers, the timing of which depended on the urgency and other factors affecting the foster carers family and the child's placement at that time. Monitors recommend that the agency be mindful to record the reasons why information may not be shared immediately and note the timeframe within which the information is to be shared. This is to promote service improvement and to aid transparency.

Foster carer questionnaires and interviews

A total of seven foster carer families completed and returned the questionnaire to the monitoring team and two foster carers were interviewed individually. Carers were provided

with an opportunity to reflect on their experience of being supported by the agency, their experience of training within the agency, the positives they experience from fostering as well as the challenges being a foster carer placed on them and their families. All foster carers stated that they were well supported by Orchard Fostering. One carer stated in their questionnaire that “I am happy with the support I get from Orchard- we feel listened to and they make sure we have all supports in place”. The support offered by Orchard Fostering resulted in another carer noting that one of the positives of fostering with this agency was “Being able to have a positive, nurturing and consistent effect on children who were in the care system and be their advocates”. Another foster carer stated that their “link worker was very approachable, returning calls promptly and following up on concerns with Tusla when needed”. Another foster carer wrote that they had “access to counselling support” with a named therapist and had availed of respite for one weekend. They continued that they were reminded of the out of hours number every Friday should they require support.

Monitors also received communication from a young person in care being cared for by a foster carer with Orchard Fostering. They stated that they were a part of the Young Orchard Voice- a group dedicated to the young people engaged with Orchard Fostering. In their communication they said “Being part of the Young Orchard Voice has been a great opportunity for me as a young person in care to make my voice heard. I get to talk to so many great people and go so many places. Questions and concerns are all listened to”.

Monitors found through the review of records at the agency, relevant interviews and communication with foster carers and one young person being cared for by Orchard Fostering that the agency promoted safe care through engagement with each stakeholder, comprehensive and responsive policies and adherence to same.

2.2 Recommendations for service improvement

- Monitors recommend that the agency be mindful to record the reasons why information concerning foster carers may not be shared immediately and note the timeframe within which the information is to be shared.

2.3. Actions Required to be compliant with the standard

- None identified.