

English Dominican Congregation of St Catherine of Siena

Baseline Audit Report
October 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is an audit of the English Dominican Congregation of St Catherine of Siena undertaken as part of the CSSA programme of baseline audits. The website of the English Dominican Congregation of St Catherine of Siena describes the sisters as *“a religious community of apostolic life, following the rule of St. Augustine as Dominican Sisters. As Dominicans we strive to follow in the mission of St Dominic in the four-fold dimensions of prayer, study, community life and mission. Prayer is essential to our way of life, as, according to one of our mottoes, we contemplate and pass on to others the fruits of contemplation. Deepening our relationship with God lies at the heart of our life, as we pray both privately and as a community. Study is not done for its own sake but has the two-fold purpose of deepening our relationship with and knowledge of God and His creation and furthering His Mission. Each sister is encouraged to study deeply to the best of her ability, and this study will also include gaining professional qualifications where appropriate.”* The English Dominican Congregation of St Catherine of Siena is also known as EDC and will be referred to the EDC or the congregation for the remainder of this report.

1.2 This audit seeks to assess the effectiveness of current safeguarding arrangements of the EDC by considering practice against the eight National Safeguarding Standards over the last twelve months. The Dominican Order are international, with the English Dominican community consisting of 19 sisters, five of whom live in nursing homes, eleven who are finally professed, two sisters in temporary vows and one novice in her first year. The sisters advise that their ministry is limited and takes place largely under the authority of other organisations or local dioceses. The sisters also own a nursing home registered with the Care Quality Commission¹ and an Ofsted² registered specialist school. Given that both are subject to statutory regulation they fall outside the scope of this audit.

1.3 The CSSA devised a categorisation scheme for Religious Life Groups; this placed Groups on a scale from Level 1 (a small community with minimal outreach and no

¹ CQC is the independent regulator of health and adult social care in England.

² Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills.

known safeguarding concerns), through Level 2 (a medium sized community with some outreach with vulnerable populations and/or providing some Diocesan Activities such as a Parish Priest) to 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 categorisation scheme was paired with bespoke self-assessment and grading materials that corresponded to the respective levels; The EDC were allocated to Level 2 of the categorisation scheme for the current audit.

1.4 The CSSA recognises the rich diversity of religious Life groups and acknowledges that the religious life groups within any 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 The EDC were initially notified of the intention to audit in June 2024 with an agreed date of September 2024, however due to the previous analyst leaving the role, and a significant incident in the CQC registered care facility the audit was rescheduled. The audit was completed the week commencing 7 April 2025 and an onsite visit was completed 8 April 2025.

2.2 The safeguarding lead submitted the Level 2 Self-Assessment and supporting evidence on 16 March 2025 and additional evidence was provided during audit week. The website for the congregation has also been reviewed as has the CQC and Ofsted reports for EDC owned facilities. The Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)³ have contributed to this report and the Dioceses of East Anglia, Birmingham, Clifton and Nottingham have advised that there has been limited or no contact with the EDC.

³ 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. Their website is available [here](#)

2.3 Interviews have been completed with the following:

- In person Trustee focus group 8 April 2025
- In person interview the Prioress General (also known as safeguarding lead) 8 April
- In person interview sister 8 April
- In person interview sister 8 April
- Teams interview sister 9 April
- Teams interview sister 10 April
- Teams interview Local Leader and Novice Mistress 10 April
- Teams interview sister 10 April
- Teams interview Trustee 10 April
- Email contributions from sister 15 April

2.4 A list of evidence provided by the sisters is available as an appendix to the report.

2.5 The CSSA are grateful to all the sisters and partner agencies who facilitated the completion of the audit.

3. Audit grading

3.1. Practice was assessed against the eight safeguarding standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales. The CSSA RLG Level 2 Maturity Matrix was used to grade audit evidence, with scores from the individual sub-standards being used to calculate the overall standard gradings. Each standard was graded on an ascending six-point scale of *Basic, Early Progress, Firm Progress, Results Being Achieved, Comprehensive Assurance, and Exemplary*⁴. Grades for individual standards were combined to produce an overall grading.

⁴ Where evidence does not meet the threshold for a grade of 'Basic,' a substitute grade of 'Below Basic' would be awarded.

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

3.2 The key findings of this audit are that the EDC have achieved the overall grading of Early Progress. Practice of the EDC varies across the eight National Safeguarding Standards with good practice observed in the established safeguarding policies and the vetting of new members. The prioress general (safeguarding lead) is committed to improving safeguarding practice within the EDC and working with the RLSS and CSSA in relation to identified recommendations.

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 EDC have a designated safeguarding lead, the prioress general of the congregation who has been in post for nearly six years, a successor will be elected on 22 July 2025. The safeguarding lead is a qualified doctor who has worked both in hospital environments and as a general practitioner. As a GP she was also the safeguarding lead for the general practice. The safeguarding lead has also previously served on the Birmingham archdiocese safeguarding commission until 2023 and supports with interviews for seminarians. The safeguarding lead serves as a Trustee within the congregation, a governor within the congregationally owned specialist school and is part of the management board of the CQC registered care facility. In addition to safeguarding courses throughout her professional career the safeguarding lead has completed safeguarding level 3 training in 2021 and safeguarding for trustees training in April 2025.

4.1.2 The EDC have an up-to-date safeguarding policy adapted from the RLSS template which has been in operation since 2022 and reviewed on an annual basis. The safeguarding policy highlights that the EDC *"is committed to safeguarding all children and adults. For EDC this commitment directly relates to the fact that we are all made in the image of God and the Church's common belief in the preciousness, dignity and uniqueness of every human life. We start from the principle that each person has a right to expect the highest level of protection, love, encouragement and respect"*. The scope of the policy is clear in that it applies to all *"workers, religious, voluntary or employees, regardless of their role or the activities that they undertake"*. Key safeguarding roles and responsibilities within the community are defined in the policy including the responsibilities of the board of Trustees which *"has a duty to maintain appropriate governance and oversight of Safeguarding in line with this policy and national guidelines"*, and it is stated that certain functions of the board will be delegated to the safeguarding lead.

4.1.3 The safeguarding policy outlines training expectations for all members of the congregation. Practice guidance and procedures, whistleblowing, recording and storing of information and safer recruitment guidance are all included within the policy, as is a list of key safeguarding bodies including the Charity Commission⁵ and Local Authority Designated Officer⁶. The safeguarding policy is an appropriate policy to support the ministry of the sisters, is said to have been agreed by the Trustees and shared with all active members and has recently been updated on the congregation's website.

4.1.4 Safeguarding practice is overseen by the board of Trustees who are all members of the congregation. Extracts from meeting minutes from 2024 and 2025 highlight that safeguarding is a standing agenda item, and consideration is given to safeguarding issues across the institutions of the congregation, and including policy updates and significant incidents. The board of Trustees meet monthly, a frequency which far exceeds the expectations of the Charity Commission but appears proportionate to the risks associated with regulated activity.

4.1.5 The EDC promote the use of blue ring binder files to store up to date safeguarding information pertinent to the EDC and their ministry. All members of the congregation are expected to have a ring binder containing safeguarding information, and it is reported that the pastoral standards document *Integrity in Ministry*⁷ has been sent to all sisters, and there is an expectation that it is accessible within the safeguarding blue folders. Whilst there are limited visitors to the convent in Stroud safeguarding posters are displayed in the restroom used for visitors and it is reported by the safeguarding lead that this is repeated in public areas of convents.

⁵ The Charity Commission for England and Wales is a non-ministerial department that regulates charities in England and Wales.

⁶ The LADO, or Local Authority Designated Officer, oversees and manages allegations against individuals who work with children. This includes professionals, volunteers, and anyone else who interacts with children.

⁷ Integrity in Ministry is a code of conduct for clergy and religious engaged in Ministry.

4.1.6 The safeguarding lead and Trustees utilise the skills and knowledge of professional safeguarding services such as the RLSS and attend the annual safeguarding conferences.

4.1.7 Participants within interviews acknowledged their responsibility to uphold the safeguarding policies of the institutions where they currently practice, such as the dioceses, universities and hospitals, and to ensure that they are also following the policies of the EDC.

Areas for development

4.1.8 The safeguarding lead, members and Trustees have verbalised an awareness of the need for a culture where safeguarding is seen as everyone's responsibility, however the governance arrangements have had limited impact in ensuring basic safeguarding arrangements such as training and DBS oversight.

4.1.9 Additionally, during the course of the audit concerns were raised regarding the culture within the congregation. These did not meet the threshold for statutory safeguarding and it was requested that the matter was not pursued further to allow for a formal response from the EDC. In contrast, other members attributed conflicts that had arisen to the complexities of intergenerational and cultural differences between sisters. This report therefore makes no comment on the accuracy of the concern. However, the issue does highlight the importance of maintaining a positive and safe culture, and the steps that may be taken to support this, for example a confidential reporting processes, ongoing training for leaders and regular review of members' wellbeing'. The safeguarding lead has since met with the RLSS to discuss a course of action in response to this issue.

4.1.10 During audit interviews concerns were raised in respect of the concentration of power by a small number of members. However, it is recognised that in addition to having a small number of members who are able to take on positions of responsibility, roles are democratically elected by either all professed sisters or by the Trustees who are, in turn, elected by all finally professed sisters. This is consequently a matter that all finally professed sisters are able to influence. No concerns were identified about the prioress general or the support that she offers to members. The prioress general has stated that her preference would be for the

safeguarding lead role to be separate from the role of prioress general, however reports that due to the small number of sisters this has not been possible at this time.

4.1.11 Concerns have been shared that there is a general lack of support available, and a sense of disconnect between members of the congregation at different locations, the safeguarding lead and other sisters who are further away. While not a universally expressed view, it would indicate the need for further work to develop a culture of support within the EDC. It is therefore recommended that consideration is given to how members can meet more frequently and access the safeguarding lead. The safeguarding lead has advised that she is welcoming of any of the sisters contacting her (see also 4.5.3).

4.1.12 Members of the EDC would also benefit from further promotion of the pastoral standards *Integrity in Ministry*, as some members are not familiar with this document, although are aware of the principles of safe ministry.

4.1.13 The EDC should develop an action plan aligned to the eight National Safeguarding Standards that considers the needs of all members and the actions needed to further develop and monitor safeguarding practice within the congregation in England.

Graded: Early Progress

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

Strengths

4.2.1 The sisters have a congregational website where an up-to-date safeguarding policy can be observed which includes a commitment to safeguarding all children and adults. Within the Convents the sisters have shared that there are posters with the details of the safeguarding lead and the RLSS, although there are very few members of the public who attend the convents.

4.2.2 All members of the congregation are provided with blue files to store safeguarding information, and it has been consistently shared that emails are the most effective method of sharing communication across the congregation.

4.2.3 The congregation hold community meetings in each of the convents where safeguarding messages are sometimes shared. The local prioress for Cambridge has shared that community meetings are an opportunity for members to voice any issues and their contributions are encouraged.

Areas for development

4.2.4 The EDC have a congregational website which is managed by a webmaster within the congregation, and whilst it is positive that there is an up to date safeguarding policy available on the internet, practice in the area could be improved by ensuring that the contact details for the safeguarding lead and RLSS are displayed in the policy, similarly, the congregation may wish to highlight on their website other support services that are available to victims and survivors.

4.2.5 The ministry of active members is largely conducted within the dioceses or other organisations who remain responsible for safeguarding communications. However, the sisters in Cambridge do have a one person retreat facility which is private quarters and would benefit from safeguarding communications being displayed, such as the contact details for the safeguarding lead and RLSS.

4.2.6 Each sister remains appropriately responsible for the maintenance of their blue safeguarding file; however, the safeguarding lead has identified that an agreed contents list would be beneficial in ensuring that all sisters have the correct and up to date information. Whilst it is good practice that all members have safeguarding information it is essential that all sisters can demonstrate efficient understanding of any guidance provided and so it is recommended that safeguarding is discussed more regularly at community meetings.

4.2.7 Progress in standard 2 could be achieved by the development of a simple communications plan. The communications plan should consider what communications need to be shared, the best methods of sharing communications

and with what frequency and how often communications should be reviewed to ensure that they are up to date and relevant to the congregation.

Graded: Firm Progress

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

Strengths

4.3.1 The EDC do not have any previous experience of, and therefore there is no practice evidence available that would enable a direct assessment of how the congregation engage with and care for those who report having been harmed. However, the safeguarding lead advises that all sisters are committed to preaching the Gospel as Dominicans in a way that respects all people and treats them with dignity and compassion and as such the safeguarding lead believes all sisters would provide a compassionate and caring response.

4.3.2 The EDC have adopted the RLSS safeguarding policy which provides an overview of what will happen should a disclosure of harm be received by the sisters, and it is highlighted that action must be taken in line with the Church's mandatory reporting policy, unless in exceptional circumstances which can only be authorised by the leader. The safeguarding policy highlights that the EDC will liaise closely with the RLSS and either the RLSS or the safeguarding lead will have casework responsibility. There is recognition from the congregation that *"staff should be supportive of the individual making the disclosure."*

4.3.3 The Trustees have shared their awareness of the congregational safeguarding policy and the eight National Safeguarding Standards and advise that they would direct any victim of harm to the RLSS in the first instance. The safeguarding lead has demonstrated her awareness of support services such as

Safe Spaces⁸, although acknowledged that other support services are available. The Trustees and safeguarding lead have confirmed that resources can be made available to a victim of harm to receive appropriate support.

4.3.4 All members of the congregation who contributed to the audit demonstrated an awareness of how to support a victim of harm identifying that the safeguarding lead would need to be informed. The sisters also acknowledged that concerns can be shared during spiritual direction and in those instances, they would try to support a victim of harm to share their concerns with the appropriate authorities.

Areas for development

4.3.5 As there has been an anonymous disclosure of alleged harm within the congregation, that at this time has not been investigated, the congregation are limited in being able to engage with the member, however it is recommended that the congregation work closely with the RLSS to identify what actions can be taken to support all members, and discussions have already begun.

4.3.6 The EDC should consider making public statements about their support for victims of harm and include this within the website, with consideration to signposting to specialist support services. The sisters within the congregation would also benefit from redistribution of details of both national and local support services so that they are aware that the leadership are supportive of the welfare of all members.

4.3.7 The safeguarding lead and all active sisters should access training in relation to supporting victims of harm, so that all responses to victims of harm are appropriate and informed.

4.3.8 It is essential that action is taken in line with all allegations of harm as per the Catholic Church's mandatory reporting policy, therefore the safeguarding policy needs to be reviewed, and the discretion of the safeguarding lead (*"all unless in*

⁸ 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.

exceptional circumstances which can only be authorised by the leader”) be removed.

Graded: Early Progress

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

Strengths

4.4.1 Whilst outside the scope of this audit the EDC have recent experiences of managing allegations and concerns within their regulated CQC provision, and it is reported by the safeguarding lead that concerns were shared with all appropriate statutory authorities and the Charity Commission. The safeguarding lead therefore feels confident that she is able to respond effectively and safely to an allegation or concern. The safeguarding lead has also given consideration to the potential allegations or concerns that could be raised about the congregation in line with their previous ministry.

4.4.2 The safeguarding policy expects that *“everyone involved in the work of EDC has a duty to disclose to the Prioress General or Safeguarding leads... any safeguarding concerns that have been raised”* and there is a procedure to follow if the EDC becomes aware of any safeguarding issues. It is also highlighted that everyone involved in the work of the EDC will be provided an opportunity to disclose in line with the DBS Code of Practice any safeguarding concerns that have been raised about them.

4.4.3 The safeguarding policy provides guidance on the recording and storage of safeguarding concerns and case files, and the safeguarding lead reports there is lockable storage within the convents. The congregation also have a wider privacy policy which is available on the website.

4.4.4 All sisters who have contributed to this audit have shared that in the event of an allegation or concern they would be confident in liaising with the appropriate

services, for example the local diocesan safeguarding leads, the police and the safeguarding lead for the congregation. Some of the sisters also demonstrated awareness of the role of the RLSS.

4.4.5 The safeguarding lead and trustees reported that resources will be provided to any sister who requires additional support, including those who may need additional support due to the receipt of a disclosure.

4.4.6 The safeguarding lead demonstrated her understanding of the differences of managing a low-level dispute between members of the community and responding to an allegation of abuse. The safeguarding lead has spoken confidently about the nuances of managing low level concerns and considers this to require a more supportive approach.

Areas for development

4.4.7 The sisters have adopted the safeguarding policy based on an RLSS template, and it is recommended that in addition to planned annual reviews, the policy should also be reviewed for effectiveness following any circumstances in which it is used, and any learning shared across the congregation.

4.4.8 The sisters have not provided any evidence of proformas used to capture concerns and it has been identified by the safeguarding lead that this would be beneficial, as such the sisters should develop a simple recording template for sisters to use in the event of an allegation or concern, that enables accurate recording and assists in the effective management of allegations or concerns by the EDC.

Graded: Early Progress

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

Strengths

4.5.1 The EDC do not have any experience of, and therefore there is no practice evidence available that would enable a direct assessment of the management or support of a sister who might be the subject of an allegation or concern. The safeguarding lead however advises that the congregation would seek the advice of the RLSS in respect of any sister who is the subject of an allegation or concern.

4.5.2 The safeguarding lead has advised that the congregation are supportive of the needs of all members and advises that they have previously provided resources for members who are struggling emotionally or could benefit from extra support. The safeguarding lead has reported her efforts to identify services for members and reach out to other congregations in times of need. Financial support has also reportedly been provided in the past to members who have chosen to leave the congregation.

4.5.3 Whilst outside the timeframe of this audit, there is prior evidence that where significant issues have been raised about the behaviour of members actions have been taken by the safeguarding lead to address and manage concerns, and it is recorded in non-recent documents that following an allegation against a member no longer with the congregation, all sisters were provided an opportunity to speak with the safeguarding lead about any concerns they may have had.

4.5.4. Whilst the safeguarding lead has not completed any training in respect of managing a safety plan, she would seek this training if it became necessary. The safeguarding lead has however had previous experience of the requirements of safeguarding plans due to her role within an archdiocese. The safeguarding lead reports that she is often approached by other religious organisations for safeguarding advice.

4.5.5 Interviews with members have confirmed that many of the sisters are engaged with spiritual accompaniment who they report offer quality support. Family relationships and friendships are also encouraged within the EDC and the

sisters are enabled to take holidays and spend time away from the congregation. Elderly sisters or sisters requiring care are supported to reside in care facilities.

4.5.6 The safeguarding lead in her role as prioress general visits all sisters every year, although the practical frequency of contact is described as much more regular and informal. It is reported by the local prioress that on official visits the safeguarding lead will review minutes of community meetings to identify any themes or issues that may need to be addressed. The local prioress has shared that as in intergenerational community people express themselves differently and members have to be aware of the sensitivities of others and be generous in how they treat each other in both formal meetings and in everyday life.

4.5.7 Members who have contributed to this audit have shared that should they be the subject of an allegation, they are confident they would be supported by the congregation whilst an investigation took place, although none of the members were confident in what the support would entail.

4.5.8 An existing member of the EDC who is a Canon lawyer could be consulted to ensure that any allegations were managed in line with Canon law expectations. However, the safeguarding lead advises that an independent canon lawyer would be accessed. In practical terms if a sister could not remain within her convent, the congregation have provisions to support a sister away from her usual place of residence.

Areas for development

4.5.9 Whilst many members of the EDC were clear they feel they would be well supported by the congregation if they were the subject of an allegation, there is no reference within existing policies to the support that would be offered to sisters. It is therefore recommended that a new policy is drafted, or current policies are expanded, detailing what support will be offered to any sister who is the subject of an allegation of concern, and that consideration is given to how widely this should be shared, but minimally with all sisters in active ministry.

Graded: Firm Progress

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

Strengths

4.6.1 The EDC continue to receive new members and there is a vocations promoter who is the initial port of call for any potential candidate. During the period of discernment candidates are invited to come and stay with the sisters frequently to get to know them. The safeguarding lead advises that candidates are often known to the sisters for some time before being invited to stay. The application form requires a detailed family history and medical forms, and three references where possible from an employer, friend and parish priest. The novitiate process is reported to be rigorous, and the psychological assessment is completed in advance of commencing the novitiate programme. The novitiate house is in Cambridge and there is a joint novitiate programme with the male Dominican order, the novitiate programme is described as academically stimulating.

4.6.2 There are currently twelve sisters with an up-to-date DBS check and the safeguarding lead promotes the use of the Ucheck service. The safer recruitment policy is briefly mentioned in the safeguarding policy and a more comprehensive safer recruitment policy is available, which is more appropriate as the sisters employ over 300 staff in various roles within regulated activity. The EDC do not employ any staff or volunteers within the convents. The safer recruitment policy includes the following statement *“as part of its commitment to ensuring that children, young people and adults are kept safe from harm, the English Dominican Congregation will apply robust selection and appointment processes to anybody who is applying to work within the Congregation in a role which gives them direct access to children or adults. Reliance on a practice of untested trust is insufficient and we aim to adhere to the highest standards of practice and public accountability, while continuing to foster a spirit of trust and openness that reflects the values of the Church”*. The safer recruitment policy offers guidance on pre-recruitment, applications, interviews and appointments, and is clear about identification verification and DBS requirements with consideration to candidates who move into roles. It is highlighted that training for the role will be discussed during the interview process.

4.6.3 The EDC have a *“procedures for employing foreign nationals”* document, which was last reviewed in 2019 and will be reviewed at the general chapter in 2025. There is clear guidance in the document that *“no job offer should be made to any potential employee until the right to work in the UK has been verified.”* There is guidance within the document as to the appropriate ID checking.

4.6.4 The EDC have an up-to-date complaints policy that was most recently reviewed in February 2024 and will next be reviewed in July 2025. The complaints policy states that all complaints will be taken very seriously, and that the congregation will seek to resolve them as soon as possible. There is guidance on when to make a complaint, identified as within one month of the incident or within one month of becoming aware of the incident, and how to make a complaint either verbally, through email or in writing. The RLSS and CSSA are identified as the final port of call if following an investigation, a complainant is still unhappy and there are details for the local government ombudsmen.

4.6.5 A whistleblowing policy is contained within the safeguarding policy, and highlights that *“The EDC will encourage and enable anyone with a safeguarding concern, to refer the concern without fear of victimisation, or disadvantage.”* It is stated that any concerns in respect of malpractice, illegal acts or omissions in relation to safeguarding should be shared with the RLSS who will take a lead on investigating concerns and will provide written feedback as to the reasons why identified actions have been taken. The EDC also have a more comprehensive policy which is linked to institutions completing regulated activity.

Areas for development

4.6.6 There are thirteen members of the EDC currently in DBS eligible roles with only one member without an up-to-date DBS at this time, and this will be completed by the diocese in line with her ministry. It is recommended that the safeguarding lead manage a central list of DBS numbers and completion dates for the sisters, to include DBS completed with other organisations. The safeguarding lead can then ensure that DBS are updated every three years in line with the expectations of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. The sisters should also give consideration

to how a blemished DBS would be managed and risk assessed, and it is recommended that a blemished DBS policy is developed.

4.6.7 The EDC have arrangements for whistleblowing, although when it was explored with members why their concerns about the culture had not been shared formally, they reported that they did not feel comfortable to follow this process or raise concerns officially. It is recommended that following planned work with the RLSS that the whistleblowing policy and processes are reviewed with members of the EDC to consider how this process could be improved for any future concerns.

4.6.8 The comprehensive safer recruitment policy is fit for purpose but should be reviewed in line with the EDC's current alignment to the RLSS rather than local diocese. The EDC complaints policy could be improved by the use of time frames for the investigation as stages one, two and three and consideration should be given to publication of the complaints policy on the EDC website as well as providing hard copies on display within convents. The sisters may wish to review the reference in the complaint policy to the local government ombudsmen or provide clarity that this is only in respect of regulated services.

Graded: Firm Progress

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

Strengths

4.7.1 Whilst outside the scope of this audit the EDC are involved in safeguarding activities across a range of institutions and have the benefit of lay professionals in safeguarding roles for advice and guidance. The safeguarding lead reports that she is sought out by other professionals for safeguarding advice, and she has previously been a member of a religious leaders safeguarding group in Birmingham. Similarly, another member of the congregation has previously been part of the safeguarding commission for East Anglia. It is reported by the former safeguarding coordinator for the diocese that the contributions from the member were valued.

4.7.2 The safeguarding lead has completed a range of safeguarding specific training throughout her career including safeguarding lead training in 2021, safeguarding for governance in September 2023, safeguarding in the context of Catholic Social teaching in February 2025 and safeguarding social media training in March 2025 and Trustee training in April 2025.

4.7.3 Five sisters have completed diocesan safeguarding training albeit in 2022. One sister with a governance role in the specialist school has completed safeguarding training as part of this role. There is also a sister who is training to be a counsellor who has accessed safeguarding training. Members of the congregation are also booked to attend training with the RLSS in respect of spiritual accompaniment the use of manipulation and coercive control in ministry and community trustee and safeguarding in the context of catholic social teaching.

Areas for development

4.7.4 In preparation for this audit the safeguarding lead has identified that there are a number of sisters who do not have up to date safeguarding training and there appears to have been a reliance on safeguarding training being provided within other organisations where the sisters have ministered. Church based safeguarding training is needed for all active sisters as a matter of urgency. To ensure that the safeguarding lead has effective oversight of safeguarding training a central list of training attendance should be held by the safeguarding lead, this must then be shared with the Trustees for review so that there is a clear understanding across the EDC leadership of the training needs of the sisters.

4.7.5 All sisters should access refresher safeguarding training, considering issues such as spiritual abuse and coercive control and this should be evaluated as a group to develop an agreed expectation of behaviours that are acceptable and not acceptable within the context of the convent.

4.7.6 The safeguarding lead should complete updated safeguarding lead training. Whilst Trustee training has been undertaken with the EDC financial auditors in 2013, Trustee safeguarding training would be beneficial for all current Trustees.

4.7.7 There is no evidence of the safeguarding training that is offered to new members during the novitiate period, and so it is essential that training is provided. The EDC should continue to encourage open discussion and reflection on what behaviour members can expect from one another.

4.7.8 The sisters should develop a training needs analysis alongside knowledge of the active ministry of sisters to plan for what training is required now and is likely needed in the future. Whilst it is acknowledged that many sisters are not in active ministry, those who are capable, should be provided basic safeguarding information on how to keep themselves safe. All safeguarding training should be reflected upon for its effectiveness and consideration should be given by all members to what other training may be beneficial for the sisters, this should be then shared with the safeguarding lead who can incorporate this information into the training needs analysis.

Graded: Basic

4.8 Standard 8 Quality assurance and continuous improvement

Strengths

4.8.1 EDC have established relationships with the RLSS and the CSSA and have signed contracts with both. The safeguarding lead has attended training organised by the RLSS in addition to attending the RLSS Annual Safeguarding Conferences in March 2024 and 2025. Attendance at the RLSS Annual Safeguarding Conference enables the sisters an opportunity to access on the day training and liaise with safeguarding professionals about good safeguarding practice within religious life.

4.8.2 Through preparation for this audit the safeguarding lead has identified further work needed to improve safeguarding practice which includes proformas for recording any concerns raised. The local leader is also committed to implementing any recommendations from the CSSA audit.

Areas for development

4.8.3 Upon the completion of joint work with the RLSS the EDC should reflect on the issues raised and how any learning can be obtained and shared within the congregation.

4.8.4 The sisters should also develop a simple safeguarding action plan aligned to the eight National Safeguarding Standards as this will allow for ease of understanding for all members. The safeguarding action plan should be reviewed by the Trustees which will enable the sisters to review and monitor progress against the eight National Safeguarding standards and the recommendations from this baseline audit.

Graded: Early Progress

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1 The EDC have developed appropriate safeguarding policies, however the governance arrangements for overseeing safeguarding within the congregation, has had limited impact on the knowledge of Trustees in respect of training and DBS compliance of members, and therefore further work is needed by the safeguarding lead and Trustees to ensure that they are confident in the ability of members to minister safely.

5.2 During audit interviews concerns have been shared in respect of the wider culture within the EDC, although this was by no means the experience of all interviewees. No conclusions have been drawn in this respect, they do however require exploring and discussion with the RLSS in respect of a suitable course of action has already commenced.

5.3 The EDC have the benefit of a congregational website that could be further used to promote safeguarding communications as there is limited evidence of internal communications regarding safeguarding, although clearly the RLSS training is being shared as recently members have enrolled to access this. Similarly, the blue

safeguarding folders are being promoted, although it is essential that the sisters read and understand any safeguarding information that is shared, and so it is recommended that discussions about safeguarding are held within the community meetings more frequently.

6. Recommendations

6.1 The following recommendations are made to support EDC to further embed good safeguarding practice.

Within 3 months

- In view of the concerns raised about the culture of the EDC, they should work with the RLSS to identify actions that can be taken to support all members.
- Review the safeguarding policy and remove the discretion of the safeguarding lead in relation to mandatory reporting.
- The EDC to work with the RLSS to address any difficulties between members to seek a resolution to existing tensions.
- The EDC to further promote the pastoral standards *Integrity in Ministry* and use this as a discussion point for the sisters.
- Ensure that the contact details for the safeguarding lead and RLSS are displayed in the safeguarding policy on the website.
- The contact details for the safeguarding lead and RLSS to be displayed at the retreat in Cambridge and during retreat days.
- Distribute a contents list for blue safeguarding files to ensure that all sisters have the correct and up to date information.
- The EDC should develop an action plan aligned to the eight National Safeguarding Standards that considers the needs of all members and the actions needed to further develop and monitor safeguarding practice within the congregation in England.

- Develop a simple communications plan, which may form part of the overall safeguarding action plan.

Within 6 months

- Update the details of support services that are available to victims or survivors of abuse on the website.
- Ensure that sisters can demonstrate effective understanding of any safeguarding guidance provided.
- Safeguarding to be discussed regularly at community meetings.
- Develop a simple recording template for sisters to use in the event of an allegation or concern.
- The safeguarding lead to consider how she may be more accessible to the sisters, consideration to dedicated time in her diary for meetings and drop-in sessions, including the use of online meetings.
- Draft a policy detailing what support will be offered to any sister who is the subject of an allegation or concern.
- Review the safer recruitment policy demonstrating the EDC's current alignment to the RLSS rather than local dioceses.
- Update complaints policy with time frames for the investigations at stages one, two and three and consideration should be given to publication of the complaints policy on the EDC website as well as providing hard copies on display within convents.
- The safeguarding lead to manage a central list of DBS numbers and completion dates for the sisters, to include DBS completed with other organisations.
- Safeguarding lead to manage a central list of attended training by members.

Within 12 months

- Develop a training needs analysis to include what will be offered to new members during the novitiate period.

- All sisters should access refresher safeguarding training, considering issues such as spiritual abuse and coercive control and this should be evaluated as a group to develop an agreed expectation of behaviours that are acceptable and not acceptable within the context of the convent.
- The safeguarding lead should complete updated safeguarding lead training.
- The safeguarding lead and all capable sisters should also access training in supporting victims of harm.
- Trustee safeguarding training to be completed by all Trustees.
- Review safeguarding policy and whistleblowing policy in line with recent concerns.
- Review the constitutions with all members and reflect on what behaviours members can expect from one another.
- The sisters should ensure that all training is reflected upon for its effectiveness and consideration is given by all members to what other training may be beneficial for the sisters.
- Upon the completion of joint work with the RLSS the EDC should reflect on the concerns raised and whether any learning can be obtained and shared.

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In accordance with the overall rating of *early progress* further inspection by the CSSA should take place after a minimum one year period, subject to no new risk factors arising.

8. Appendix

Evidence submitted

- Charity Commission Governance
- Safe Spaces Poster
- EDC Complaints Policy
- EDC Employing Foreign Nationals
- EDC Whistleblowing Policy
- Privacy Notice EDC
- Safe Recruitment EDC
- Safeguarding Training Records
- Safeguarding Social Media
- Safeguarding Social Teaching
- Safeguarding Governance
- Safeguarding Level 3
- Safe Recruitment Certificate
- Privacy Statement
- EDC Constitutions
- RLSS Poster
- RLSS A Brief Guide To Safeguarding For Religious Groups
- Charity Commission Serious Incident Reporting Policy
- RLSS Understanding Spiritual Abuse
- RLSS Online And Social Media Guidance For RLSS Members
- Maintaining Safe Yet Caring Boundaries
- Loan Policy
- Safeguarding In a Catholic Charity
- Guidelines And Policies Regarding Internet Presence
- RLSS Safe Recruiting Guide
- Dominican Sisters Stone – The Responsibilities of Trustees
- DBS and Training records
- Historical Concern record