

Marist Sisters

Baseline Audit Report
July 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 This report is a baseline audit of the safeguarding arrangements for the Order of the Marist Sisters¹. It is undertaken as part of the CSSA programme of baseline audits for Religious Life Groups (RLGs) in England and Wales.

1.2 The Marist Sisters in the province of England are 29 members consisting of 16 retired Sisters who reside in a residential care home and 13 active Sisters; two of whom have no ministry. The 11 active Sisters deliver social and pastoral services throughout the country in Parish support roles, residential care services, spiritual support and an NHS volunteer role working across sites in Birmingham, Manchester, Hythe, Walsingham and London. All of their activities are undertaken under the auspices of other organisations. The Order also runs a care home in Hythe and two of the Sisters residing there help in the local Parish. There is one lay employee, who is a cleaner for the group and is employed for two hours fortnightly, and no volunteers.

1.3 This audit covers the period up to the 12 months preceding the audit week which took place in October 2024. The Marist Sisters' care home in Hythe is managed by St John of God Hospitaller Services and is regulated through the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and so will not be included in this audit. Similarly, the audit will not include comment on the safeguarding arrangements in place for the diocese in which the Parish support is undertaken nor the Sisters' voluntary work for host organisations, such as the NHS.

1.4 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

¹ The Marist Sisters operate under the registered charity number 225485.

populations and/or a disproportionately high number of open safeguarding cases). The Marist Sisters have been assigned to a Level 1 audit.

1.5 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. Methodology

2.1 Initial contact was made by the CSSA Analyst to the Unit Leader and Safeguarding Lead for the Marist Sisters on the 9th July 2024 via e-mail to notify of the intention to complete a safeguarding audit. Further e-mail communication then occurred over the ensuing days to clarify the level of audit to take place and set a date for the in-person visit.

2.2 The Level 1 Self Assessment (an assessment tool which provides background information on the Marist Sisters' adherence to the eight individual National Safeguarding Standards²) and accompanying evidence was e-mailed to the CSSA by the Unit Leader of the Marist Sisters on the 30th September 2024. Following the review of the Self Assessment and the supporting evidence provided, the CSSA analyst completed an in-person visit to the Marist Sisters at their New Malden site on the 22nd October 2024.

2.3 During the in-person visit the auditor had the opportunity to meet with both the Unit Leader, who is also the Chair of trustees for the Marist Sisters, and the Safeguarding Lead for the group. The following evidence has also been considered in the preparation of this report in reaching decisions regarding scoring for the individual safeguarding standards and the overall grade:

- Marist Sisters safeguarding policy
- Marist Sisters safeguarding statement
- Liaison with the Religious Lives Safeguarding Service (RLSS)

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

- Unit trustees meeting minutes
- Unit Leadership meeting minutes
- Log of safeguarding training completions
- Log of DBS certificate checks
- Display posters

2.4 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.

2.5 No case audit work has been undertaken during the course of this audit as there have been no safeguarding allegations or concerns reported in the past 12 months involving the Marist Sisters and hence there are no current or previous case files to pass comment on.

3. Audit grading

3.1 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 2.2.

3.2 This report summarises the findings of the audit undertaken of the Marist Sisters and their progress towards meeting the eight safeguarding standards. The overall grading for the Group is assessed as “**Met with Recommendations**” which comprises of eight separate standards; the grading for each individual standard of which is tabulated below.

Overall grading	Met with Recommendations
Standard 1 – Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Met with Recommendations
Standard 2 – Communicating the Church's safeguarding message	Met with Recommendations
Standard 3 – Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed	Met with Recommendations
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 with Recommendations
Standard 8 – Quality assurance and continuous Improvement	Met with Recommendations

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 Marist Sisters have a Safeguarding Policy specific to the Unit of England which was reviewed and approved by the trustees at their meeting on the 10th September 2024. Roles and responsibilities of key personnel such as trustees, Safeguarding Lead and Unit Leader are defined within the policy as is the procedure for reporting abuse. However, the Safeguarding Policy does not describe the process for reporting abuse to the Police or other statutory authorities if someone is in immediate harm. All members, are expected to sign to acknowledge receipt and understanding of the Safeguarding Policy and a record is retained as evidence. The Marist Sisters also have a Safeguarding Statement which is available for each community and links to CSSA policies and the Self Assessment indicates that a copy of *Integrity in Ministry* is also located in each community although this was not physically checked by the CSSA Analyst.

4.1.2 The Marist Sisters have six trustees; all of whom are Religious Sisters. Minutes from the trustee meetings show that they occur approximately quarterly and that safeguarding is a standing agenda item. The Safeguarding Policy mentions the trustees and outlines their responsibilities in governance and oversight of safeguarding in line with National guidelines.

4.1.3 In addition to the trustee meetings, the Marist Sisters have Leadership meetings which has a different membership to the trustee meetings. These occur every two months or more frequently, virtually or in-person. Meeting minutes evidence that safeguarding is a topic discussed at every meeting.

4.1.4 Contracts with both the RLSS and the CSSA have been agreed and signed and the RLSS have confirmed that the Marist Sisters have been in contact with their membership, training and safeguarding teams. The RLSS have also verified that the Marist Sisters have been represented at the safeguarding conferences and have attended the Trustee, RLG Leaders and Safeguarding Leads training offered. The take up of this training from leaders and key roles shows a commitment to

safeguarding training from the leadership group. An understanding of the role of the RLSS in supporting the Marist Sisters with any concerns or issues relating to abuse was evident through discussions with the Unit Leader and Safeguarding Lead.

4.1.5 The Marist Sisters do not have a Safeguarding Action/Annual Work Plan which should be agreed and utilised to drive safeguarding practice with regular reviews by trustees and leaders.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

4.2.1 The Marist Sisters have no formal Communications Plan and no website. That said, there is little that needs to be communicated to the wider public given that active members undertake roles that fall within the responsibility of their respective host organisations. Information sent by the CSSA and RLSS is reported to be relayed to all members and those who are not involved with host organisations have messages shared in person or via telephone. The group is of small size but split across sites and so leaders should consider how best to relay safeguarding messages to all of its members and to ensure that retired members in the residential care home are fully aware of how to report abuse. However, there is a Sister who resides in the home who is able to care for any spiritual needs and the Unit Leader visits every four to six weeks in person and can also receive complaints. Where possible the Marist Sisters should seek the views of the host organisations in which they are involved to assist in reviewing the best means of communicating messages of safeguarding.

4.2.2 The Safeguarding Lead advised that they are kept informed of safeguarding developments through communications from the CSSA and the RLSS and attend safeguarding conferences and webinars. Key messages are subsequently disseminated as appropriate.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

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

4.3.1 The Marist Sisters have no historical or current case work from which to pass comment on in relation to Standards 3, 4 or 5. That said, the information attained during the in-person meeting with the Unit Leader and the Safeguarding Lead show that the leadership understands the impact of abuse on survivors and know how to refer and report onwards to police and other statutory services in the event of an emergency and in the case of an alleged offence being committed. An awareness of the support available from the RLSS in responding to those who report being harmed was also demonstrated.

4.3.2 There is a need to develop a more detailed understanding of the potential for members of the Marist Sisters, in particular the residents in Hythe care home, to report abuse. It is acknowledged that members in the care home can have welfare and spiritual support from the Sister who resides with them. In addition, there could be further consideration of, and preparations made for, pastoral support for any Sisters who may receive disclosures in the course of their ministry. In the absence of a website the Marist Sisters should consider alternative ways in which to encourage complainants to report abuse and engage with them.

4.3.3 The Unit Leader and Safeguarding Lead believe the main source of potential safeguarding situations would be from historical allegations of abuse from schools or homes the Marist Sisters have run in the past. They say this is something they are prepared for if it should occur and explained their processes of contacting the RLSS for advice and taking prompt action with any accused people.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

4.4.1 There is no current or previous casework available to assess direct practice in this area. Nonetheless, the Unit Leader and Safeguarding Lead demonstrated in interview that they are aware of how to respond to allegations of abuse and commented that they would feel confident in seeking the advice of the RLSS. An understanding of the support the RLSS would offer in the event of any allegations being received was also apparent. The Unit Leader asserts that they and the trustees would be kept updated of all concerns by the Safeguarding Lead through their structured meetings.

4.4.2 The Safeguarding Policy covers the recording and storage of safeguarding concerns and case files and this, together with responses given during interview from the safeguarding Lead, evidences a sound understanding of the need to make accurate records and to store them securely. Current sensitive information is stored securely by the Safeguarding Lead and any future hard files can be locked in a secure cabinet and electronic records stored securely as outlined in the Safeguarding Policy.

4.4.3 The Unit Leader and Safeguarding Lead showed a good understanding of their obligations and responsibilities under civil and canon law. However, there was significant emphasis on the need to engage with the RLSS in seeking advice and less reference to statutory services and the police notification.

Graded: Met

4.5 Standard 5 Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)

4.5.1 It is accepted that work of the active Sisters falls under the responsibility of the host organisations in their roles. However, should an accusation of abuse be received it would likely fall to the leaders of the Marist Sisters to facilitate any

actions of a safeguarding plan. This has been acknowledged by the group and designated and suitably trained responsible Sisters have been appointed to manage this should it occur. The Unit Leader reports that alternative accommodation could easily be sourced for members should the need arise.

4.5.2 Through interview with the Unit Leader and Safeguarding Lead it is apparent that leaders within the Marist Sisters are aware of the likely spiritual, legal and emotional support needed by respondents and of a range of internal and external sources available to them should anyone be accused of causing harm. The Unit Leader and Safeguarding Lead state they would seek the support of the RLSS in signposting and in the monitoring and assessment of respondents.

4.5.3 The leadership would be prepared to work towards supporting any respondents who had to leave in returning to life within the group where appropriate to do so. For civil legal advice they would refer the respondent to the congregation solicitor.

Graded: Met

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

4.6.1 Specified in the Safer Recruitment Practice Guidance within the Safeguarding Policy is the need to ensure that DBS checks for members and employees are applied where needed and that appointments will not be made until a satisfactory DBS check has been returned. This assurance was echoed by the Safeguarding Lead and Unit Leader during interview who advised that the Unit Leadership group and trustees would consider any blemished DBS returns prior to making a decision and that the RLSS would also be contacted for advice on an assessment of the circumstances of the blemish. However, the Unit Leader explained that she does not appoint anybody as there are no positions to appoint to and the Sisters who are with host organisations have approached those organisations directly to seek voluntary work and they then facilitate DBS checks and referencing.

4.6.2 DBS checks are completed by the RLSS for the members of the group requiring one. Those members of the Marist Sisters who are working with host organisations, such as a Sister who is volunteering with the NHS, are treated as employees and do not require separate DBS checks but nonetheless the Safeguarding Lead retains a log of those completed.

4.6.3 All DBS checks are in date and records are centrally collated by the Safeguarding Lead who is able to provide assurance to the trustees that all those who require a DBS check have received one. In the event of a blemished DBS disclosure the Leadership meeting would consider the information and, together with the Safeguarding Lead, assess the information returned. A record of any decisions made would be kept alongside the rationale behind it. The Unit Lead and Safeguarding Lead are aware of the need to ensure that all sensitive and personal documentation or information appertaining to DBS applications is stored securely as per the Safer Recruitment Practice Guidance in the Safeguarding Policy. To this end files are kept only as long as necessary and are locked away.

4.6.4 In addition to a satisfactory DBS return, the Safeguarding Policy outlines that employees must be able to evidence appropriate skills and experience for the role, provide references and sign to acknowledge receipt and understanding of all policies and processes. The Unit Leader explained that although this process is noted in policy, in practice it is very unlikely to happen as any future need will be met via employment agencies.

4.6.5 The group report no new members or overseas visitors in recent times but state any new people entering the Order would be DBS checked, have a thorough induction and would be required to provide references prior to undertaking any public-facing ministry. This information was verbally relayed during interview and is not a process that features in policy at all. However, the Unit Leader highlighted that the group do not have the personal to take any new members and if they were approached by anyone expressing a desire to join they would be directed to the generalate in Rome.

4.6.6 There is no standalone Complaints or Whistleblowing Policy for the Marist Sisters. However, these areas are covered within the Safeguarding Policy.

Graded: Met

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

4.7.1 The group recognise the need for its members to receive safeguarding training and to this end the RLSS have confirmed that the Marists Sisters have completed role-specific Trustee, RLG Leaders and Safeguarding Leads training with the service. The Safeguarding Lead keeps a record of safeguarding training completed by all members.

4.7.2 The Marist Sisters Safeguarding Policy outlines that all Marist Sisters will undergo yearly refresher safeguarding training relevant to their role. Records indicate that some training is overdue and that some Sisters have not had annual refresher for several years. Trustees and leaders should have oversight of compliance with safeguarding training for all members and take appropriate action where this falls short of expectations. They should also seek feedback on the training completed in order to assess its impact and effectiveness and guide future training provision.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

4.8 Standard 8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

4.8.1 It is acknowledged that the opportunity for learning in relation to case work is minimal given that the Marist Sisters have no historic or current cases or active concerns. Trustees have provided sufficient oversight to ensure that there have been no known incidents of non-compliance with the National Standards. Should there be, the trustees are able to identify them and relay them to the RLSS and/or CSSA. In interview the Safeguarding Lead and Unit Leader asserted that e-mails informing of safeguarding updates from the CSSA and the RLSS are appropriately shared with the Sisters.

4.8.2 During the in-person visit the Unit Leader and Safeguarding Lead voiced a willingness to use the feedback from this audit to learn more about their processes and improve on their safeguarding practice if required.

4.8.3 Although there is evidence that leaders have the facility for tracking compliance and oversight of safeguarding matters within the Order through their regular Unit Leadership and Trustees meetings, they should seek methods of learning and ways to review their processes wherever possible and share the results. A Safeguarding Action Plan would assist this process.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1. The Marists Sisters have a Safeguarding Statement and Safeguarding Policy in place which outlines the roles and responsibilities of key roles. Governance arrangements are in place with leaders meeting regularly and discussing safeguarding as a standing agenda item. Methods of reflection and learning in relation to safeguarding should be developed and communications can be strengthened. The development of a Safeguarding Action Plan will assist this process and drive the direction of safeguarding.

5.2 Although there is no previous or current experience of handling disclosures of abuse or supporting those who suffer abuse or are subject to allegations, the leaders demonstrate a sound understanding of what to do and where to go for support should the need arise in future.

5.3 There has been engagement with the RLSS and leaders are aware of the ongoing support available from the service. The Safeguarding Lead, trustees and group leaders have received specialised training provided by the RLSS and other members have also been trained in safeguarding although some are due refresher training.

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 6 months

- The Safeguarding Policy should include the requirement to report abuse to the Police or other statutory authorities if someone is in immediate harm.
- The Marist Sisters should develop and agree a Safeguarding Action Plan which can be used by leaders to drive safeguarding practice and review progress.

Within 12 months

- All those members who are providing ministry on behalf of the Order should receive regular safeguarding training updates relevant to their roles in line with the annual refresher training cited in the safeguarding policy.
- Links should be made with the parishes and host organisations in which the Marist Sisters operate to ensure a consistent communication of safeguarding messaging and reviewing the best means of relaying messages to Sisters.
- Use digital or physical means of reaching out to and communicating with those who need to report abuse and make adequate preparations for supporting those who disclose abuse and for Sisters who receive any disclosures.
- Leaders should seek methods of learning and ways to review the effectiveness of their safeguarding processes wherever possible.

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In line with the overall rating of *Met with Recommendations*, a reaudit for the Marist Sisters should take place after a minimum 2 year period. Should any indications or factors come to light that suggest an increase in risk before this time a reaudit may take place sooner.