Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency

Sisters of the Divine Saviour

Baseline Audit Report

June 2025

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 This is an audit of The Sisters of the Divine Saviour undertaken as part of the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) programme of baseline audits of Religious Life Groups (RLGs).

1.2 The Sisters of the Divine Saviour, referred to for the remainder of this report as SDS, are the English Mission of an international Roman Catholic Order of women founded in Italy with their Mother House in Rome. The Order is run by the Mission Superior who is resident at the Mission Office, the Divine Saviour Convent, in Redfield, Bristol. Another house is in Yate in Bristol. SDS number five Sisters, one of whom is currently in a Care Home which is regulated by the Care Quality Commission. It was last rated as Good in March 2022. The Mission Superior is the only Sister in active ministry as she assists with First Holy Communion Classes in one Parish in the Diocese of Clifton and also for the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain.

1.3 This audit seeks to assess the effectiveness of the current safeguarding arrangements by considering practice over the last 12 months. The CSSA has categorised Religious Life Groups (RLGs) 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 to vulnerable populations and/or providing some Diocesan activities, such as Parish priests), to Level 3 (a large community and/or one with significant outreach to vulnerable populations and/or a disproportionately high number of open safeguarding cases). The Sisters of the Divine Saviour are considered a Level 1 Apostolic Community.

2. Methodology

2.1 After initial contact was made with SDS, it became apparent that they were unable to submit an effective self-assessment of their safeguarding practice or supply any supporting evidence. This was due to limitations in their technological ability.

2.2 The safeguarding lead for SDS agreed for a CSSA auditor to visit the Divine Saviour Convent in person and complete the audit based upon that visit. The Mission Superior and the Sister with a lead for Safeguarding were interviewed.

2.3 Liaison has taken place between the auditor and the Religious Life Safeguarding Service[1] (RLSS). SDS utilise the services of RLSS. Clifton Diocese, where SDS minister, have been contacted. SDS's most recent Charity Commission Report and Accounts have also been read[2].

3. Audit Grading

3.1 Safeguarding practice is assessed against the eight safeguarding standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales[3] .

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.

3.3 This report summarises the findings of the audit undertaken with SDS and their progress towards meeting the eight safeguarding standards. The overall grading for the Group is assessed as Not Met with all eight safeguarding standards rated at that level.

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[1] RLSS are an independent team of Safeguarding professionals offering Safeguarding services to the Religious of the Catholic Church in England and Wales

[2] THE SISTERS OF THE DIVINE SAVIOUR CIO - 1174516

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

Overall Grading	**Not Met**
Standard 1 - Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Not Met
Standard 2 - Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message	Not Met
Standard 3 - Engaging with and Caring for those who report having been harmed	Not Met
Standard 4 - Effective Management of Allegations and Concerns	Not Met
Standard 5 - Management and Support of Subjects of Allegations and Concerns (respondents)	Not Met
Standard 6 - Robust Human Resource Management	Not Met
Standard 7 - Training and Support for Safeguarding	Not Met
Standard 8 - Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement	Not Met

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 SDS have a designated safeguarding lead who is the former Mission Superior. However, this appears to be a position in name only which has not had a significant impact on safeguarding practice. They have signed contracts with the CSSA and RLSS and know that they can contact RLSS for support with safeguarding matters.

4.1.2 There is no safeguarding policy or safeguarding commitment statement. The Mission Superior and the Safeguarding Lead did not have full understanding of how to create a safe environment for members and for those they encounter in public ministry.

4.1.3 All the Trustees in SDS are Sisters. Safeguarding is not discussed in leadership meetings and Trustee meetings, which are ad hoc and not planned. The Charity Commission recommend a minimum of two trustees meetings per year[4].

4.1.4 SDS have limited ability to navigate online and consequently did not have full awareness of the expectations of the eight safeguarding standards of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. Similarly, there was no understanding of the expectations of the pastoral standards document, Integrity in Ministry[5].

Graded: Not Met

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

4.2.1 The importance of safeguarding is not discussed within SDS. Whilst they are members of RLSS they have not worked with them to promote a safer environment

[4] Charity meetings - GOV.UK

[5] Integrity in Ministry is a code of conduct for Religious engaged in ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales

for themselves. SDS have no public buildings or website where they would need to provide information to members of the public.

Graded: Not Met

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

4.3.1 The Safeguarding Lead was confident that, in the event of a Survivor reporting having been harmed in contact with SDS, she could contact RLSS for advice and support. They acknowledged that allegations or concerns could be raised by the Sisters and that Survivors require support and care. However, there has been no training undertaken, and there is no written policy guidance, on how to receive a disclosure in a compassionate and caring way.

4.3.2 Outside of RLSS there was no awareness of other agencies, such as Safe Spaces[6], which can be contacted to support Survivors of abuse.

Graded: Not Met

4.4 Standard 4 Effective Management of Allegations and Concerns

4.4.1 If safeguarding allegations or concerns were received then SDS would be entirely reliant upon RLSS to effectively manage the case. They have previously acted upon police advice with regard to not having the name of the convent displayed to the public to avoid potential unwanted attention. This suggests they would be able to report any emergency concern to the police as it arose. However, as none of the Sisters have completed any safeguarding training there is a limited

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[6] Safe Spaces is a free and independent support service, providing a confidential, personal, and safe space for anyone who has been abused by someone in the Church or as a result of their relationship with the Church of England, the Catholic Church in England and Wales or the Church in Wales.

understanding of the potential types of abuse they may encounter, although the Sisters reported feeling safe.

4.4.2 Sisters' records are not securely stored either electronically or in paper form. This suggests that, in the event of an allegation or concern, records relating to that would not be accurate, promptly created, stored securely or shared appropriately.

4.4.3 As trustee meetings are not regular or formal there is no mechanism to make trustees aware of any allegations that arise or then to take decisions about reporting serious incidents to the Charity Commission[7].

Graded: Not Met

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

4.5.1 In the event of an allegation being made against a member of SDS they said that they would consult their Generalate as to what to do in terms of supporting the Respondent. As seen above, they also have an awareness of the services available through RLSS to manage, monitor, risk assess and support Respondents.

4.5.2 SDS were confident that they would be able to access Canon Law advice and support through the Generalate should this prove necessary.

4.5.3 SDS have been reliant upon their belief that an allegation against one of their members is unlikely so have not taken steps to prepare for a concern being raised against them beyond joining RLSS.

Graded: Not Met

[7] How to report a serious incident in your charity - GOV.UK

4.6 Standard 6 Robust Human Resource Management

4.6.1 Clifton Diocese confirmed that the Mission Superior has a current Disclosure and Barring Service[8] (DBS) check for her role in preparing children for First Holy Communion. She is the only Sister who holds a role that needs a DBS check.

4.6.2 SDS receive Sisters from overseas who come to the UK to develop their English. They do not engage in public ministry in the UK. Testimonials of Suitability are not sought from the Religious Superior in their country of origin and they are not expected to engage with any form of safeguarding training.

4.6.3 There are two employed staff who have worked with SDS for a number of years as a cleaner and a cook. They did not take up references for these individuals although they said their employment was based upon the recommendations of others. There is no safer recruitment process to utilise in the event that SDS need to employ any further staff.

4.6.4 SDS do not have a formal suite of policies and procedures, therefore there are no mechanisms to allow individuals to whistleblow or raise complaints.

Graded: Not Met

4.7 Standard 7 Training and Support for Safeguarding

4.7.1 No member of SDS has completed safeguarding training and there has been no internal expectation that they would do so. It is imperative that those in ministry engage with the Diocese to comply with their safeguarding training expectations. A minimum level of safeguarding training expectation should also be set for those Sisters who are capable of completing it. This will heighten awareness of the potential forms of abuse and increase the likelihood of successful reporting any they may be subject to.

Graded: Not Met

[8] Disclosure and Barring Service - GOV.UK

4.8 Standard 8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

4.8.1 SDS have taken no steps to improve or quality assure their own safeguarding practice. Safeguarding is not discussed at trustee level.

Graded: Not Met

5. Summary of Overall Findings

5.1. Safeguarding practice has not been prioritised by the members of SDS and they have taken no steps to engage with the safeguarding expectations of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. This is, in part, due to the challenges that they have in engaging with technology. However, they are aware of the existence of the safeguarding standards and they should have taken reasonable steps to keep themselves, and those they come into contact with, safe. During this audit no evidence was found that the Sisters, or those they minister to, are currently being harmed as a result of the deficiencies in safeguarding practice. The CSSA cannot be assured that the Sisters would recognise a future safeguarding risk and be able to ensure that their members would be protected from harm though.

5.2 The CSSA have made contact with RLSS to request that they proactively engage with SDS to support them in improving their safeguarding practices. This report will be shared with RLSS to enable them to target their support accordingly. The CSSA will liaise with RLSS in six months' time to establish that progress is being made towards achieving the below recommendations and improving safeguarding practice at SDS.

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 3 months

Create a safeguarding policy or safeguarding commitment statement

Source a copy of Integrity in Ministry and discuss expectations amongst the members

Plan how to promote the importance of safeguarding within SDS and to any they may come into contact with

Create secure storage places for confidential records

Routinely seek Testimonials of Suitability for Sisters arriving from overseas and store them securely

Create a safeguarding training expectation for all Sisters

Within 6 months

Hold trustee meetings in line with Charity Commission minimum recommendations and have safeguarding on the agenda each time

Work with RLSS to understand how to effectively manage any allegations or concerns raised with them, including how Survivors and Respondents should be supported

Within 12 months

Adopt a Safer Recruitment template from RLSS

Adopt Complaints and Whistleblowing policies from RLSS templates

7. Arrangements for Follow-up

7.1 In line with an overall audit rating of Not Met, the earliest date of the next audit of SDS by the CSSA is within one year in January 2026. If the CSSA becomes aware of a significant safeguarding concern or allegation in the intervening period, then an earlier audit will be required.