

Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians)

Baseline Audit Report
September 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is the baseline audit of the safeguarding arrangements for the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians) present in England (known hereafter as ‘the Vincentians’). The Vincentians of the Province of Ireland can trace their origins back to 1638, when the first of a small group of Irishmen who had fled to France to escape the persecution of Catholics and train for the priesthood, joined the new community founded by Vincent de Paul, then a priest who was ministering to the poor there. In 1646 Vincent sent several priests to Ireland to help revive the faith of the Catholic population around Limerick and Tipperary. Their mission lasted only a few years and they were forced to return to France for fear of their lives due to Cromwell’s invasion of Ireland culminating in the siege and the fall of Limerick in 1651.

1.2 When Catholic emancipation was achieved in 1829, a group of four young men studying at Maynooth came together “...to form an institute which would combine the advantages of community life to preach missions to the Irish Faithful and educate them in their faith” Under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul a day school for boys was opened at Ushers Quay, Dublin. Towards the mid-1830s the opportunity arose, with assistance from the then Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, to purchase the grounds of Castleknock College, formerly a protestant boarding school. The purchase enabled the Vincentian Community to set about establishing a junior seminary for the Dublin diocese.

1.3 Worldwide, there are approximately 3,000 Vincentians with the main areas of growth being experienced in Eastern Europe and in Asia. The headquarters of the Vincentians is located in Rome, while Ireland and Britain are combined as one province with the leadership based in Sybil Hill, Dublin. The number of Vincentians in England is small and they are involved in the running of two parishes in Mill Hill and Burnt Oak in London. The province is administered by the Provincial Council

which meets monthly. More details on the history of the Order and their presence worldwide can be found on their website.¹

1.4 There are currently seven Confreres residing in the community houses in Burnt Oak and Mill Hill in London. All are in active employment working as parish priests for the Archdiocese of Westminster² or as prison and hospital chaplains in their local community. One Confrere works as chaplain and as the Director of the Daughters of Charity, a religious order of nuns who live and work in Mill Hill, London³. For those that work as priests, safeguarding support comes not only from the Vincentians but from their local diocesan Parish Safeguarding Representatives (PSRs)⁴ who provide a direct link into the Head of Safeguarding at the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster⁵ hospitals and other organisations follow the safeguarding requirements of the Vincentians but act in accordance with the individual safeguarding policies of their place of ministry. All Confreres currently living in England are fully active and none have any care needs. Retired Confreres and those with additional needs return to Ireland where the Vincentians are set up to care for them in their final years.

1.5 The CSSA assess Religious Life Groups against a categorisation scheme based on the safeguarding risk that is likely to be associated with their activities and size, from Level 1, a small community with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns known as an Apostolic or an Enclosed Order, Level 2, a medium sized community with some outreach with vulnerable populations and/or providing some Diocesan activities such as a Parish Priest and Level 3 a large community and/or one with significant outreach with vulnerable populations and/or a

¹ Website of the Vincentian Community <http://www.vincentians.ie>

² www.rcdow.org.uk

³ www.daughtersofcharity.net

⁴ Parish Safeguarding Representatives are trained volunteers who provide assistance and support to their parish in safeguarding matters

⁵ Diocesan safeguarding coordinators ensure that the diocese complies with the eight National Safeguarding Standards and have responsibility for the management of victims and survivors, all safeguarding allegations and respondents, the delivery and monitoring of training and Safer Recruitment

disproportionately high number of open safeguarding cases. The Vincentians have been categorised as Level 2 due to their provision of Parishes Priests and audited using this framework.

1.6 The CSSA recognises the rich diversity of the Religious and acknowledges that the Religious Life Groups within any category may vary significantly in terms of size, ministry and safeguarding practice. Consequently, CSSA quality analysts may use professional judgement to ensure that Religious Life Groups are graded against the eight National Safeguarding Standards⁶ in such a way that reflects their uniqueness.

2. Methodology

2.1 The CSSA notified the Vincentians of their intention to audit on 10 March 2025. An information request was made the same day that included the provision of a self-assessment document with an agreed completion date of 13 May 2025. An initial pre-audit meeting was held between the CSSA quality analyst and the safeguarding lead on 25 March 2025 to discuss the audit requirements and a scheduled date for the audit of 10 June 2025 was agreed. A further email confirming the arrangements was sent by the CSSA quality analyst to the safeguarding lead on 3 June 2025.

2.2 Information provided within the self-assessment was analysed by the CSSA, alongside additional documentary evidence provided by the Order together with that provided on the Vincentian's website. Further confirmation of engagement was sought from the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)⁷ and the Archdiocese of Westminster. This evidence was assessed against a bespoke Level

⁶ Full details of the eight standards and underpinning sub standards are available here: The Eight National Safeguarding Standards (catholicsafeguarding.org.uk)

⁷ The Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS) is an independent team of safeguarding professionals offering safeguarding services to the Religious of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

2 Maturity Matrix⁸ to arrive at ratings for each standard and a combined overall grade.

2.3 The following methodology was used to complete the audit

2.3.1 Interviews were held on 10 June 2025 with the following:

- The Provincial
- The Local superior
- The Designated Safeguarding Manager
- The Confreres of the community in England

A further interview with a Trustee was conducted on 18 June 2025.

2.3.2 A comprehensive document review was carried out of all supporting evidence listed in the Appendix to this report.

2.3.3 No new allegations or concerns have been reported to, or about the Vincentians within the previous 12 months therefore it was not possible to examine casework during this audit or assess some aspects of direct safeguarding practices.

3. Audit grading

3.1 Practice was assessed against the eight National Safeguarding Standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales and graded in accordance with the CSSA Maturity Matrix for Level 2 Religious Life Groups.

3.2 Potential audit ratings against each standard, and the final overall ratings, are: Below Basic, Basic, Early Progress, Firm Progress, Results Being Achieved, Comprehensive Assurance and Exemplary

⁸ [APPENDIX-5-LEVEL-2-MATURITY-MATRIX-FINAL.docx](#)

3.3 The Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians) received an overall grading of Comprehensive assurance.

Overall grading	Comprehensive assurance
Standard 1 – Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body’s leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Results being achieved
Standard 2 – Communicating the Church’s safeguarding message	Comprehensive assurance
Standard 3 – Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed	Comprehensive assurance
Standard 4 – Effective management of allegations and concerns	Comprehensive assurance
Standard 5 – Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)	Comprehensive assurance
Standard 6 – Robust human resource management	Comprehensive assurance
Standard 7 – Training and support for safeguarding	Exemplary
Standard 8 – Quality assurance and continuous Improvement	Comprehensive assurance

4. Audit findings against each standard

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

Strengths

4.1.1 The Vincentians have their own policies for both child and adult safeguarding. The children's policy has been in place for some time and reflects the legislative requirements of Ireland. Adult safeguarding is not legislated for in Ireland at the time of audit, but there is a growing recognition of the need to account for and make provision for the safeguarding of vulnerable adults. The Designated Safeguarding Manager (DSM) for the Vincentians has therefore written an adult safeguarding policy which has been approved by the Provincial Council. The Vincentian policies are built on the framework of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI)⁹ safeguarding standards, however there is significant overlap with the eight National Safeguarding Standards which potentially makes them robust enough for use in England. The two policies are Ireland specific in terms of legislation and reporting requirements which does not meet the expectations of the National Safeguarding Standards in England and Wales or those of the Charity Commission. These policies should therefore be either adapted to ensure that they cover each jurisdiction in which they are used or separate policies for each country developed. The mission in London follows the current policies and the child and adult safeguarding policies of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Westminster and for those who do external ministry in hospitals and prisons the respective safeguarding policies of the organisation in which they are operating. The Vincentians have a safeguarding statement that commits to protecting both children and vulnerable adults.

4.1.2 The Vincentian's leadership in the UK is provided by the local superior who is responsible for providing support and oversight of safeguarding practice for the communities in Mill Hill and Burnt Oak. The local superior is also responsible for

⁹ [National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland – Towards a Restorative and Transitional Justice model](#)

compliance with safeguarding training updates and for the annual safeguarding audit. Acting as the point of contact for all Confreres to discuss any safeguarding issues they encounter, he will also liaise with the diocesan PSRs as required to ensure all issues are shared and managed appropriately depending on whether they are diocesan or congregational matters. The local superior is also the point of contact for the DSM and the Provincial who are based in Ireland regarding local community safeguarding matters.

4.1.3 The Vincentian's safeguarding policy clearly sets out the roles and responsibilities at all levels of the organisation for ensuring good safeguarding practice. The Provincial is the most senior member of the Order in Ireland and is supported in his leadership role by the Provincial Council. Based in Ireland is the designated safeguarding manager (DSM) for the Order, who is responsible for the oversight of training, safer recruitment, safeguarding policy and processes. The DSM is an employee brought in for their significant expertise and experience in professional safeguarding work and is the point of contact for all safeguarding matters in Ireland and England. They communicate and co-ordinate as required with the safeguarding leads in the diocese, prisons, schools and hospitals wherever ministry is practiced by community members in England as well as the RLSS and the CSSA. The DSM ensures that the community members are maintaining their responsibilities to the individual organisations they are working within and will ensure that they meet the safer recruitment requirements and attend all training required of them. The responsibility for the oversight of training compliance and training needs also sits with the DSM and they visit England frequently to provide support and to review safeguarding practice and compliance with training. In Ireland the DSM attends all safeguarding committee meetings and reports directly to the Provincial.

4.1.4 The Vincentians have a robust governance structure for safeguarding. The order has a safeguarding committee that holds a separate meeting within the monthly Provincial Council meeting. All actions are tracked in the minutes of these meetings and reported on at the next meeting. Decisions and new information from the Provincial Council and safeguarding committee meeting are shared with all Confreres through provincial messages. The five Trustees for the order (based in

Ireland) are the Provincial and the four members of his Provincial Council. All Trustees attend the safeguarding committee meetings and are involved in the oversight of safeguarding practice, the management of safeguarding concerns and compliance with the safeguarding policies. The Trustees are all based in Ireland and have undertaken the NBSCCCI Trustees training which includes safeguarding responsibilities. None of the Trustees have undertaken UK based Trustee training, but all are aware of their reporting responsibilities to the Charity Commission¹⁰ and CSSA should this be required. The DSM role for the Vincentians is a key one and all the responsibility for the management of safeguarding concerns is managed and co-ordinated through them. The Provincial holds overall responsibility for safeguarding for the Vincentians and provides annual reports to the Charity Commission. The Irish and English elements of the order are combined for registration and reporting purposes to the Charity Commission.

4.1.5 The Vincentian strategies and associated safeguarding implementation plans for children have been established in Ireland for some time and the most recent one has been adapted to also include safeguarding for vulnerable adults. These strategies are updated on a three-yearly basis. Currently legislation in Ireland on which the strategy is based does not include adults, however the Vincentians recognise the need to include them and have proactively made changes to their current strategy to ensure it includes measures for vulnerable adults. Progress against the safeguarding implementation plan, which lists the actions required to achieve the goals set in the strategy, is reviewed at Provincial Council meetings and monitored through an action tracker. In addition, an annual report is created that demonstrates the progress made against the strategy and this is provided to the Provincial and Trustees by the DSM. By including actions that pertain to vulnerable adults the strategy and associated safeguarding implementation plan more closely align with the safeguarding guidance, legislation and the eight National Safeguarding Standards that define expected good practice for safeguarding adults in the UK. There is one safeguarding strategy for both Ireland and the UK.

¹⁰ www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission

4.1.6 The Confreres are made aware of the CSSA eight National Safeguarding Standards, Integrity in Ministry¹¹ and Caring Safely for Others¹² through their training. All Confreres spoken to were aware of the documents and how they inform safeguarding practice. At time of audit a version of Integrity in Ministry specifically for the Vincentian community was in creation.

4.1.7 The Vincentians have a contract with both RLSS and the CSSA. The DSM has attended the RLSS conferences and has been in communication with them. The current contract is due for renewal and will be adapted to meet the bespoke requirements of the Vincentians as they operate in both England and Ireland. The Vincentians have not accessed training from RLSS directly as the Confreres are either trained through the diocese or the organisations they work for. In addition to the contracts with RLSS and CSSA the Vincentians have a network of support in Ireland with other safeguarding organisations and designated safeguarding leads from other Religious Life Groups (RLGs) and would bring in additional support if they felt it was needed.

4.1.8 The culture of safeguarding the Vincentian leadership promote is one of awareness, recognition of risks and of putting mitigations in place to ensure that all who they encounter are safe and all their Confreres are safe in their ministry. This is supported by the awareness of expectations and actions required by the Confreres demonstrated at the focus group discussions, for example using openly visible spaces when meeting with children and vulnerable adults. The Provincial and other leaders spoken to as part of this audit demonstrated an awareness of the challenges faced for Confreres who are becoming more elderly and frailer and have put systems in place to support these individuals. There is a healthcare committee in the province that meet monthly to consider the needs of the more elderly or ill Confreres. The community in England are young and very active and provide few challenges, however the Vincentians in Ireland are predominantly aged over 70 years and need additional support. This is provided using the elderly care systems in Dublin with priests having access to social care and care homes

¹¹ [Integrity in Ministry – Religious Life Safeguarding Service](#)

¹² [Caring-Safely-For-Others.pdf](#)

as required. Priests in England who become frail are invited back to the Irish community of Vincentians to receive this support.

Areas for development

4.1.9 A formal process to document the identification and mitigations put in place to manage and oversee risk would support the Provincial and Trustees assurance that all identified actions are being implemented.

4.1.10 The Vincentians need to either adopt specific policies for use in England or adapt the existing ones to cover the independent jurisdictions of Ireland and England to meet Charity Commission requirements.

Graded: Results being achieved

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

Strengths

4.2.1 All safeguarding messages are shared with the Confreres via Provincial messages and through community meetings via the local superior. The DSM visits the community regularly and shares updates with them. The monthly Provincial meeting includes safeguarding, and all Confreres have access to the minutes from these meetings. The diocese shares their messaging through their PSRs, and the DSM has established good communication channels with PSRs to share information and updates from the Vincentians. All safeguarding messages are viewed in the context of the standards in England although there is a recognition that this needs to be more thorough and this is reflected in the actions cited in the Vincentian communication strategy and communication implementation plan.

4.2.2 There are safeguarding communications in the public areas and churches where the Vincentian priests work. These are diocesan in origin and align with the diocesan safeguarding communications policy. The Confreres spoken to who work in prisons and hospitals were aware of safeguarding messages and communications boards in their own areas of work like those found in the parish

churches and buildings. The Vincentians policy and statement are in the hallway of the community houses for any visitors to see. In addition to the safeguarding messages on the notice boards in the public areas of the church, more information has been put in the toilets, both male and female so that people can read it in private. There were posters for Safe Spaces¹³ in all settings as well as for Safe Links¹⁴ which is advocated by Safe Spaces and concerns information and support for victims of domestic abuse. All safeguarding communications are reviewed at least annually and are updated as required.

4.2.3 Further information on safeguarding can be found on the Vincentians website. This is currently under review and development and will have a designated safeguarding area. Whilst this work is underway the website is currently limited to the Vincentians statement on safeguarding and the contact details of the DSM. The communication implementation plan details the additional information that will be available on the website once it is completed and this will include all policies, information on reporting a concern, safeguarding updates and news as well as links to agencies that can support those who have been harmed by the church.

Areas for development

4.2.4 The Vincentians have shown a commitment to ensuring that their safeguarding messages are current, relevant and in line with national standards and guidelines and have embraced the sharing of communications with the organisations they work with in England. There is a recognition that some safeguarding messaging needs to be more robust in the context of English safeguarding practice, and this is reflected in their recently developed communication strategy and communication implementation plan. The next stage is to implement the communications plan in full and to evaluate the outcomes to ensure that they have achieved their aims. This will be supported by their newly developed safeguarding section on the order's website.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

¹³ [Home – Safe Spaces England and Wales](#)

¹⁴ <https://safelinksupport.co.uk/>

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

Strengths

4.3.1 The Vincentians safeguarding policy clearly details the procedures to be followed when an individual discloses that they have experienced harm. A significant piece of work has been done by the Vincentians on engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed by the church following the national inquiries in both England and Ireland. As part of this work a handbook for the community was created that provides guidance and support for Confreres on this subject, amongst others. The handbook is reviewed and updated annually to include any new practice and learning from current practice in this area. This element in the handbook is well written and reflects the expectations of the eight National Safeguarding Standards. It is a well-used, respected source of information for the Confreres who all have their own copy for reference and who quoted from it during conversations with the analyst. At the time of audit, reporting principles and expectations were included in the handbook however specific guidance on English legislation and reporting requirements was not. This is recognised by the DSM as an area of development and work is ongoing to address this issue as documented in the safeguarding implementation plan.

4.3.2 All Confreres have received training in how to engage with, respond to and care for those who report having been harmed. In addition to the information and best practice guidance in the handbook, training has been undertaken on the processes to be followed by the organisations that they work with that align with their individual policies. The Vincentian internal reporting processes are documented in the handbook, and all Confreres have a training session on this annually. Support is available through the local superior and from the DSM. All Confreres were aware of the support function of RLSS but were more likely to use the local superior or DSM for internal matters and the designated safeguarding leads and PSRs in the other organisations they work with.

4.3.3 There have been no cases in England in the past 12 months. In Ireland the Provincial and Trustees have managed several safeguarding cases and have worked with victims and survivors of abuse. Learning from the issues in Ireland and

feedback sought from survivors has informed practice and is shared with the Confreres at Provincial meetings and the Provincial Assembly. There is an awareness that reports of harm may come from within the Vincentian community as well as from external sources, although again, there are no cases of this over the past 12 months. The DSM has experience working with survivors and has spoken to Confreres about their experiences in Ireland. This session is going to be added to the safeguarding programme for the Confreres in England for 2025/26.

Areas for development

4.3.4 The handbook provided to the Confreres is a well written document and clearly sets out the principles of good practice for engaging with and supporting those who have reported being harmed however, specific guidance on English legislation and reporting requirements is needed to ensure that it meets all the requirements of those Confreres working in England.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

Strengths

4.4.1 The Vincentians have clear and direct processes in place within their safeguarding policy for the reporting of safeguarding concerns and allegations. Alongside these all Confreres working in England are aware of the reporting processes and requirements of them when they are providing ministry in their respective roles be that in schools, prisons or as parish priests. Examples were given by the Confreres of when they had raised a concern and it had been escalated through the correct channels to be managed by the diocesan safeguarding team. The handbook provided by the Vincentians for the Confreres covers the principles behind reporting safeguarding concerns and allegations and defines good practice in speaking with and supporting those who are raising a concern or reporting an allegation both from within and without the Order. As part of the safeguarding implementation plan, the DSM has contacted the RLSS and the

dioceses to work with them to develop a flow chart that breaks down the reporting requirements for England with a plan to simplify the process for Confreres. This is in the early stages of development.

4.4.2 All allegations raised would be reported locally and managed in line with local policies. There is an expectation that the DSM co-ordinates with the dioceses or relevant organisations including RLSS in the reporting and management of issues raised in England. The ultimate responsibility for managing the outcomes sits with the Order. All cases are taken to the safeguarding committee and reviewed there. The Trustees all demonstrated an awareness of their responsibilities including the need to inform the Charity Commission and insurers if required and to work with statutory authorities as needed. Any learning from the management and outcomes of cases in both England and Ireland has been and would be shared with the Confreres via Provincial messages to inform their understanding and practice.

4.4.3 The Confreres in England do not hold any information or records that require management in line with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)¹⁵. All documentation that might be completed for a safeguarding incident or concern would be held by the safeguarding leads at the respective organisations. Confreres' personal information is held centrally in Ireland and is managed in line with Irish data protection legislation which is set out in the handbook. There are plans to adapt the current handbook to include the relevant legislation for England as part of this year's update.

Areas for development

4.4.4 The Vincentian handbook again provides good practice guidance for the Confreres on their reporting responsibilities and the need to adhere to local policies and procedures when providing ministry in England. The development of a flowchart to simplify the processes will help further. There needs to be reference to the English legislation regarding the management of data to ensure that all Confreres are fully aware of and able to operate within GDPR requirements.

¹⁵ [UK GDPR guidance and resources | ICO](#)

4.4.5 The Vincentians do not have a separate policy for the management of low-level concerns currently as they consider all concerns to be of equal importance. There is however the recognition that some issues may be missed if they are not considered to be of significant magnitude and that there should be a policy and process in place to ensure that these are captured and managed.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

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

Strengths

4.5.1 There are formal processes in place for managing respondents set out clearly in the safeguarding policy and all those spoken to were aware of these. The initial investigation into an incident or allegation would take part in England with the safeguarding leads for the various organisations taking the lead on this, working collaboratively with the DSM, who would report back to the Provincial and Provincial Council on developments. If there was substance to the allegation, the Confrere would be withdrawn to Ireland whilst further investigation took place (unless criminal proceedings were underway in England) and the disciplinary processes of the Vincentians started there. Physical, psychological, spiritual and financial support would be provided, and the individual would be appointed a support person as well as have access to Canon Law support. The DSM would provide oversight to the situation and would report to the Provincial and the Provincial Council at the safeguarding committee meetings. Should the individual have to remain in England, they would be withdrawn from any form of ministry and any safeguarding plan put in place would be managed by the local superior with the support of the diocesan safeguarding team and/or the DSM dependent on circumstances.

4.5.2 There have not been any reported concerns or allegations made in England in the past 12 months so the processes in place have not been tested to see if they are effective. Involvement with the RLSS is likely to be minimal as all actions taken

by the Vincentians in these circumstances are managed by the DSM and would only be involved if an individual approached them directly. In these circumstances, the DSM would consult with them and expect a handover of the case. The DSM would then manage the investigation, the contact with the victim and the subsequent actions should they be required such as a safeguarding plan. Any Confrere requiring a safeguarding plan would be returned to Ireland where they would be managed by the DSM and integrated into a community of Confreres there (unless prevented by criminal proceedings in England).

Areas for development

4.5.3 The Vincentians processes for the management of the subjects of allegations are established and have been used in practice in Ireland, although not in England. There was no evidence of the evaluation of these processes having been undertaken from the perspective of those who have been the subject of an allegation, and this would be a useful next step to take in the review and development of processes.

4.5.4 A useful addition to the handbook and policy would be to include a flow chart or process map that shows clearly the role of each of the external organisations such as the diocese, RLSS, prison and hospital safeguarding leads that the Order work with on the management of those who are the subject of an allegation to clarify a complex and unique situation for the Confreres.. Although they expressed confidence in the systems in place, this would be a useful addition for the Confreres.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

Strengths

4.6.1 The Vincentians have a robust and established safer recruitment policy in place with clearly defined processes for Confreres, those wishing to explore a vocation and lay staff. All lay staff are employed in line with English employment regulations and are interviewed, must provide two references and are subject to a

probation period. None of those currently employed by the Vincentians are in a position where a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)¹⁶ check is required. All other staff and volunteers the Confreres work with externally are employed by the individual organisations and are therefore recruited using their policies. Compliance with safer recruitment policies is overseen by the Provincial and Trustees.

4.6.2 All Confreres have DBS checks either in England or undergo the Irish equivalent dependent on their place of residence. Many have multiple DBS checks completed by the organisations they work for. Those not in employment have DBS checks completed by the DSM. Oversight of all Confreres' DBS status is managed by the DSM to ensure that all are current and have the correct level for their roles. DBS certificates are held by the Confreres themselves.

4.6.3 All Confreres undertake formation and training in England or Ireland. Individuals from overseas must come with a DBS equivalent from their own country and letters of recommendation and references. Safeguarding training takes place as part of their training for the priesthood, and all must have undertaken this prior to entering any form of ministry. All those seeking formation are vetted and have psychological assessments and are under continuous review during their formation. Personnel records are kept and managed in accordance with the Vincentians' record-keeping policy.

4.6.4 There is a comprehensive complaints and whistleblowing policy in line with the expectations of the eight National Safeguarding Standards, with clear guidance on what to do should the need arise to make a complaint or grievance or raise a concern about a breach of the Vincentian code of behaviour. It clearly sets out that these processes should not be used in the event of an allegation or suspicion of abuse and that the safeguarding policy should be followed in these circumstances. There is a complaints form and a defined timeline for the management of complaints and whistleblowing incidences. All those spoken to felt confident to raise concerns and felt they would be listened to, and action would be taken. All complaints are shared with the Provincial and Provincial Council to ensure that they have oversight, and learning is captured and shared. The Provincial and Trustees

¹⁶ www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service

demonstrated an understanding of the need to liaise with CSSA and the RLSS as required in these matters.

Areas for development

4.6.5 The Vincentians have clear and comprehensive policies in place for safer recruitment and complaints / whistleblowing. These should be quality assured through an internal audit process to gain feedback on both the effectiveness and the experience of those who have used them or been subject to them. This will provide assurance and identify areas for development or improvement.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

Strengths

4.7.1 The Vincentians see training and education as a priority and this is reflected in the creation of a training needs analysis and a stated commitment to ensuring that all Confreres and relevant church personnel, both paid and voluntary, receive appropriate safeguarding training to maintain high standards of practice. To this end the Vincentian expectation is that all personnel belonging to or working for the Order who work with children and vulnerable adults, whatever the context, are inducted into their relevant diocesan or organisational safeguarding policies and procedures when they begin work in these organisations. There is the additional expectation that all will attend training on a regular basis as determined by that organisation. A training register is maintained by the DSM to assure compliance with these expectations.

4.7.2 The DSM for the Vincentian Community provides training and updating of Vincentian policies and procedures to Confreres and staff in the Provincial Office and community houses in both Ireland and England. The Provincial Council is responsible for overseeing the delivery and quality of the training programmes and for identifying specific education and training needs through the yearly community safeguarding audits. The training needs analysis is updated following this feedback and additional training has been introduced in previous years to address the

Confreres' self-identified training needs such as supporting the victims of spiritual abuse and working with survivors. The DSM liaises with the diocese and other external organisations the Confreres work with to ensure that any internal training provided compliments their programme. All training that is provided is evaluated at the point of delivery.

4.7.3 Notable practice found at this audit was the development and use of a handbook for the community on safeguarding practice. This handbook provides the community with a platform and framework for ongoing safeguarding training and the development of their safeguarding practice. Safeguarding topics are divided into ten monthly sessions that include the principles and background to the topic, guidance on good practice with direct links to policies and legislation and have a self-assessment exercise included in each one to allow the individual to test their knowledge and supports the identification of areas that need further development. Each monthly session must be completed and an audit form returned to the DSM showing attendance and feedback. These forms are audited annually by the DSM, and a report is provided to the Provincial and the Trustees. The outcomes of this audit inform the content for the following year's handbook.

Areas for Development

4.7.4 No areas for development were identified.

Graded: Exemplary

4.8 Standard 8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

Strengths

4.8.1 The Provincial and Trustees acknowledge the importance of the eight national safeguarding standards, Integrity In Ministry and Caring Safely for others and their role in providing a framework for good safeguarding practice. Time has been spent reviewing these documents against those used for the same purpose in Ireland. The Provincial and Trustees with the support of the DSM have identified significant overlap between these documents and the Irish standards and are in the process of creating their own adaptation of Integrity in Ministry for use by the Vincentians.

The Confreres working in England are expected to have read these documents and to work in accordance with their recommendations. Those spoken to in ministry in England were all aware of them and had received copies of them to refer to. All Conferences are provided with an individual copy of a handbook which provides guidance on best practice in safeguarding and is designed to accommodate updates and specialised information depending on the ministry they undertake. The handbook is reviewed and updated annually by the DSM following an internal audit

4.8.2. The Vincentians recognise the need to bring in outside expertise in the DSM as they report not being able or experienced enough to understand what needs to be done by themselves. The previous Provincial developed a theology around safeguarding as a ministry not a duty. Vincentian communities define themselves as a community to evangelise the poverty of those who are outside the order. The failings identified in the safeguarding inquiries that involved them in Ireland were seen as a poverty in themselves of their own making and one that the Provincial describes as “something they could buckle under or rise to a new definition of their mission”. The learning from this experience led to the development of safeguarding strategies and the handbook for the community. It is this philosophy as safeguarding as ministry that the current Provincial and Trustees build on the work done under the previous Provincial over the past 20 years that is seen in the most recent three-year strategic plan for safeguarding which is reviewed annually and progress reported on by the DSM.

4.8.3 The Vincentians have a robust and tested system in place for managing safeguarding allegations and issues. The Vincentians welcome and are proactive in their work with survivors of abuse. The number of cases they have had to manage are relatively few which has allowed the Vincentians to consider these cases deeply and work to understand how things happened and how they could have been prevented. All cases are treated as a proactive learning experience, and this is shared with the Confreres as well as used to inform practice development and training. Robust systems are in place to provide support for those affected by harm and abuse and these have been evaluated and developed over the years to meet the needs of survivors.

Areas for Development

4.8.4 A lot of work has taken place in Ireland working with the survivors of abuse. The learning from this has been shared but there is a recognition that the Confreres in England have not had the same experience. There are plans in place to ensure that they are exposed to this and can develop their practice based on this experience going forward. Once instigated, this learning process should be evaluated to understand its effectiveness and whether it should be shared with other RLGs.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1. The Vincentians have shown a commitment to a positive, open and transparent culture around safeguarding. There are robust policies and procedures in place for good safeguarding practice based on the recognised safeguarding standards and legislation from both Ireland and England. The Provincial and Trustees recognise the limitation of their own knowledge and experience and have employed expert help in the form of the DSM. This, coupled with their engagement with safeguarding bodies and external organisations in both Ireland and England, ensures that they are up-to-date and well supported with their decision-making regarding safeguarding. A key strength is their understanding of the need to adapt and change to meet new safeguarding challenges demonstrated by the continuous evaluation of progress against the safeguarding strategy and the annual review and update of the community handbook on safeguarding.

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 3 months

- The development of a flow chart or process map that shows clearly the role of each of the external organisations such as the diocese, RLSS, prison and hospital safeguarding leads that the Order work with on the management of those who are the subject of an allegation.
- Reference to the English legislation regarding the management of data should be added to the handbook to ensure that all Confreres are fully aware of, and able to operate within GDPR requirements.
- More specific guidance on English legislation and reporting requirements is needed in the handbook for Confreres to refer to when reporting allegations of harm or raising a safeguarding concern.
- A formal process to document the identification and mitigations put in place to manage and oversee risk should be developed.

Within 6 months

- A review of the complaints and whistleblowing policies by those who have used them should be undertaken to evaluate their effectiveness and to identify any learning.
- An evaluation should be undertaken of the processes used to manage an allegation from the perspective of those who have been the subject of one to identify learning and develop practice.
- Development of a policy for the management of low-level concerns.
- The Vincentians need to either adopt specific policies for use in England or adapt the existing ones to cover the independent jurisdictions of Ireland and England to meet Charity Commission requirements.

Within 12 months

- Evaluate the new communication plan to measure the effectiveness of the actions taken to improve and develop safeguarding messaging.

- Review and evaluate the individual policies for England and Ireland to ensure that no gaps are evident.

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In accordance with the overall rating of Comprehensive assurance, reaudit by the CSSA should take place after a three-year period, subject to no new risk factors arising.

8. Appendix

Documents reviewed during the audit process as follows:

- The CSSA Self –assessment form
- The Vincentian safeguarding statement
- The Vincentian adult safeguarding policy
- The Vincentian Child safeguarding policy
- The Vincentian Safeguarding Strategy (2022–2025)
- The Safeguarding implementation plan 2025
- The Vincentian Handbook for the Local Community 2024
- DBS register and certificates
- Training Register and certificates
- The Vincentian Communication Plan 2025
- The Vincentian Training Needs Analysis and action plan 2025
- The RSM Ireland review of Safeguarding