Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency

Infant Jesus Sisters

Baseline Audit Report

December 2024

Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 The Sisters of the Infant Jesus (Nicolas Barre) General Trust[1] is an International group working across 18 countries. The work undertaken typically involves education and other ministries to young people, health care and pastoral or parish ministries; usually in developing countries (principally, but not exclusively, in Africa). This includes various forms of support for people who are disadvantaged and in need. The Sisters do not maintain any physical premises or have a local website for England that the public might have access to.

1.2 The Infant Jesus Sisters are the English and Irish Province of this group; the Province Administrative hub of which is based in Ireland with Sr Marie Pitcher being the Provincial lead and the five Sisters in England residing in separate premises around the country, three of whom remain in active ministry. A breakdown of these Sisters' work in projects is as follows:

- One is the Bursar of the congregation worldwide and a trustee for three charities.
- One Sister is the CEO and manager of a separate organisation. This is a charitable pony centre called Wormwood Scrubs Pony Centre where she has worked for 35 years.
- One Sister is a Primary school Governor, a post she has held for 9 years, a school teaching volunteer and a Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) volunteer.

1.3 The CSSA has devised a categorisation scheme for Religious Life Groups taking part in safeguarding audits. This categorises Groups on a scale from *Level 1* (a small community with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns), *Level 2* (a medium sized community with some outreach with vulnerable populations and/or providing some Diocesan Activities such as a Parish Priest) or *Level 3* (a large community and/or one with significant outreach with vulnerable populations and/or a disproportionately high number of open safeguarding cases). The Infant Jesus Sisters have been assigned to a Level 1 Apostolic audit.

[1] Infant Jesus Sisters (Nicolas Barre) Generalate CIO. Registered charity number 1164298

1.4 The CSSA recognises the rich diversity of the Religious and acknowledges that the Religious Life Groups within any particular category may vary significantly in terms of size, ministry and safeguarding practice. Consequently, CSSA analysts may use professional judgement to ensure that Religious Life Groups are graded against the national standards in such a way that reflects their uniqueness.

2. Scope & Methodology

2.1 The audit took place in October 2024 and e-mail communications were shared between the auditor and the Infant Jesus Sisters safeguarding lead to establish a date for the audit and a time for the in-person visit. In advance of the formal audit visit, the Infant Jesus Sisters were asked to complete a Level 1 audit self-assessment tool which provided background information on the Group's adherence to the eight individual safeguarding standards, detail regarding their progress in the overall implementation of these standards and evidence of how this was being achieved. This self-assessment, along with accompanying evidence, was provided to the auditor via an e-mail on the 20th August 2024.

2.2 The self-assessment form and accompanying evidence was analysed by the assigned auditor ahead of the in-person visit. The evidence provided in both the self-assessment form and the in-person visit has been assessed against the Level 1 Maturity Matrix and ratings for each standard have been assigned together with an overall grade.

2.3 In addition to the self-assessment form and accompanying evidence the auditor had the opportunity to have a joint meeting with the Infant Jesus Sisters' Provincial lead (who is also a trustee) and the safeguarding lead during the in-person visit on the 3rd October 2024. The following evidence has been considered in forming conclusions for the individual safeguarding standards scoring and the overall score:

- A joint in-person meeting with the Infant Jesus Provincial lead and safeguarding lead
- Self-assessment form completed by the Infant Jesus Sisters and submitted to the CSSA auditor

- "Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures of the Infant Jesus Sisters" International policy booklet dated February 2018
- "Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures of the Infant Jesus Sisters" International policy booklet updated August 2024
- "Safeguarding Policy Infant Jesus Sisters in England" document 2024
- Provincial Council Meeting Agendas with standing "Safeguarding" item
- Trustee Minutes with standing "Safeguarding and Complaints" item
- Training certificates
- DBS file
- E-mail liaison with the Religious Lives Safeguarding Service (RLSS)

2.4 No case audit work has been undertaken during the course of this audit as there have been no safeguarding reported concerns involving, or allegations against, the Infant Jesus Sisters Religious Life Group and so there are no current or previous case files to pass comment on or measure the implementation of their policies or procedures.

3. Audit Grading

3.1 Safeguarding practice is assessed against the eight safeguarding standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales[2]

3.2 Safeguarding practice is graded in accordance with the CSSA Maturity Matrix for Level 1 Religious Life Groups. Each standard is graded on an ascending three-point scale of *Not Met, Met with Recommendations* and *Met*. Grades for individual standards are combined in order to produce an overall grading for the Religious Life Group as an outcome of the audit. The audit draws on evidence generated from self-assessment, interviews and the supporting documentation as listed in paragraph 2.3.

[2] A description and full details of the Standards can be found on the CSSA website here

Overall Grading	**Met**
Standard 1 - Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Met
Standard 2 - Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message	Met
Standard 3 - Engaging with and Caring for those who report having been harmed	Met
Standard 4 - Effective Management of Allegations and Concerns	Met
Standard 5 - Management and Support of Subjects of Allegations and Concerns (respondents)	Met
Standard 6 - Robust Human Resource Management	Met
Standard 7 - Training and Support for Safeguarding	Met
Standard 8 - Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement	Met

3.3 This report summarises the findings of the audit undertaken with the Infant Jesus Sisters and their progress towards meeting the eight safeguarding standards. The overall grading for the Group is assessed as "Met" which comprises of eight separate standards all reaching a grade of "Met" individually. The evident culture of safeguarding was a notable strength for the Group.

4. Audit findings against each standard

4.1 Standard 1 Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry and culture

4.1.1 The Infant Jesus Sisters have two written and up-to-date safeguarding policies. One of these is a "Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures" document aimed at the encompassing international Congregation and provides detailed guidance on responding to allegations and concerns and signs and types of abuse. Despite being a document intended for International consumption it is appropriately aligned with the laws and expectations of England and Wales. During the in-person visit the auditor was provided with a hard copy of this overarching policy in a pamphlet version dated the edition of February 2018. It was raised that there may be a recently updated version available and to this end the auditor was sent an electronic version of the policy and procedures document on the 18th October 2024. The newest edition of the document was, in fact, updated slightly prior to the audit week and is dated August 2024. The new version is equally as comprehensive. Although not deemed sufficient enough to warrant a formal recommendation as an outcome of this audit report, it is suggested that it is fed back to the creators of the "*Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures of the Infant Jesus Sisters*" policy that consideration is given to re-naming the document to encompass Vulnerable Adults as well in the title as the document is aimed at, and includes details on, both groups.

4.1.2 The second safeguarding policy is specific to England (there are no Sisters present in Wales) and has an initial review date of October 2024 with a maximum of 3 yearly reviews thereafter. The Provincial Sister and safeguarding lead advised the auditor in their in-person meeting that in 2023 they recognised that their previous policy was out-of-date and so they approached the RLSS for a proforma and drew up their current policy based on this. The policy references the RLSS and the roles of the Provincial Superior, Safeguarding lead and other roles in safeguarding concerns. Although the phrase "zero tolerance" itself is not explicitly described in either policy, it is clearly implied that no forms of abuse are acceptable and that appropriate and timely action will be taken to combat it.

4.1.3 As mentioned in the local safeguarding policy the Infant Jesus Sisters have a designated lead for safeguarding who has completed training offered by both the

RLSS and in her voluntary work in the education sector. The Provincial Superior has also completed training through the RLSS and during the in-person meeting both evidenced a thorough knowledge of safeguarding issues and of their legal responsibilities. Through interview it was apparent that the professional backgrounds and work that the Provincial Superior (who is also a trustee), safeguarding lead and other Sisters (including those on the board of trustees) were involved with, had provided them with a sound understanding of effective safeguarding practice.

4.1.4 In terms of safeguarding governance arrangements, the auditor heard how governance structures were in place and effectively considered safeguarding matters. Although formal trustee meetings are held as and when required as opposed to a set period of time, the minutes from these meetings showed they occurred sufficiently frequently enough to meet the minimum threshold recommended by the Charity Commission[3]. When the meetings occur, safeguarding and complaints are a topic on the agenda. Despite there not always being issues raised in this item, it is encouraging to see that the space is being devoted to safeguarding and complaints at these meetings should the need arise to discuss at all.

4.1.5 The auditor was also shown an agenda from the most recent "virtual" Provincial Council meeting which contains a standing safeguarding agenda item. In addition, it was apparent from interview that several of the trustees and the safeguarding lead have very regular informal contact where all aspects of Religious Life are considered. Given the very small size of the Infant Jesus Sisters the oversight offered from trustees and leaders in safeguarding, who also appear to vocally champion a culture of safeguarding, is considered to be robust.

4.1.6 Evidence shows that representatives from Infant Jesus Sisters have attended conference, webinars and courses offered by the RLSS with whom they have been a member of for three years. The Provincial Sister relayed in interview how the Group had several virtual meetings when they first joined the RLSS which in turn helped them network with other congregations if required.

[3] Guidelines specified by the Charity Commission can be found on their website [here]

Graded: Met

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

4.2.1 Infant Jesus Sisters have established close links with the core organisations they are involved with including the PACT team, local primary schools, St Vincent de Paul support work and Wormwood Scrubs Pony Centre. Here they have integrated with those organisation's safeguarding processes and undertaken DBS checks and recognised safeguarding training to improve their practice and promote a safer environment.

4.2.2 There is no formal safeguarding communication plan in place. However, given the fact there are only five Sisters in the Group and that several members are retired, it is felt that having no formal plan is proportionate. The regular communication of safeguarding messages through other means such as self-reported e-mails, Zoom meetings and telephone calls, in-person meetings, the appearance of safeguarding as standing items in the Provincial Council and Trustee meetings is considered to offset this absence. In addition, the CSSA auditor acknowledges that the Group maintains no physical or online spaces where they might have need to communicate safeguarding messages to the wider community.

4.2.3 During the in-person meeting with the Group the safeguarding lead informed the auditor that continuing to fully embed *Integrity in Ministry*[4] with all 5 sisters was a task to be completed. She reflected that her work within, and training from, the prison has helped her understand the potential for people to be adversely

[4] Integrity in Ministry is a code of conduct for Religious engaged in ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. It has been written for the guidance of those in ministry and for the information of those people with and among whom Religious exercise their ministry and a copy can be located here

manipulated and that there is a need for the Sisters to be protected as well. This self-assigned recommendation for future work is supported by the auditor.

Graded: Met

4.3 Standard 3 Engaging with and Caring for those who report having been harmed

4.3.1 Infant Jesus Sisters have no historic or current case work from which to draw any assessments in relation to Standards 3, 4 or 5. Furthermore, any concerns or allegations raised to the Sisters during their voluntary work in the prison, SVP or educational setting would be managed by the School, prison or organisation in which they are assisting. That said, the information gleaned during the in-person meeting through interview and in regard to the range and quality of training received evidenced that the Sisters are well-equipped to respond compassionately and effectively to those reporting harm should the need arise. Despite not having any current or previous situations to draw upon in regard to evidencing this Standard, the Provincial and safeguarding lead were able to envisage scenarios in which they may need to take action in caring for those who have been harmed. They were able to give a thorough account of how they might record concerns or disclosures, onward reporting and potential action to take in reducing risk. A description is also offered in the self-assessment which states that any complainant reporting abuse would be listened to, assured and offered help and support suitable to their needs and that relevant agencies and support groups would be contacted as appropriate. Several internal and external avenues for signposting of support are also listed in the self-assessment.

4.3.2 The RLSS have confirmed the engagement that the Infant Jesus Sisters have had with them and their policy evidences the formalised links the Group has with the RLSS in reporting abuse and supporting victims and survivors.

Graded: Met

4.4 Standard 4 Effective Management of Allegations and Concerns

4.4.1 Although there is no casework available to assess practice, the two formal written policies in place demonstrate that members are effectively assisted in responding to allegations of abuse. The Province safeguarding policy outlines any reports of abuse must be reported to the RLSS so that their assistance can be acquired. It has been confirmed that these policies have been sent to all five Sisters and that the Sisters who are involved in voluntary work with other services are obliged to follow those organisation's reporting policies and procedures.

4.4.2 During interview with the Provincial Sister and the safeguarding lead it was evident that both have a sound understanding of how to respond to an allegation of abuse in terms of sharing with statutory authorities, the organisation they are working for, and with the RLSS. They also demonstrated good knowledge of the circumstances in which they are likely to receive such reports, of the thresholds of statutory involvement and of the need to handle information carefully and sensitively.

4.4.3 GDPR and Data Retention were also discussed during the in-person visit and it was apparent that the Sisters have a good awareness of the need to keep accurate and timely records of any concerns or allegation, and to store relevant information securely and for periods only which they are entitled to. To this end there is a secure filing cabinet within the safeguarding lead's property where any future concerns can be stored should any arise. Section 8 of the local safeguarding policy also covers the recording and storage of safeguarding concerns and case files.

4.4.4 During the in-person visit the Provincial and Safeguarding Lead expressed awareness of the need to keep all members safe. This was in relation to both accusations of abuse and also in regard to their potential vulnerabilities. Being conscious of the advancing age of two of the group members in particular, assurances of safeguarding measures have been sought in terms of sheltered housing.

Graded: Met

4.5 Standard 5 Management and Support of Subjects of Allegations and Concerns (Respondents)

4.5.1 As above, with the absence of any historic or current casework it is not possible to directly assess practice in the area of management and support of those accused of abuse; hereafter referred to as Respondents. That said, from discussions with the Provincial Superior and the safeguarding lead the auditor was able to determine that a good understanding of the effects of accusations on respondents and of the need to take prompt action in protecting them and others. Subsequently, the Provincial Sister advised that there would be no hesitation in standing someone down should the need arise and that there are no issues with alternative accommodation given that all Sisters reside independently.

4.5.2 The Safeguarding Policy for Infant Jesus Sister in England covers the need to report to the RLSS any concerns or allegations of abuse. Liaison with the RLSS, together with the in-person interview, has shown that ties with the RLSS have been made and further consultation, referrals and advice will be readily sought from them if the need arises in regard to Respondent support and management. An awareness of Canonical investigations and where to refer Respondents for legal support was also evidenced. The designated safeguarding lead has received adequate training on support available and is well suited to be able to liaise with the RLSS and support and manage a Respondent should the need arise in future. The various potential needs of a Respondent were discussed, and it is clear that the Provincial Superior and the safeguarding lead would be suitably equipped with the knowledge to refer if they were required to.

Graded: Met

4.6 Standard 6 Robust Human Resource Management

4.6.1 DBS processes within Infant Jesus Sisters are followed and an accurate and up-to-date record is made of those Sisters requiring a DBS check. During the in-person visit the auditor had sight of the DBS records which documented dates of current DBS checks. The Sisters reported attending the U-Check DBS training provided by the RLSS and the RLSS confirmed that they have processed two DBS

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checks for the Group; one Enhanced level and one Basic level check. The auditor was advised during the in-person visit that the RLSS were consulted in determining the correct level of check required for a Sister residing in sheltered accommodation who is retired from active ministry but was accompanying other residents shopping occasionally and being a companion to them. It is of note that this Sister no longer carries out such duties.

4.6.2 Of the other Sisters in the Group another is also retired and does not require a DBS certificate and the remaining three obtain their DBS checks through the organisations they volunteer with. Nevertheless, the safeguarding lead ensures that she has maintained a record so she will be aware of when they expire. This does mean that all of the trustees hold Enhanced DBS checks through their other roles.

4.6.3 There are no other members, volunteers or lay persons attached to Infant Jesus Sisters and so no further DBS checks are required for other parties. The Group hire the services of an accountant to act as a secretary and complete administrative financial tasks. This employee receives employment reference checks, but no DBS check is required. Should any blemishes be returned for agencies carrying out DBS checks on Infant Jesus Sisters then the disclosure would be for that organisation to consider the Sister's suitability to undertake the role.

4.6.4 When enquiring about DBS and Safer recruitment checks for potential new members joining Infant Jesus Sisters the auditor was informed that there have been no new members for over twenty years. However, in the unexpected event that a new person was to explore the possibility of joining the Sisters were familiar with the checks and training necessary prior to progressing further. Interview during the in-person visit revealed that a similar process would be followed for overseas visitors or visiting clergy if this ever occurred. That said, it is acknowledged that Infant Jesus Sisters have had no such visitors for many years and even if they did there would be no facility for them to practice active ministry.

4.6.5 Safer Recruitment practice guidance and whistleblowing is covered in the Safeguarding Policy Infant Jesus Sister in England document. The need to obtain previous employment references and a satisfactory DBS return prior to any appointment is included, as are the DBS code of practice requirements. In relation to whistleblowing, both Sisters commented that they felt confident all Sisters knew how to raise a complaint should they need to via following the Whistleblowing guidance in Section 7 of the English Safeguarding policy.

Graded: Met

4.7 Standard 7 Training and Support for Safeguarding

4.7.1 The safeguarding lead Sister was able to provide the auditor with a range of Safeguarding training certificates relevant to the Sisters' roles. Whilst two Sisters no longer require training as they have completely retired from public ministry the remaining three have undertaken an array of training provided by the RLSS and their respective voluntary working places where annual updates are mandatory. An example being provided of the annual half-day mandatory Safeguarding training that the Safeguarding Lead must attend as part of her educational work. This means that everyone in the Group (which includes all trustees) who requires training has received it and documentary evidence is available. Feedback from training that the Group have completed together, for instance, the RLSS webinars, has shown that the attendees have found it to be accessible and useful to their practice. The safeguarding lead and Provincial Sister advise that although they are sufficiently trained at present, they would feel confident in identifying any gaps in the future and would liaise with the RLSS in the first instance if this was the case.

4.7.2 As mentioned above, the facility to address shortcomings in safeguarding training provision and attendance does exist through the link the safeguarding lead holds with the safeguarding agenda items in both the trustee meetings and the Provincial Council meetings. However, given the small number of members within the group and the frequent and ease of contact between the safeguarding lead and the Provincial lead and/or other trustees, this escalation route is unlikely to be required.

Graded: Met

4.8 Standard 8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

4.8.1 It is acknowledged that the lack of casework and the small community size of Infant Jesus Sisters reduces the ability to, or indeed the need for, verifying any complex internal audit or review of safeguarding practice. The documents reviewed by the auditor, in conjunction with the in-person visit, show that safeguarding practice is understood and adhered to where necessary and that there is a willingness from the trustees and leadership to discuss and adhere to the National Standards of the Church.

4.8.2 Whilst it may be difficult to gauge how any learning from experience is achieved with an absence of casework or active concerns, the small number of members in the Group make the sharing of policies and practice updates an easier task to accomplish and measure. There have been no known incidents of non-compliance with the National Standards and so it is not possible to pass comment on the Group's effectiveness in identifying them and relaying them to the RLSS and/or CSSA. That said, the safeguarding lead commented that she receives regular update e-mails from the CSSA and the RLSS which she then disseminates to all Sisters. In the same way, any learning from the various conferences she or the Provincial Sister attends is also shared.

Graded: Met

5. Summary of Overall Findings

5.1 Although small in numbers, Infant Jesus Sisters have a sound knowledge and understanding of safeguarding principles which is supported by a good degree of working experience gained in environments associated with children and the vulnerable. They are guided by strong leadership who clearly acknowledge the importance of protecting children, vulnerable adults and the congregation and communicate this message. The commitment and obligation to care for and protect the vulnerable is set out in both the international and national safeguarding policy – both of which are current and relevant. It is clear that safeguarding is not a stand-alone item but something which is woven into all aspects of their work.

5.2 The Sisters embrace the Church's safeguarding procedures and have established links with the RLSS who have assisted with the delivery of some training and DBS checks. Records of roles, DBS checks and training are present, up-to-date and accurate.

5.3 The absence of previous experience in dealing with recorded reports of abuse should not prevent the Infant Jesus Sisters illustrating, as they have done, through other means that they are able to act effectively and rapidly in the case of abuse being reported.

6 Recommendations

6.1 The overall grading for the audit of Infant Jesus Sisters is set as "Met" and it is considered that they have achieved all the relevant measures of the National Standards as laid out in the Maturity Matrix. Therefore, there are no formal recommendations to be set as an outcome of this audit. In line with this overall rating a re-audit of the Group by the CSSA should not normally take place for a three-year minimum period, subject to no indicators of a raised safeguarding risk arising.