

Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal

Baseline Audit Report
December 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 This report is a baseline audit of the safeguarding arrangements for the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal¹. This audit has been undertaken as part of the CSSA programme of baseline audits for Religious Life Groups (RLGs) in England and Wales.

1.2 The Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal follow the Rule of St Augustine and are guided by the Constitutions of their Congregation.

1.3 Dominican Sisters' convents are centres for prayer, learning and hospitality. They have centres for preaching at the Niland Centre, at Harpenden, and at Cricklewood. Sisters who are no longer involved in any active ministry due to retirement or ill health reside at Rosary Priory in Bushey Heath, near Watford. The Niland Centre, located in the grounds of Rosary Priory, is administered and run by the Dominican Sisters to promote and support Christian spirituality, education and faith formation, and outreach to the wider community. A main element of the Dominican Sisters' ministry is hospitality where they welcome groups of different faiths and no faith and provide them with space and facilities for various types of meetings.²

1.4 The English region of the Congregation comprises 17 sisters involved in active ministry within the Congregation, six in active ministry external to the Congregation, 17 not in active ministry, four Novices and two candidates in residence. Sisters with personal care needs and not involved in any ministry reside on the first floor of Rosary Priory and are cared for by Sanctuary Care³. This provision is registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and is covered by their inspection framework; therefore, it does not form part of the CSSA's audit of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal.

1.5 At Rosary Priory, there are currently three lay employees, two of whom are full-time and are responsible for finance, and in addition, a part-time lay Safeguarding Lead, who has held the role for ten years.

¹ Saint Rose of Lima Association Limited is the corporate trustee of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal.

² Information taken from www.dominicansisters.co.uk

³ Sanctuary Home Care Limited is a domiciliary care agency that provides personal care to sisters living at Rosary Priory.

1.6 This audit seeks to assess the effectiveness of current safeguarding arrangements, by considering practice over the last 12 months. The scope of this audit covers practice across England and Wales. The CSSA has categorised RLGs on a scale from Level 1 (a small community with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns), Level 2 (a medium sized community with some outreach 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 Dominican Sisters of St Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal were assigned to a Level 2 audit.

1.7 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 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 CSSA analyst initially contacted the Safeguarding Lead on 11 February 2025 to advise of their intention to conduct a safeguarding audit during the week of 7 July. Following a change in the assigned analyst, further contact was made by the Quality Assurance Manager confirming this update and a revised date of 30 September was agreed.

2.2 The Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal were requested to complete a Level 2 audit self-assessment tool providing information on their adherence to the National Safeguarding Standards and progress in the overall implementation of the standards. The self-assessment was submitted on 1 September along with a supporting document confirming types of safeguarding records retained and a link to the congregation's website, where the Safeguarding Policy could be found. Additional evidence was provided after this date, with the final submission received on 6 October.

2.3 Information from the self-assessment and supporting evidence provided by the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal was reviewed by

the analyst and was assessed against the Level 2 Maturity Matrix to arrive at ratings for each standard and a combined overall grade.

2.4 Audit interviews were undertaken in-person on 30 September at Rosary Priory in Bushey Heath with:

- The Congregation Secretary (who also holds the role of Safeguarding Trustee)
- Four Sisters

Further meetings were held (online) between 1 October – 22 October in chronological order with:

- The Safeguarding Lead
- The Registered Manager of Sanctuary Care
- The Congregation Prioress

2.5 A tour of Rosary Priory was facilitated by the Congregation Secretary and Safeguarding Lead, by way of demonstrating practical safeguarding arrangements.

2.6 Liaison has taken place between the analyst and the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)⁴, regarding their engagement with the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal.

⁴ 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.

3. Audit grading

3.1 Practice was assessed against the eight national safeguarding standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales⁵ and graded in accordance with the CSSA Maturity Matrix for Level 2 RLGs.

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.

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

⁵ Full details of the eight standards and underpinning sub standards are available here: The Eight National Safeguarding Standards (www.catholicsafeguarding.org.uk)

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 Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal have made public a statement of dedication to upholding the eight national safeguarding standards. Located on the 'Safeguarding Policy' section of their website, the policy provides an overview that includes a commitment to *'acknowledging each person's right to the highest level of protection, love, encouragement and respect, fostering a culture of safeguarding, sustaining an environment where everyone's safety, well-being and welfare is actively promoted, cooperating with Church/statutory agencies to report any concerns or allegations promptly, adhering to the national policies and procedures in line with the One Church Approach and responding to survivors promptly and with compassion.'* The (RLSS template) Safeguarding Policy, approved on 8 September 2025, sets out the scope; training expectations; roles and the safeguarding responsibilities of both the Congregation Prioress and Congregation Council; the Designated Safeguarding Lead; and all other personnel. It includes the procedures to be followed upon anyone becoming aware of a safeguarding issue and the associated recording and storage of safeguarding information.

4.1.2 The importance of ensuring a culture of safeguarding is recognised by the Congregation Prioress, who outlined the practical steps taken to create a safe environment for Sisters living at Rosary Priory, other convents and for those who may visit. This includes recording the details of any visitors, particularly to Rosary Priory, where many Sisters live. In recognition of the increased vulnerability and frailty associated with age and health conditions among those Sisters with care needs, any visitors to them are accompanied by a carer as an additional safeguarding measure. Although Rosary Priory convent itself is not advertised as being open to the public, there are occasions where members of the public attend to view their extensive grounds. If they do not announce themselves, a Sister will investigate and where necessary accompany them throughout their visit. These arrangements minimise any potential risk of harm that may be posed to Sisters

should anyone attempt to enter the convent without permission or appropriate supervision. This approach also ensures that members of the public are supported and reduces the likelihood of situations where misunderstandings or safeguarding concerns could arise.

4.1.3 A corporate trustee, the Saint Rose of Lima Association, was established in the early 1970s, to acknowledge the relationship between the ecclesiastical body and the two civil legal entities through which it operates, namely the UK registered charity and the Dominican Sisters' South African public benefit organisation. There are four trustees of Saint Rose of Lima Association, all of whom are Sisters within the Congregation. They meet regularly to discuss finance and safeguarding matters, although the scope of safeguarding oversight is limited to routine information sharing regarding concerns about individual Sisters. Minutes from two separate meetings show evidence of discussions on the development of safeguarding related policies (including complaints and whistleblowing) and feedback from safeguarding training delivered by RLSS. Trustees have experience of submitting a Serious Incident Report although not specifically related to safeguarding. A Serious Incident Reporting Policy has been written by the Safeguarding Trustee, which sets out when to report, what to report, including types of safeguarding incidents and the requirements under the Charity Commission's guidance.

4.1.4 The Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal, have employed a lay Safeguarding Lead who is based at Rosary Priory. He has undertaken a range of training, including EduCare Child Protection and Online Safety training, Designated Safeguarding Leads training with RLSS, Basic Safeguarding training, and Dealing with Dementia. In addition, there has been attendance at AGMs held by RLSS and training provided by Farrer and Co, on safeguarding in faith-based organisations.⁶

4.1.5 In February 2025, the Congregation Council (trustees) reviewed and updated the comprehensive 'Risk Policy and Register' that combines mission, governance, operational, safeguarding, data protection and financial risks, along with the controls and mitigating actions. The safeguarding section of the register covers a broad range of risks, including those relating to the care of Sisters, safer recruitment

⁶ Farrer and Co is an independent law firm that advises individuals, families, businesses, financial services, educational and not for profit organisations.

practices, management of allegations, and contingency planning for major events such as war and future pandemics. This policy and risk register is scheduled for formal review on an annual basis.

4.1.6 The Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal are members of RLSS, whom they have engaged for safeguarding advice, completion of DBS checks, role-specific training for the Safeguarding Lead and trustees, as well as the provision of basic safeguarding training for Sisters in April 2025.

4.1.7 Links have been established between the Congregation Council and the Diocese of Westminster, where a retired member of clergy has previously been consulted to assist in the assessment of a situation understood to have been a safeguarding concern, which was subsequently referred to RLSS.

Areas for development

4.1.8 While safeguarding is a standing item on the trustees' meeting agenda, there is no evidence of any systematic monitoring or tracking of progress against the national safeguarding standards. Trustees, together with the Safeguarding Lead should agree on what safeguarding information is to be provided for each meeting to support effective oversight, monitoring and decision making.

4.1.9 The Safeguarding Trustee acknowledges the need to develop a safeguarding action plan and has identified areas for inclusion: increasing the awareness amongst Sisters of the eight national safeguarding standards, training for those in initial formation, and establishing quality assurance processes. Using the recommendations from this audit, the plan should detail who is responsible for implementing each agreed action against the timescales set for completion. Progress on the action plan should be tracked at each trustee meeting; this will align with the monitoring as stated in 4.1.8.

4.1.10 The Sisters spoken to as part of the focus group could not recall any promotion of the Integrity in Ministry⁷ pastoral standards. At the time of the audit, the Congregation Secretary was in the process of creating an abridged version titled

⁷ Integrity in Ministry is a code of conduct for Religious engaged in ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. It has been written for the guidance of those in ministry and for the information of those people with and among whom Religious exercise their ministry.

Caring Safely for Others⁸. Further promotion of these documents should be prioritised so that any Sisters providing external ministry, including Novices due to be involved in community projects, are clear on appropriate boundaries and the safeguarding of children and adults at risk.

Graded: Firm Progress

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

Strengths

4.2.1 The Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal have a public website on which the 'Safeguarding Policy' section is situated at the top of the home page. Also located prominently at the top of this page are the details of the Safeguarding Lead, including a contact number and email address. The same is true of the website for the Niland Conference Centre.

4.2.2 During the focus group, Sisters reported that they received updates on safeguarding at their mid-term assembly (September 2025), including the revised safeguarding policy. Outside of this, further communication has been received via email from the Congregation Secretary (Safeguarding Trustee) pertaining to spam emails and communications on how to keep safe online. There are plans to further develop the use of website and social media to communicate key messages. When this happens, the approach will be guided by any revisions to the Social Media Policy, which is currently under review.

Areas for development

4.2.3 The 'Safeguarding Policy' section of the website is currently used primarily to communicate the Safeguarding Policy and details of the Safeguarding Lead. This section of the website could be strengthened by publishing the full suite of safeguarding related policies and by signposting to local and national support services that members of the public or Sisters can access independently. This could

⁸ Caring Safely for Others, Pastoral Standards and Safe Conduct in Ministry.

include RLSS, CSSA, Safe Spaces, Children's and Adult's Services, Police, NSPCC and Age UK.

4.2.4 Safeguarding messages are reported to be communicated to those Sisters living outside of Rosary Priory, by a range of means, such as email and post. Although the Safeguarding Lead undertakes 'house visits', they are not routine or frequent enough to provide assurance that the information has been received, read and understood. A system should be developed to confirm that safeguarding messages have been received and understood. This could include maintaining a log of communication sent, obtaining written acknowledgement of receipt, scheduling regular and documented house visits/check-ins by the Safeguarding Lead, providing opportunity for Sisters to ask questions and demonstrate their understanding. Implementing this system will help ensure that safeguarding information consistently reaches those intended and that they are fully aware of its content.

4.2.5 While not underway at the time of the audit, the Congregation Secretary spoke of the possibility of future pastoral ministry for the Vietnamese Novices, where they will be involved in the Vietnamese ethnic chaplaincy. When this happens, checks should be made to ensure that their safeguarding responsibilities are established and understood by them.

4.2.6 A communication plan has not yet been developed, therefore, one should be created that sets out how safeguarding messages will be shared, with whom and by what means. This could be incorporated into the Safeguarding Policy or safeguarding action plan and should seek to ensure that communications are consistent, effective and appropriate to the audience. The plan should include how messages will be evaluated for their effectiveness, which could be achieved through seeking the engagement of key people (Sisters, children, young people, and the wider public who Sister's, external to Rosary Priory, are likely to encounter). Any feedback should be recorded and used to inform and strengthen safeguarding communications.

Graded: Firm Progress

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

Strengths

4.3.1 The Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal Safeguarding Policy states that it is applicable to all members, employees, lay associates and volunteers. The Congregation Prioress is recorded as the person with ultimate responsibility for safeguarding, and certain functions are or may be delegated to members or employees, namely the Congregation Council, and designated Safeguarding Lead. All other personnel are expected to be familiar with the policy and associated policies to know how to respond properly when faced with a concern or disclosure. The policy covers the procedures to be followed upon learning of a safeguarding issue, including the need for the Safeguarding Lead to pass on concerns and associated records to RLSS and reporting to statutory authorities. The policy acknowledges that where a report to statutory authorities is required, the individual will be informed that the concerns must be shared and that circumstances dictate when the individual may not be able to maintain anonymity.

4.3.2 The Congregation Prioress has not had any experience in engaging with or supporting individuals who have reported harm. However, she would ensure that she is available to provide a listening ear and supportive presence, and would involve the appropriate personnel and organisations, as necessary.

4.3.3 Training records evidence that over three quarters of Sisters completed basic safeguarding training with RLSS in April 2025. Those Sisters involved in the focus group demonstrated a good understanding of what constitutes abuse and the importance of listening to individuals who report harm, taking time to reflect on what has been shared before signposting them to the Safeguarding Lead.

4.3.4 For Sisters who are receiving care from Sanctuary Care, in the event of them reporting a safeguarding concern, the procedure would involve liaison between the Registered Manager, the House Prioress⁹ and the Congregation Prioress. Any

⁹ Each convent has a House Prioress who is responsible for the day to day running of the convent and care of the Sisters who reside in each house. Overarching responsibility for the Congregation lies with the Congregation Prioress.

referrals to Adult Social Care would be discussed with the Sister involved and the Congregation Council.

Areas for development

4.3.5 While the Safeguarding Policy outlines the procedures to be followed in the event of a safeguarding issue being raised, further improvements could be made by including a statement on how individuals reporting harm will be supported. By outlining a commitment to ensure that anyone coming forward will be treated with respect and offered appropriate support, individuals are more likely to feel confident that they will be taken seriously and suitably supported. It should also be made explicit that anyone likely to receive a disclosure, (eg, Sisters involved in external ministry, and the Safeguarding Lead) has a responsibility to demonstrate this response in practice.

4.3.6 There have not been any reports of harm to draw any learning from, however, the Congregation Council acknowledge the importance of obtaining feedback from anyone who reports harm or abuse, to establish whether they have received appropriate support. A debrief amongst trustees will be scheduled to review such cases, to identify any potential learning that can be used to inform improvements to future practice.

Graded: Firm Progress

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

Strengths

4.4.1 The Congregation Council have adopted the RLSS template Safeguarding Policy and practice guidance regarding receiving and recording disclosures of abuse. The Safeguarding Policy and other policies have been shared with all Sisters and are readily available in a policy folder for easy reference.

4.4.2 There have not been any safeguarding allegations received within the scope of the audit; however, evidence was seen of RLSS being consulted regarding concerns relating to a Sister which did not meet the threshold for safeguarding

intervention. Advice was given, however, on appropriate next steps to ensure appropriate assessment and support was provided. This example demonstrates that the practice of the Congregation Council is in line with their Safeguarding Policy.

4.4.3 Electronic records pertaining to safeguarding concerns and allegations are maintained and stored securely at Rosary Priory and are only accessible to the Safeguarding Trustee and Safeguarding Lead. While outside the scope of the audit, the analyst saw evidence of the records kept, including details of the date the concern was received, the person involved, the action taken, charity commission report, the date of conclusion, and the outcome. Owing to the timing of the safeguarding concerns, all except one were referred to a Diocesan safeguarding office, which was in line with practice prior to the inception of RLSS.

Areas for development

4.4.4 It is essential that all future electronic recordings of safeguarding concerns are completed to a high standard, with particular attention to the accuracy, especially regarding the dates when cases are opened and concluded. Quality assurance processes should be developed to ensure that when any new allegation is received and recorded electronically, it is of a consistently high standard. For completeness, the running safeguarding record should include the correct dates, indicate whether the individual is a child or adult, specify the type of concern (eg domestic abuse, mental health), and document any learning identified at the point of conclusion. Maintaining this information will provide the Congregation Council with clear oversight of safeguarding concerns, ensuring responses are appropriate and compliant with the Safeguarding Policy and best practice.

Graded: Firm Progress

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

Strengths

4.5.1 Outside of the concern discussed in 4.1.7, the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal, have not had any other experience of managing and supporting anyone subject to safeguarding concerns to draw upon as evidence against this standard, therefore, grading is based on policy and theoretical responses. Within the 'Practical Guidance' section of the Safeguarding Policy, it states that personnel must act in accordance with the reporting policy of the CSSA, which requires action if there are reasonable grounds to suspect or believe that someone holds any type of role within the Church is going to or is likely to or has committed a crime, is going to or is likely to or has caused harm, or poses or is likely to pose a risk, or is otherwise unsuitable to work in a public facing role. Furthermore, the 'Roles and Responsibilities' section requires that *'anyone involved in the organisation must disclose to the DSL any safeguarding concerns that have been raised about them.'*

4.5.2 There are established links with another religious life group, (the English Province of the Order of Preachers, i.e., Dominican Fathers), who could be consulted should any canonical advice be required. The Congregation Prioress understands the Congregation Council's responsibilities in managing and supporting any Sister who is subject to an allegation and any associated risks, in conjunction with RLSS who would be relied upon for support. If a temporary removal from ministry is required, consideration will be given to whether there is sufficient resilience within the congregation to maintain that ministry during any period of absence.

Areas for development

4.5.3 The Congregation Prioress described the procedures that would be followed in the event of an allegation being made against a Sister. They would involve listening to the experiences of the individual making the allegation and then the Sister whom the allegation is made against, before contacting RLSS for their advice and guidance on next steps. To avoid the risk of prejudicing any further investigation, it is the CSSA's recommendation that contact should be made with RLSS prior to speaking to the Sister of whom an allegation has been made against.

4.5.4 During discussions held with Sisters involved in the focus group, there was a limited understanding of the procedures that would be followed in the event of an allegation being made against them, including the support that would be provided. Their understanding was restricted to that of involvement of the Safeguarding Lead and the Congregation Prioress. Clear and accessible information should be provided to Sisters on what to expect should an allegation be made against them, including the process, the roles and responsibilities of those who will be involved and the support available to them (eg pastoral, financial, legal).

4.5.5 The Safeguarding Lead holds direct responsibility for implementing the Safeguarding Policy and procedures including record management and oversight of the relationship with RLSS. He is responsible for referring any cases to RLSS and maintaining contact with them throughout the process. To date, he has not had any experience of managing any lay or religious respondents. During the audit interview, he outlined plans to establish a network with other religious life groups within the area, comprising Safeguarding Leads who have experience in managing safeguarding cases, including those involving respondents. The CSSA view this to be good practice, therefore it is encouraging to see this actively being considered. Once this network is operational, the Safeguarding Lead should actively engage with members to learn from their collective experience and incorporate any insights into practice in preparation for future case management.

Graded: Firm Progress

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

Strengths

4.6.1 The Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal's Safer Recruitment Practice Guidance is included in the Safeguarding Policy and states that all personnel are required to obtain a DBS in accordance with the national safeguarding standards, including women applying for Candidacy or other stages of initial formation. Evidence was seen of DBS records pertaining to Sisters involved in active ministry within the Congregation that demonstrates expected compliance, as all have up to date DBS checks. Comprehensive records are maintained to easily identify the date of issue, the applicant's certificate number

and expiration dates. Records pertaining to the six Sisters involved in external ministry provide evidence of DBS checks completed for two. This is in line with what would be expected, based on their roles within the NHS and a school. The remaining four Sisters' involved in active external ministry are not in DBS eligible roles.

4.6.2 There has not been any experience of receiving any blemishes on DBS checks. In the event of receiving one, liaison would take place with the Congregation Council and RLSS to assist in determining the suitability of the applicant to undertake the role based on the information disclosed.

4.6.3 At the time of the audit, four Vietnamese Sisters were present in the UK region of the Congregation having completed their initial formation in South Africa. Prior to entering the UK, each novice had undergone psychological testing, health checks and were subject to police checks (in their country of origin). Three of these have subsequently undergone DBS checks in accordance with their ministry with vulnerable children and adults. Ongoing assessments are undertaken to determine the progress and suitability of each novice to be able to begin any form of ministry. A staged process of planning for DBS checks is in place, based on the timescales for them becoming involved in any active ministry in early 2026. The analyst heard from the Congregation Secretary about how Novices are supported to obtain a satisfactory level of English language, through combining formal lessons and through their interactions with Sisters in community.

4.6.4 Complaints and Whistleblowing Policies had been adopted two months and three weeks, respectively, prior to the audit. The Complaints Policy sets out how *'the organisation encourages open communication and takes seriously complaints against it, seeing these as opportunities for learning as well as making good where parties have been wronged or injured.'* Within the policy, there is clear guidance on the procedures to follow dependent on the nature of whom the complaint is made against. Complainants are informed of two options available to them: under an informal procedure or formal procedure where there is a clear differentiation between the responses, albeit both will be responded to by the Congregation Prioress. Included in both policies are the procedures to be followed in the event of a complaint being made against the Congregation Prioress as well as information pertaining to involvement of external bodies and any associated record keeping. This is acceptable in line with our expectations of what should be included.

Areas for development

4.6.5 Prior to becoming involved in active ministry, it is imperative that the Novices are suitably prepared for their safeguarding responsibilities in keeping themselves safe and those to whom they minister. The Congregation Secretary intends to approach the cultural differences in safeguarding between Vietnam and the UK. This should include an introduction to the national safeguarding standards, and Integrity in Ministry, as discussed in 4.1.10, to include checks that they have a good level of understanding of their content.

4.6.6 The newly developed Complaints and Whistleblowing Policies require further promotion to ensure that everyone is clear on how to raise concerns and complaints safely and confidently. By clearly communicating these policies and making them accessible to Sisters, employees and the public (when made available via the website), helps to create a culture of openness and transparency, where individuals feel safe and supported to raise issues. As in 4.6.5, checks should be made to confirm that these policies have been read and understood, and could include the expectation of signed acknowledgement, as per the expectations of the Safeguarding Policy.

Graded: Results Being Achieved

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

Strengths

4.7.1 Training records are maintained by the Safeguarding Lead and provide information pertaining to safeguarding training he has completed as part of his role, as well as the training completed by Sisters, trustees, and the finance team. Where Sisters were unable to attend the Basic Safeguarding Training provided by RLSS in April 2025, there is a record outlining the reason for non-attendance. The Safeguarding Lead has attended a range of relevant training courses, as outlined in 4.1.4, exceeding that of the expectations set out in the Safeguarding Policy.

4.7.2 The Safeguarding Trustee, who also holds roles as the Congregation Secretary and Governor at a local college has undertaken extensive safeguarding related training. This equips her with the knowledge and skills that are transferable across

diverse ministry contexts, eg health, education, parish settings. This places her in a strong position to be able to support the Safeguarding Lead in advising Sisters, employees and other trustees on what constitutes best practice, and the development of robust safeguarding policies (for which she is currently responsible).

4.7.3 The Congregation Prioress advised that there have not been any failures to meet training expectations, to date, but in the event of there being any, the expectation would be that the Safeguarding Lead would meet with the Sister for a conversation to assist with understanding the reason for not undertaking the training. Feedback from this conversation would be shared with the Congregation Prioress who would then decide on the next steps.

Areas for Development

4.7.4 Out of four members of the Congregation Council (trustees), two have completed trustee training with RLSS. The remaining two should complete the same trustee specific training to ensure that all have received the same information. In addition, Basic Safeguarding Training should be arranged for those Sisters who were unable to attend the session in April.

4.7.5 While the Safeguarding Lead is readily available to Sisters within Rosary Priory, further work needs to be done to ensure that Sisters living outside of Rosary Priory, including the Novices are suitably supported to respond to safeguarding expectations. Regular visibility and routine checks of Sisters' understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities will help build their confidence and ensure they remain prepared. Such engagement will also provide assurance to the Congregation Council that Sisters know how, confidently and appropriately, to respond to any safeguarding concerns should they arise.

4.7.6 Although links have been established between the Safeguarding Lead and other religious life groups, there is currently no evidence that these have led to any strengthening or improvements to practice. The Safeguarding Lead should begin recording any safeguarding related information, (including those meetings as discussed in 4.5.4), and what actions can be taken by the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal, to improve practice. This record should also note any impact or changes that result from these actions.

4.7.7 Extracts from Congregation Council meetings reflect on the quality of safeguarding training provided by RLSS and indicate an intention to seek further training for the Novices and Vietnamese members. The Safeguarding Lead advised the analyst that he is supported to undertake any training identified, which demonstrates a prioritisation of training from the Congregation Council. It is recommended that a formal training needs analysis be produced to identify and address any training needs for all Sisters involved in active ministry, as appropriate to their roles.

Graded: Firm Progress

4.8 Standard 8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

Strengths

4.8.1 The self-assessment clearly outlines areas for improvement that have been identified as part of the audit process. Included is a development plan, which outlines actions needed eg to improve Sisters' awareness of the national safeguarding standards, increased liaison with Sanctuary Care, the implementation of a training plan and the introduction of a quality assurance process.

4.8.2 The Safeguarding Trustee is developing an abridged pastoral standards document to ensure that the Novices and Vietnamese members receive a clear foundation in safeguarding practice for the conduct of their ministry. This, together with the Congregation Prioress's commitment to ensuring that they understand the safeguarding expectations placed upon them, will help promote effective safeguarding from the start.

Areas for Development

4.8.3 Evidence was seen of safeguarding being discussed at Congregation Council meetings; however, it is limited to that relating to the development of safeguarding related policies, reflections on training and concerns regarding individual Sisters. There are no arrangements in place currently for the routine evaluation of compliance against the national safeguarding standards and what action is required to address any shortfalls in practice. A safeguarding action plan with clear

assigned responsibilities should be written, incorporating the recommendations from this audit and those areas for development as described in 4.8.1, and the associated timescales for completion.

Graded: Early Progress

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1. The Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal have the foundations for effective safeguarding in place, as demonstrated by the development of safeguarding related policies and procedures. The Safeguarding Lead and Congregation Council now need to ensure that these are fully understood, implemented, and embedded across the organisation.

5.2 To demonstrate the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal's commitment to supporting anyone who comes forward to report harm, further work is needed to ensure that policies and public facing information, (including the website), provides clear details of available support services. Any Sister likely to receive disclosures or safeguarding concerns should be suitably prepared and equipped to respond appropriately, in line with the Safeguarding Policy.

5.3 Through the links already established with other religious life groups, opportunities to share good practice and learning from them should be actively pursued to inform and enhance safeguarding practice.

5.4 A safeguarding action plan should be developed to support continuous improvement through regular tracking, monitoring and evaluation of progress against the national safeguarding standards. This will help build on practice already associated with receiving an overall rating of Firm Progress and ensure ongoing development.

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 3 months

- To develop a safeguarding action plan that incorporates the recommendations arising from this audit and the areas for improvement already identified in the self-assessment. Once developed, the Congregation Council should undertake routine oversight of the plan to assist with the monitoring and tracking of progress.
- To consistently promote the Integrity in Ministry pastoral standards, amongst Sisters and Novices prior to them becoming involved in any active ministry.
- The Safeguarding Lead should be fully accessible to all Sisters to ensure that they are adequately equipped to respond to any safeguarding concerns. Routine visits should be scheduled to those Sisters living at other convents, to ensure that they have the necessary confidence and readiness to address safeguarding matters appropriately.
- To introduce Novices and Vietnamese members to the national safeguarding standards.
- To further promote the Complaints and Whistleblowing Policies, including making them publicly available on the website.

Within 6 months

- To develop a communication plan that outlines how safeguarding messages will be communicated, which may be incorporated within the safeguarding action plan or policy. The plan should include how key people will be engaged to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding communications, as relevant to the audience.
- To enhance the website by providing details of the support services available, locally and nationally.
- To review safeguarding information and ensure it is in a format and language that is accessible to its audience.
- To strengthen the Safeguarding Policy by including details on how anyone coming forward with concerns will be supported.

- To strengthen the procedures and practice to ensure consistent and accurate recording of safeguarding concerns.

Within 12 months

- To develop a system where the feedback from those who report harm or seek safeguarding support is routinely obtained and used to inform practice.
- To provide Sisters with information on the procedures to be followed in the event of an allegation being made against them. This could include the CSSA's '*Guide to Clergy and Religious, if you are the subject of an allegation of abuse*,' as a starting point.
- To arrange trustee training for the remaining two trustees who have not yet been trained.
- For the Safeguarding Lead to ensure that discussions and/or meetings are held with other religious life groups, documented and use any insights gained to inform and enhance safeguarding practice.
- To develop a Training Needs Analysis to assist with the identification of any gaps in safeguarding training and support for Sisters, especially Vietnamese members, and Novices.

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In line with the audit pathway, having received an overall rating of Firm Progress, the minimum period for the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal's next safeguarding audit will be two years, subject to there being no indications of increased risk.

8. Appendix

Evidence provided

Caring Safely for Others Abridged Version (Draft)

Complaints Policy

DBS Register

Dominican Sisters Structure

Extracts from Council Minutes

Reporting Concerns and Allegations Register

Risk Policy and Register

Safeguarding Policy

Serious Incident Reporting Policy

Social Media Policy

Training Register

Transition From Active Community Living Policy

Whistleblowing Policy