

The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary

Baseline Audit Report
May 2026

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is the baseline audit of the safeguarding arrangements of the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (also referred to as ‘the Order’). This audit has been undertaken as part of the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency’s (CSSA) baseline audit programme of Religious Life Groups in England and Wales.

1.2 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary were established in England, in 1903. The congregation has its origin in the Sisters Servants of the Sacred Heart, founded by the Abbé Victor Peter Braun in Paris in 1866. The original congregation was forced by wars and persecution to separate, and the original sisters arrived in England in 1870. The sisters quickly established themselves in London where they began again their mission of helping struggling workers and their families. Their numbers in England grew, and the sisters began to serve in Scotland and Wales, where they provided medical care in mining towns and opened schools where they taught the local children. In 1902 the majority of sisters in England elected to separate from the sister Servants of the Sacred Heart and to form a new congregation. The Order took the name the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary at its formal establishment on 3 March 1903. The Motherhouse of the new congregation was established in the London suburb of Chigwell which was how the sisters became more commonly known as the Chigwell Sisters¹.

1.3 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have communities in England and Wales, Ireland, Scotland the United States of America, the Philippines, El Salvador, Uganda and Zambia. Their stated purpose is to ‘bring the love and compassion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to all those we meet’ and their work includes providing care and support for some of the poorest and most vulnerable in the communities where they live. The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary supported the provision of care at two local authority mother and baby homes until 1998 in Ireland and willingly participated in the review into all mother

¹ Information in the introduction is taken from interviews with members of the Order and from the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary website: [Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary](#)
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and baby homes by the Irish government in 2021². This historical activity falls outside the scope of this audit which relates to practice over the last 12 months within England and Wales.

1.4 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in England and Wales are involved in several ministries. In Liverpool, Worksop, Harlow, Lewisham and Herne Bay the sisters continue to minister in the parishes and to the local community in a number of ways that include faith formation, parish support, acting as Ministers of the Eucharist, working in homeless centres and food banks, and providing support for refugees and migrants, as well as visiting the sick, the elderly and the housebound. The sisters also have a retreat centre, the House of Prayer in Colwyn Bay in Wales which offers a programme of retreats for individuals and groups.

1.5 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary own and oversee the management of two special schools and Marian House in Uxbridge; a care home that caters for sisters and for lay people. This care home is registered with and regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC)³ and as such does not fall within the scope of this audit. Also in Uxbridge, the sisters own Pield Heath School which cares for children and young people with special educational needs. The school is regulated by Ofsted⁴ and therefore the safeguarding arrangements do not fall within the scope of this audit. Chigwell Convent is home to the leadership team, the central finance and administration teams and the Communications Desk. At Chigwell there is a community of sisters, many of whom are involved in pastoral ministries. Adjacent to Chigwell Convent is St John's Special School and post 18/19 provision which supports children and young people with special educational needs and is regulated by Ofsted.

1.6 The sisters live in small communities and individual dwellings in the areas where they work, with six of the sisters living at the Chigwell Convent. The sisters all have

² [Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes](#)

³ CQC is the independent regulator of health and adult social care in England. [Care Quality Commission](#)

⁴ Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. Their role is to inspect services providing education and skills for learners of all ages [Ofsted – GOV.UK](#)

individual en-suite accommodation and have housekeeping and catering staff to meet their needs. The Convent is suitable only for sisters with no additional health needs and those who live there are active in the community. Members of the Order with age related additional care needs are transferred to the care home where they can continue to live as a community of sisters. They are supported here by a Trustee to ensure that their physical and psychological care needs and spiritual needs are met. There is a chapel on the site of the Chigwell Convent which is in daily use and open to the public. Services are presided over by priests from the Diocese of Brentwood.

1.7 This audit seeks to assess the effectiveness of the current safeguarding arrangements by considering practice over the last 12 months. The CSSA has categorised Religious Life Groups (RLGs) on a scale from Level 1 (a small community with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns), Level 2 (a medium sized community with some outreach to vulnerable populations and/or providing some Diocesan activities, such as Parish priests), to Level 3 (a large community and/or one with significant outreach to vulnerable populations and/or a disproportionately high number of open safeguarding cases). The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary are categorised as a Level 2 Religious Life Group due to the number of members and ministries, and they completed a corresponding self-assessment.

1.8 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 met with the Congregational Leader, the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and members of the senior leadership team (SLT) on 12 December 2025. It was agreed that the audit of the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary would take place on 18 February 2026 with the self-assessment and supporting evidence to be submitted by 23 January 2026. The self-assessment was returned with supporting evidence on 23 January 2026. Additional evidence was viewed during the audit visit.

2.2 The quality assurance analyst visited the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary as planned on 18 February 2026. As part of the visit, audit interviews were undertaken with the following:

- The Congregational Leader
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead
- A Trustee
- A focus group of sisters from across England and Wales

2.3 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary are based within the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brentwood and are members of the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)⁵. Information shared by both organisations showed that they have regular and appropriate contact with them and are proactive in seeking advice and support when required regarding safeguarding. No concerns were raised by either organisation in terms of the safeguarding practices of the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

⁵ The RLSS is a team of independent safeguarding professionals offering safeguarding services to the Religious of the Catholic Church in England and Wales [Religious Life Safeguarding Service – Religious Safeguarding](#)

3. Audit grading

3.1 Practice was assessed against the eight national safeguarding standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales⁶ and graded in accordance with the CSSA Maturity Matrix for Level 2 Religious Life Groups⁷

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

3.3 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have received an overall audit grading of Comprehensive assurance having achieved this grading in five of the eight national safeguarding standards.

Overall grading	Comprehensive assurance
Standard 1 – Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body’s leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Comprehensive assurance
Standard 2 – Communicating the Church’s safeguarding message	Comprehensive assurance
Standard 3 – Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed	Results being achieved
Standard 4 – Effective management of allegations and concerns	Results being achieved

⁶ The eight standards lay out what CSSA expects in terms of level of safeguarding practice in church bodies (that is, dioceses and religious life groups) A description and full details of the Standards can be found on the CSSA website [here](#)

⁷ [APPENDIX-5-LEVEL-2-MATURITY-MATRIX-FINAL.docx](#)

Standard 5 – Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)	Results being achieved
Standard 6 – Robust human resource management	Comprehensive assurance
Standard 7 – Training and support for safeguarding	Comprehensive assurance
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 Generalate of the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary provide leadership and direction on all safeguarding matters from their base in Chigwell. There have been safeguarding policies and procedures in place since 2005 which have all been subject to an annual review and have been developed over the years to meet the requirements of the eight national safeguarding standards as well as changes in safeguarding practice. The most recent iteration of the safeguarding policy was published in December 2025 and is accompanied by a statement that sets out the Sisters' commitment to safeguarding all children and adults. The policy document is widely available in all the settings where the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary provide ministry as well as in the convents and communities where they live. The policy forms part of a safeguarding handbook that includes guidelines and templates for documentation that must be completed

as part of the implementation of safeguarding procedures. The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have developed separate safeguarding policies and statements for Scotland and Ireland that align with their respective Bishops' Conference's safeguarding standards. All three policies, the safeguarding handbook and safeguarding statements are accessible on the Sisters' website. The policy for England and Wales meets the standards expected in terms of content.

4.1.2 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have a DSL who is a member of the order and who has significant experience in safeguarding through her work as a nurse and from leading on safeguarding for many years. The DSL oversees all safeguarding arrangements in terms of ensuring that all information is shared and that training and safer recruitment standards are met. The DSL is instrumental in the internal auditing processes for the Order and regularly reviews the arrangements for the retreat centre as well as working with safeguarding leads in the care home and schools' settings to ensure that the safeguarding practice meets the expectations set out by the Board of Trustees. The retreat centre building has safeguarding information throughout as well as a code of conduct for visitors and guests.

4.1.3 The commitment to safeguarding extends to include the Congregation's missions in Africa, the Philippines, the United States of America and El Salvador. Missions are required to have a safeguarding policy in place, which is in line with local safeguarding expectations and practices. These documents are required to be submitted to the DSL, signed off by the Board of Trustees and implemented at local level. The DSL for the Order visits the overseas missions periodically to ensure that these policies are being implemented in practice, carrying out audits and making recommendations if required. These recommendations are then followed up individually with the safeguarding officers at each overseas mission. Policies developed for the overseas missions included ones that had illustrations to meet the needs of people who have limited literacy and also to enable them to be shared with children. This was considered by the analyst to be notable practice that could be used more widely.

4.1.4 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have a Central Leadership Team, made up of the Congregational Leader and her General Council, who are responsible for setting strategy and for overseeing the governance of the entire Order. The Congregational Leader appoints the Board of Trustees of the Congregation's charity, which comprises the Leadership Team and the Congregation's General Treasurer. The Board of Trustees meet quarterly and minutes from these meetings showed that safeguarding was a standing agenda item at each meeting. Reports from the schools and overseas missions on safeguarding are shared at Trustee meetings together with a summary report from the DSL which covers safeguarding areas of concern, and updates on safeguarding activity across the whole Order. All the Trustees have undergone RLSS Trustee training and have also had the equivalent training to meet the requirements for Scotland and Ireland. At present there are five Trustees. Trustees are allocated areas of responsibility and oversight for example the schools and the care home. The Trustees who hold these roles are actively involved with the senior leadership of each of the individual charitable organisations and hold regular meetings with them and their governing boards. Outcomes are shared at the Board of Trustees meeting where strategic decisions, relating to the charity's activities, are made and ratified. The Trustees are also responsible to the Charity Commission of England and Wales for good stewardship of the charity's assets and must abide by the Commission's rules and regulations.

4.1.5 The Board of Trustees also act as a consultation group for safeguarding, reviewing safeguarding risks, policy and procedural developments. There is currently no formal safeguarding implementation plan, although all actions and undertakings are agreed at Trustee Meetings and are recorded in the minutes of these meetings. Safeguarding is seen as a priority and something that underpins all the actions of sisters in their ministry and in their day-to-day lives. Integrity in Ministry⁸ is a highly regarded document by the Order who have shared it, not only with the sisters in England and Wales, but with members of the Order who are serving overseas. The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have

⁸ Integrity in Ministry is a code of conduct for Religious engaged in ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales [Integrity in Ministry – Religious Life Safeguarding Service](#)

established links with RLSS and the Conference of Religious⁹ as well as membership of CSSA and proactively engage with these organisations to further their safeguarding knowledge and experience and to ensure currency in their safeguarding practice.

Areas for development

4.1.6 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have demonstrated that safeguarding is a priority for them and the evidence shows that their safeguarding practice is under constant review and development, however, at audit they do not have a formal documented safeguarding implementation plan. Much of the knowledge on safeguarding developments is held by the Order's very experienced DSL. The development of a safeguarding implementation plan would capture all this knowledge in a document that would ensure that should the DSL not be available there is a continuation of safeguarding developments. The safeguarding implementation plan should have SMART¹⁰ objectives that can be formally evaluated and be accompanied by an action tracker to ensure progress is maintained and can be scrutinised and overseen by the Trustees.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

⁹ The Conference of Religious in England and Wales represents the leaders of religious life by encouraging collaboration on the major issues facing religious today and by addressing issues from a Catholic perspective on their behalf [Conference of Religious](#)

¹⁰ SMART objectives are a structured framework for setting goals that are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound. This methodology transforms vague intentions into clear, actionable plans, ensuring objectives are attainable, trackable, and aligned with broader strategic goals.

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

Strengths

4.2.1 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary communicate their safeguarding messages to their communities both in England and Wales and overseas via training, discussions, via email and in newsletters. The key safeguarding documents are all available on the website and are sent in hard copies to the communities for dissemination and for display in public buildings and in the convents. There is not currently a separate communications plan, but the expectations for communication are set out in the safeguarding policy which requires that information is shared widely, that access to raising a concern is easy and in a format that can be understood by all and that information for survivors of church abuse is promoted. This was accepted by the analyst in lieu of a separate communication plan. To this end the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have developed safeguarding information in a variety of formats to get the furthest reach and have developed pictorial resources for those who may have limited literacy skills. Posters are available and were seen with information on who to contact if you needed to raise a concern and these are accompanied by posters from the RLSS on their services and also posters and information from Safe Spaces.¹¹

4.2.2 Chigwell Convent is situated within the Diocese of Brentwood and the local parish priests celebrate Mass for some of their parishioners in the convent chapel. Within the chapel there are posters and information from the diocese on their safeguarding arrangements and the contact details of the Parish Safeguarding Representative (PSR)¹² and the diocesan safeguarding team. In addition, the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary share resources with their communities

¹¹ Safe Spaces England and Wales are 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. [Home - Safe Spaces England and Wales](#)

¹² A Parish Safeguarding Representative is a volunteer who supports their Parish in Safeguarding matters such as Safer Recruitment of volunteers and liaison with Diocesan safeguarding teams

provided by the Conference of Religious and from other organisations that they are aligned with, including the CSSA, the Care Quality Commission, Ofsted and the local authorities where they have schools to inform and educate the sisters and staff.

Areas for development

4.2.3 The evidence seen at audit shows that the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have given a lot of thought into how they communicate their safeguarding messages and have adapted communication to meet the special needs of the target audience. To date there has not been any formal evaluation of the impact of safeguarding communications, and this would provide assurance for the Board of Trustees and the DSL that the messages are being clearly understood and are meeting the needs of those they are provided to and for. An internal audit of safeguarding communications should therefore be considered.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

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

Strengths

4.3.1 The Order has demonstrated its awareness of the need to reach out and engage with people who have reported being harmed. In England and Wales there have been no direct complaints about the sisters themselves in the past 12 months, however the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have had to respond to historical complaints about staff who worked in the specialised schools they managed, and this has brought them into contact with survivors. These issues are reported through to the Board of Trustees and are managed in line with the policies of the institutions from which the complaints emanate. The Chigwell Sisters actively reach out to survivors through their safeguarding information on their website and in the buildings where they are present. Posters with information and links to

survivor organisations such as Safe Spaces are accessible in hard copy and as electronic links.

4.3.2 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have policies and procedures in place to offer support to those who report being harmed that have been ratified by the Board of Trustees. These include consulting with RLSS on accessing available and appropriate support services such as counselling. In addition, the Order recognise that those supporting people who report being harmed may also need care and the DSL and Congregational Leader have open door policies for any sister or staff member who may wish to discuss their experiences and seek support. The Trustee with additional responsibility for the care home proactively engages with the resident sisters to ensure that they have every opportunity to report any concerns they have about their own personal safety and care and will follow these up with the care home manager, in addition to reporting back to the DSL and the Board of Trustees.

Areas for development

4.3.3 Although the leadership of the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary recognises the benefit and the need to learn from their engagement with those who report harm, they do not have any formal processes in place to gather feedback as to their experiences of doing so and the response they receive from the Order. The Order should consider how they might gather such feedback and use the learning from this to inform their practice and responses going forward.

Graded: Results being achieved

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

Strengths

4.4.1 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have a robust safeguarding policy and safeguarding handbook that clearly detail the expectations regarding responding to allegations of harm, be they disclosed or witnessed. The safeguarding handbook includes clear guidance on information gathering and reporting procedures and includes well thought out templates and checklists to support the correct completion of these tasks. The sisters who were interviewed as part of the audit had all received training and were all aware of how to use these procedures and their roles and responsibilities in terms of reporting all safeguarding concerns to the DSL and that these would be reported on to statutory authorities if required. There was a clear understanding of the expectations regarding the writing and storage of safeguarding records in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act¹³ and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)¹⁴, and that any notes taken must not compromise any future statutory investigation. The sisters demonstrated a clear understanding of the need to be clear with a person on their reporting responsibilities in line with the requirements of the One Church¹⁵ approach and that any interaction needed to be done with compassion and care, taking the time to listen and allowing the individual the space to disclose at their own pace.

¹³ The Data Protection Act (2018) regulates the processing of information relating to individuals, sets out the Information Commissioner's functions and sets out a direct marketing code of practice [Data Protection Act 2018](#)

¹⁴ The General Data Protection Regulation is part of the UK's data privacy legislation that has been in effect since May 2018 [Data protection: The UK's data protection legislation – GOV.UK](#)

¹⁵ The One Church Approach was adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales and the Conference of Religious following a recommendation from the Cumberledge review *Safeguarding with confidence* (2007). The One Church Approach promotes a consistent, unified approach to safeguarding throughout the Catholic Church. [K.3: Embedding a culture of safeguarding and the 'One Church' approach | IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#)

4.4.2 The safeguarding policy and handbook provide comprehensive guidance on the recognition of safeguarding issues including low-level concerns. The reporting of these is recognised for its importance in preventing any potential escalation of a safeguarding concern. The sisters spoken to at audit who manage the retreat centre shared examples of how early recognition and reporting of low-level concerns had improved the supervision and safety of children attending day retreats with their parents and how early intervention with an individual whose behaviour was not acceptable in a group of adults prevented any escalation or harm. The sisters who were involved with diocesan or other ministries were all aware of the organisational policies and procedures and the details of the individual safeguarding representatives that they would speak to if they had a concern.

4.4.3 All safeguarding concerns are reported to the Board of Trustees at their quarterly meetings, with the DSL providing an update on actions completed and the outcomes of these, together with the management plan going forward. This was evidenced by the minutes provided from these meetings. There is the facility to have extraordinary Board of Trustee meetings should this be a requirement to discuss serious incidents that need more immediate scrutiny, reporting and management. The Trustees have all completed Trustee safeguarding training with the RLSS and were able to articulate their reporting responsibilities to the Charity Commission¹⁶, the CSSA and the Church authorities as required by these organisations and in line with *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (2019/2023)¹⁷ and the *Vademecum* (2020/2022)¹⁸.

¹⁶ The Charity Commission for England and Wales register and regulate charities in England and Wales to ensure that the public can support them with confidence. [The Charity Commission - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission)

¹⁷ *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (2019/2023) A *motu proprio* (apostolic letter) establishing universal procedures for reporting abuse, preventing cover-ups, and holding clergy accountable [Apostolic Letter in the form of "Motu Proprio" of the Supreme Pontiff Francis "Vos estis lux mundi" \(7 May 2019\)](https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francis/motu_proprio/2019/05/20190507_vos-estis-lux-mundi_en.html)

¹⁸ *Vademecum on Procedure for Sexual Abuse Cases* (2020/2022) Provides practical guidance for bishops and ordinaries on how to handle abuse cases according to Canon Law [Vademecum on certain points of procedure in treating cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics \(16 July 2020\)](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccscc/consultations/documents/2020/07/20200716_vademecum_en.html)

Areas for development

4.4.4 As with the findings of Standard 3, the Order does not have any formal processes in place to gather feedback from those who disclose a safeguarding concern or those who are involved when a safeguarding concern is witnessed. The Board of Trustees although overseeing the reporting and management of concerns should also consider how they might provide feedback on the management of concerns and use the learning from this to inform practice and responses going forward.

Graded: Results being achieved

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

Strengths

4.5.1 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have contracted to the RLSS, and any allegations made against any members of the Order would be referred to and managed by them. This would include completing a risk assessment and advising on the necessary actions to be taken pending an investigation into the allegation made, including the development of a safeguarding plan. The Board of Trustees would be informed of any allegations made against any of the members of the Order and would oversee the management of these working with the RLSS through the DSL. There is no formal guidance on supporting respondents within the safeguarding policy, however the leadership of the Order and the DSL were able to articulate the need to provide a respondent with access to legal advice from both civil and canonical lawyers and would be able to do this should the situation arise. There was also an understanding demonstrated of when and how to report to Canonical authorities and the process of Canonical investigations.

4.5.2 The leadership demonstrated through discussions an awareness of the need to support respondents following an allegation and that this would include

practical support in terms of financial and legal support as well as support with living arrangements should this be required. In addition, there was the recognition that respondents would need to be signposted or referred for emotional, psychological and spiritual support throughout and after the investigation. The RLSS would be approached to provide advice on suitable services to which the respondent could be referred. Within the Order, the sisters spoke of how they would provide support and care to any peer who was the subject of an allegation, treating them with kindness and providing them with listening support as required.

4.5.3 Any allegations raised against members of staff who work for the Sisters in their schools and in the care home would all be managed in line with the employment policies and procedures for the organisation in which they work. This would be done with the support of the Human Resource (HR) manager at the setting. The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary encourage all staff to be members of a union, and their policies advise that any staff member facing an allegation should be supported by a union representative during investigations and employment processes. All allegations made against staff are reported to the Board of Trustees who oversee the management of these.

Areas for development

4.5.4 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary do not currently have a formally written process for the management of allegations within the Order and creating one would provide resilience in the system that at present relies on the knowledge, skills and experience of key leadership personnel. This would also provide information for respondents on the processes that would take place and the support available to them at each stage and inform them of the role of RLSS in more detail.

Graded: Results being achieved

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

Strengths

4.6.1 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have established recruitment processes for staff that are tailored to meet the requirements for the settings in which they work and are set out in the employee handbook and in HR policies and procedures documents. These include interviews, medical, vetting, qualification and reference checks for staff dependent on roles and responsibilities and are managed by the individual HR managers in each setting. The Trustees with specific responsibilities for the educational and care settings are involved directly with the recruitment of staff, attending interviews and supporting the decision-making process on employment. All prospective staff working for the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary across all their activities, including the retreat centre, schools, care facilities and in the convents must provide references and are subject to the relevant Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)¹⁹ checks for their role before beginning their employment. All staff have an induction during which they must complete mandatory training which includes safeguarding training. Once employed, they have annual appraisals and have a training schedule that includes the required updates for safeguarding which are dependent on role.

4.6.2 The safer recruitment policies are also used to ensure that all members of the Order that work with the public are up to date with their DBS checks and that any visiting clergy hold current celebret²⁰ before they perform any ministry at the convent or in any of the settings owned and managed by the Sisters. Documentary evidence was provided that showed that all working sisters have current DBS certificates for the roles they perform. The DBS checks for the Sisters and for staff in

¹⁹ The Disclosure and Barring Service processes and issues criminal record checks on individuals applying for employment or a voluntary role for employers. <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

²⁰ Celebret – A celebret is a letter issued by a bishop or religious superior in the Catholic Church that authorises a priest to celebrate Mass in a diocese other than his own. It serves as a form of identification for the priest, confirming that he is free from canonical censures and is permitted to perform sacraments.

the retreat and convent settings are sourced through the RLSS, and compliance is overseen by the Board of Trustees. In addition, some have secondary DBS certification held by the organisations where they volunteer. Women who are looking to join the Order do so in Zambia where the novitiate house is based. Throughout their discernment and their initial formation, the women undergo psychological assessment and must provide character references from their parishes, family histories and a medical certificate as well as undergo criminal checks in their countries of origin to ensure that they are suitable for the vocation they have chosen. Those who enter the novitiate are reviewed frequently by the formation leads and any issues that might affect their progression discussed with them. At present no members of the Order from overseas communities travel to England and Wales to work, and there are no plans for this in the future. Were this to change, arrangements would be put in place to ensure that the safer recruitment needs had been met in terms of DBS checks and training.

4.6.3 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have both a complaints policy and a whistleblowing policy that can be used by staff, members of the Order and the general public. Any complaints received regarding safeguarding are acted on in accordance with the policy and are managed by the DSL and evidence of this was seen at audit. All complaints and their outcomes are brought to the Trustees meeting for oversight and discussion as seen in the minutes of these meetings. There have been no whistleblowing incidents since the introduction of the policy, and no internal complaints have been received from staff or members of the Order. All of the sisters spoken to during the audit process were aware of both policies and reported that they are easily accessible in the safeguarding handbook and on the website should they need to use them. The sisters stated that they felt confident in raising concerns or complaints should they have them.

Areas for development

4.6.4 There is no evidence of a review of the experiences of those who have used the complaints policy, and this would provide assurance for the Board of Trustees that it is working as intended. It was unclear at audit whether any learning from complaints had been shared with the Board of Trustees or the wider congregation.

Consideration should be given as to how the Order can evaluate the complaints process as well as the development of a process to share the learning from complaints with the Order as a whole to improve understanding and practice.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

Strengths

4.7.1 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have reviewed the training needs for all the members of the Order and the staff that are employed in the settings that they manage. All training needs are managed independently through these settings and compliance figures are reported back to the Board of Trustees. The training for staff working in the retreat centre and in the convents is recorded by the DSL and reported to the Board of Trustees. The members of the Order have all undertaken the three yearly basic safeguarding training through RLSS and have annual updates provided by the DSL in addition to this. The DSL and Trustees have all undertaken additional training to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills they need to fulfil their roles as both leaders and Trustees. All have completed the RLSS Trustee training as well as the Charity Commission induction training and all attend the Charity Commission updates annually. In addition, the Trustees have all completed training that enables them to oversee their legal responsibilities as Trustees in Scotland and Ireland. In terms of additional safeguarding training those sisters whose roles require it have completed additional training from a variety of accredited external providers including advanced safeguarding, safeguarding lead training, safeguarding in spiritual accompaniment, caring with confidence, communication, supporting dementia, safeguarding as an integral part of the mission of the Church and safeguarding for staff and those providing care. All training opportunities are shared with the sisters, and they are encouraged to request training should they have a particular interest in a subject. All training certificates are held by the DSL who also keeps a training record which was seen at

audit. Training is routinely evaluated through feedback from those who undertake it.

4.7.2 Access to training is seen as a priority for the leadership of the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and they are proactive in their oversight of training completed by the sisters both here and in the overseas communities and in ensuring that training is accessible for all. Training updates are included in the generalate newsletter that is shared across all the communities, challenging the sisters to think about their own experiences and reflect on the importance of understanding the rationale behind the policies and procedures for safeguarding they must implement. The Order do not currently have a finalised training needs analysis document but were developing one at the time of audit to formalise the training requirement beyond the basic safeguarding training expected as part of the safeguarding policy. The work underpinning this document was seen to have been completed and to have informed their approach to training.

Areas for development

4.7.3 The completion of the training needs analysis will support the rationale and oversight of the training that the sisters undertake and will help identify any gaps in training which can then be addressed.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

4.8 Standard 8 Quality assurance and continuous improvement

Strengths

4.8.1 Quality assurance and continuous improvement are implemented by the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary through their involvement and engagement with the RLSS and CSSA and the scrutiny and oversight provided by the Board of Trustees. The DSL actively considers how to improve the safeguarding provision and attends meetings with other Religious Life Groups, seminars and conferences to broaden her knowledge and understanding that is then shared with

the Trustees and the communities both in England and Wales and overseas and used to develop practice. Safeguarding practice and policies are developed to align with the principles within Integrity in Ministry and to meet the safeguarding standards of the countries in which they are implemented. Scrutiny against these standards is welcomed and evidence showed that the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have actively engaged with the audit processes of other countries and taken on board the recommendations made.

4.8.2 The Leadership Team and the Trustees set the standards for every community and mission and actively review the implementation of these by undertaking regular visits. All policies and procedures developed in overseas communities and missions are scrutinised and signed off by the Leadership Team and Board of Trustees to ensure that they meet the minimum standard set. In addition, to support the standardisation and improvement agenda the DSL has regular one to one meeting with the safeguarding leads in the overseas missions as well as meeting regularly with the sisters in England and Wales in active ministry to help identify issues and address potential risks to good safeguarding practice. At the time of audit, the DSL was in the process of restarting safeguarding meetings for all safeguarding leads together to share practice, provide peer support and to provide networking opportunities for them.

Areas for development

4.8.3 The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary should consider the creation of an annual safeguarding report that would bring together a summary of progress in all safeguarding activity against a recommended safeguarding implementation plan (see 4.1.5). They could also consider the development of Key Performance Indicators²¹ (KPIs) for training compliance and DBS compliance that would provide useful statistics for the Board of Trustees to support oversight of these areas.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

²¹ Key Performance Indicators are a quantifiable measure used to evaluate the success of an organisation, employee etc in meeting objectives for performance. (The Oxford English Dictionary).

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1. The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have at audit demonstrated both their commitment to and experience in maintaining a positive culture of good safeguarding practice. They have shown that they are a reflective, learning organisation that has taken the experiences of the past and used them to ensure that its safeguarding policies and procedures meet the requirements of the safeguarding standards of the countries where they have missions and the needs of the people with whom they come into contact. In some areas of the world, they are shaping future safeguarding practice to align with the standards expected in England and Wales and should be commended on the innovations they have put in place to achieve this. In England and Wales, they have demonstrated that they have robust governance in place for safeguarding and the leadership are proactive in their approach to safeguarding issues and responsibilities. The sisters all demonstrated a good understanding of the importance of safeguarding and a proactive approach to safeguarding issues and risks in their working environments

5.2 The next steps for the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary are to look at how they can evaluate their current practices more formally with a view to identifying areas where they can make improvements and also to evaluate the positive practices they have already put in place. In addition, there is a requirement to consider the future of the management of safeguarding in the Order and whether some additional lay expertise and support should be considered to build resilience.

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 3 months

- Finalise and ratify the training needs analysis currently in development
- Consider how to evaluate safeguarding communications through, for example, the development of a survey that can measure the effectiveness of the safeguarding messages in terms of understanding and meeting need
- Develop a formal written process for the management of allegations against members of the Order
- Develop a formal safeguarding implementation plan that captures all the actions required to maintain and progress development of safeguarding practice. This should be accompanied by an action tracker that will monitor progress and support prioritisation of work.

Within 6 months

- Develop a methodology for gathering feedback from both survivors of harm and from those reporting harm to evaluate the effectiveness of the processes used in these circumstances and to extrapolate learning.
- The Board of Trustees should consider how they might use their scrutiny of the management of concerns and complaints to provide feedback that would develop practice.

Within 12 months

- Create an annual safeguarding report that brings together the outcomes of the safeguarding activity undertaken throughout the year. This report should be ratified by the Board of Trustees and consideration could be given to publishing it on the Order's website.

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In line with an overall rating of Comprehensive assurance, the earliest potential date of re-audit by the CSSA is in three years. If the CSSA becomes aware of a significant safeguarding concern or allegation in the intervening period, then an earlier audit will be required.

8. Appendix

The following evidence was seen at audit:

Safeguarding policy

Safeguarding statement of commitment

Safr recruitment and selection policy and procedure

Volunteer policy

Conflicts of interest policy

Whistleblowing policy

Complaints policy

Serious Incident Reporting policy

Health, Safety and Welfare policy

Risk assessment report

Risk policy

Internet safety policy

Training policy

Staff conduct policy

Behaviour policy

Anti-bullying policy

Discriminatory behaviour policy

Minutes from Trustees meetings

Minutes from senior leadership meetings

Safeguarding reports and reviews

Articles on safeguarding shared with the congregational missions

The Constitution

Training records and certificates

DBS database

Safeguarding information posters

Safeguarding manual that included the following documents

- Responding to allegations guidance
- Feedback forms
- Cause for concern forms
- Notification for reporting allegations of abuse
- Definition of active ministry
- Indicators of abuse
- Roles and responsibilities document

Congregational magazine

Roles and responsibilities document

Reports from safeguarding lead for Trustees

Reports from schools for Trustees

Overseas mission reports on safeguarding

Individual mission safeguarding policies as per country requirements

Evidence of membership of RLSS

Contract with CSSA