



THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR  
**SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN**  
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND

**Second Review of Child Safeguarding Practice  
in the Presentation Sisters South West Province  
undertaken by**

**The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the  
Catholic Church in Ireland (National Board)**

**Date of Review Report: August 2020**

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## **Background**

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (National Board) was established in 2006 to provide advice, services and assistance in furtherance of the development of the safeguarding of children within the Roman Catholic Church on the Island of Ireland; to monitor compliance with legislation, policy and best practice; and to report on these activities as is comprehensively set out in the Memorandum of Association of the Company.

Church authorities who have entered into an agreement with the National Board through signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) have committed to following *Safeguarding Children - Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016*.

In order to assess compliance with the 2016 Standards, the Provincial Leader of the South West Province of the Presentation Sisters invited the National Board to undertake a review of child safeguarding practice in 2020. The Union of Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Ireland) had been reviewed in 2014 under the *Safeguarding Children - Standards and Guidance for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2008*, when there were three Provinces within that Union. Since that time, two Provinces, the South East and the Northern have amalgamated into the North East Province (in 2015). The Union, which provides the central governance for the Congregation as a whole from its headquarters in Monasterevin, Co. Kildare, is now made up of the two Provinces, South West and North East. This Review is of the South West Province only.

The report of the 2014 Review can be found on the National Board's website at [www.safeguarding.ie/publications](http://www.safeguarding.ie/publications). That Review was of the whole Congregation, which at that time was comprised of three Provinces; two of the recommendations applied to the whole entity, and it was only the import of the third recommendation that could have been complied with by the South West Province acting alone. The core of that recommendation was that the Inter-Provincial Safeguarding Children Committee would produce a written three-year plan showing what further steps will be taken to keep children safe, allocating responsibility for implementing these measures to named individuals and groups, and setting dates by which these will be completed. This recommendation has been implemented.

The purpose of this current Review is to assess the Child Safeguarding practice in the South West Province of the Irish Presentation Sisters against the *Safeguarding Children, Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016*; and to establish through evidence:

- Public confidence that the Church body is safe for children;
- Affirmation to Child Safeguarding personnel that they are doing the right things well;
- Confirmation to the Church authority that what they want to be done is in fact being done;
- Independent verification of the Church body's Self-Audit – or correction and/or improvement of its Self-Audit;
- Opportunities for learning.

The process of review was initiated through a letter of invitation from Provincial Leader, Sr. Sheila Kelleher to the CEO of the National Board (January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020), and the signing of an MOU and Data Processing Deed.

The South West Province of the Irish Presentation Sisters has a very limited ministry with children. It has not had to deal with an allegation of abuse against one of its Sisters or any of its employees since the last review in 2014; and it does not manage any person about who a child safeguarding concern exists. In terms of the 2016 *Safeguarding Children, Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland*, the indicators that apply to this Province are those contained in Table 2 of that document<sup>1</sup>, and it is considered for Review purposes to be a Type 2 Church body. The Review therefore looks primarily at compliance with Standard 1 (Creating and maintaining safe environments); Standard 5 (Training); Standard 6 (Communication) and Standard 7 (Quality assurance). In addition, the elements of Standard 2 that apply to written policy and procedures are also examined.

The Nano Nagle Birthplace at Ballygriffin, Co Cork is owned and managed by the Presentation Sisters Congregation, which in turn has delegated responsibility for Child Safeguarding there to the South West Province. This is in fact the core child safeguarding activity of the Province. It had been the intention of the National Board to make a site visit to the Nano Nagle Birthplace in Ballygriffin, Co. Cork to interview the Sisters who are based there and who conduct retreat work with school students, but due to restrictions imposed to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, this visit was not possible. For the same reason, no school retreats have taken place at Ballygriffin since the pandemic lockdown in March 2020, so it was not possible to observe this ministry in operation or to speak with the student participants. It is very unlikely that any school retreats will be accommodated in Ballygriffin during the remainder of 2020, and it was agreed with the Provincial Leadership Team to complete the Review in as best way possible in the prevailing circumstances, and before that group go out of office at the end of July 2020.

### Stage 1 of the Review

The Provincial Leadership Team completed and returned the re Fieldwork Questionnaire that had been sent to it by the National Board. Under the revised Review methodology, as much information as possible is collected before a reviewer visits a Church body. This questionnaire was sent with the annual report by the Designated Liaison Person for 2019. In subsequent correspondence with Sr. Sheila Kelleher, she sent additional written information to the National Board on Sisters currently involved with Children in Ministries under the auspices of other bodies, as well as information on the direct work with children undertaken by three Sisters at the Nano Nagle Birthplace in Ballygriffin. Additional information was downloaded from the Congregational and the provincial websites.

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<sup>1</sup>National Board, Maynooth - *Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016*, accessible at <https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Safeguarding%20Children%20Policy.pdf>

### Stage 2 of the Review

The National Board sent a list of questions to Sr. Sheila Kelleher on June 16<sup>th</sup> to be addressed in a video meeting on June 25<sup>th</sup>. The video meeting involved three Sisters – Sr. Sheila Kelleher, another Sister who serves on the Provincial Leadership Team, and the Sister who is the Director of the Nano Nagle Birthplace in Ballygriffin. The meeting took one hour and ten minutes.

### Management Structure

Ireland is part of the Union of Presentation Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which was formed by Papal decree in 1976.

Four interlinking management structures are relevant to the South West Province.

At Congregational level there is a Leadership Team of five Sisters, in post since May 2018. The Congregational Leader is an Irish Sister from Cork who had taught for many years in Pakistan. The Congregational Leadership Team is based in the Congregational headquarters in Monasterevin, Co. Kildare. It has responsibility for the Presentation Union of Sisters, which is an international Congregation. The Congregational Leadership Team (CLT) it has direct responsibility for the Nano Nagle Birthplace in Ballygriffin, Co. Cork, for which a Board of Management (BOM) is in place. The Director of the centre is a member of the BOM.

There is a four-person Leadership Team at Provincial level (PLT), headed up by Sr. Sheila Kelleher, and they are based at Douglas Street in Cork. This building is named Nano Nagle Place and it also houses a museum on the life and work of Nano Nagle, the foundress of the Congregation. There is also a PLT in the North Eastern Province.

Because it is based in the administrative area of the South Western Province, the CLT has delegated child safeguarding in the Ballygriffin centre to the Safeguarding Team of the South Western Province. A small group of three Sisters resides in Ballygriffin, one of whom is the Director.

To ensure coordination of activities that have an all-island application, the two Provincial Leadership Teams come together as the Interprovincial Leadership Team (IPLT). Child safeguarding is one such activity. The two Provincial Leaders however remain responsible for:

- Approving the Presentation Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedures document to be followed by all Presentation Sisters living and working in Ireland.
- Ensuring that Safeguarding Children policies and procedures are in place for all Presentation Interprovincial Projects.
- Appointing suitable people to Child Safeguarding roles in interprovincial ministries.
- Supporting the Interprovincial Safeguarding Children Committee through funding etc.

While there is an Interprovincial Safeguarding Committee comprised of the North East and South West Provinces, each Province is responsible for its own Child Safeguarding. Two members of the South West Safeguarding Committee, the Chair and Coordinator, attend the Interprovincial Safeguarding Committee, and report back to the South West leadership team.

Sisters in the South West Province live in 39 communities and small houses in Counties Cork, Kerry and Limerick. At the time of the Review, there were 178 Sisters living in the Province, most of who are retired. The average age of the Sisters is 84 years.

### Safeguarding Structure

The Province has a Designated Liaison Person (DLP) based in Limerick, who has been in post since 2014. As there has not been an allegation or a case management requirement since the previous Review, the DLP has not had to be active in this role. However, in the same way as all post holders, she is required to attend refresher training every year. The DLP produces an annual report to the provincial, and the 2019 report was seen by the reviewer.

There are two further Sisters in the roles of Support Person and Advisor. Similarly, they have not been called on to work on a child safeguarding case, while they also attend annual refresher training.

The Sister who is in the Trainer role is quite busy ensuring that all safeguarding training needs are attended to in a timely and comprehensive manner. She is also a member of the Province's Safeguarding Committee and is a Registered Trainer with the National Board. She is based in Kerry and works closely with the Kerry Diocese's Trainer.

Two Sisters have responsibility for Garda Vetting, which is renewed every three years. There are seven members of the Safeguarding Committee; five of these are Sisters and two are lay persons, a woman and a man, both being retired school principals. The committee meets seven or eight times each year and takes responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the three-year Interprovincial Safeguarding Plan. It also oversees training and Garda vetting of all Sisters who require these. The other significant task that falls to the Safeguarding Committee to complete is the Evaluation Report on Safeguarding that is required by the Congregational Leadership Team by the end of September each year. The overall responsibility of the committee is the 'Upholding the seven standards in practice and behaviour'.<sup>2</sup>

The Province has produced an Action Plan for Safeguarding Children to run from October 2019 to September 2020, signed off by the Provincial Leader in September 2019.

The PLT members regularly visit communities and houses across the Province, and child safeguarding is always discussed with local Sisters during these visits.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://presentationsisterssw.ie/safeguarding/>

The Child Safeguarding Statement of Presentation Sisters, South West Province, Ireland can be accessed at [www.nanonaglebirthplace.ie/schools](http://www.nanonaglebirthplace.ie/schools)

### Ministries

The website of the South West Province describes the work of the Sisters in the following way:

‘Sisters are involved in a variety of ministries including education, pastoral work, and faith formation, health care, justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Many Sisters are formally retired but continue to dedicate their time and energy and engage in much voluntary work in the local community including working with prisoners, homeless people, migrants and refugees’.<sup>3</sup>

A total of 28 specific ministries are described on the website at <http://presentationsisterssw.ie/justice-and-ministries/>

### Ministries with Children

The only direct work with children conducted by Sisters of the Province is the school retreat work undertaken at the Nano Nagle Birthplace in Ballygriffin, 12 kilometres from the town of Mallow. Three of the four Sisters who live on site undertake this work. Therefore, compliance with the relevant standards is essentially measured in relation to the ways in which safeguarding matters are addressed at the Ballygriffin centre.

## **Standard 1: Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments**

All people who work at the Ballygriffin centre have been Garda vetted, and they have all taken part in child safeguarding briefing. The retreat work with children does not allow them to have contact with any staff other than the Sisters who undertake the sessions with them.

There is a checklist entitled *School Retreat Practices* with 18 separate items that are addressed before and during a visit by school groups to the centre, 11 of which relate specifically to safeguarding issues.<sup>4</sup> Before any school group arrives, the ground staff check for any hazards that need to be remedied around the site. School groups are generally there for three to four hours, and no children or young people coming to Ballygriffin stay overnight. Groups arrive by bus, are welcomed by the Sister Coordinator, and are accompanied by her and their class teachers to the Conference Centre. All adults, retreat team members, teachers and SNAs are required to sign in before any activities begin.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://nanonagleplace.ie/the-presentation-sisters/>

<sup>4</sup> Appendix 1

At the beginning of the retreat, the three Sisters that are leading work together with the full group to help them to develop the ground-rules and code of conduct for the day, with an emphasis on mutual respect and confidentiality. The students then work in three smaller groups to create an optimum environment for participation and sharing. All rooms used by school groups have glass panels in the doors. The class teachers remain on site, and while they are welcome to attend the retreat sessions, they can opt not to. If any student has an assigned Special Needs Assistant (SNA), they always attend the session.

Children who attend for school retreats are always accompanied by their class teachers. While both primary and second level groups are catered for, generally the children who come to Ballygriffin on retreat are preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation. When a school is negotiating a booking, the Director sends out a detailed letter in which the conditions to be met are set out, which include requirements for keeping students safe while they will be at the centre. The letter includes this paragraph:

*To help us with the smooth running of the day we request the following:*

*Names of students attending with consent to hold list of names - required for Safeguarding purposes; these names will be stored in accordance with GDPR*

*Names of teachers/supervisors (2 for more than 30 students)*

*Notice regarding any special needs within the group (e.g. challenges re hearing, walking outside etc.)*

*Teachers are requested to supervise the two breaks.*

*Teachers must be nearby at all times, in compliance with Standard 1 of the Safeguarding Children Policy for the Catholic Church 2016.*

A maximum of 50 students can be accommodated on a school retreat. In 2019, nearly 620 students from 14 schools attended the centre for retreats. These continued into 2020, but by mid-March, all bookings were cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Each session is 35 minutes in length, and if students need to use toilets, they form a supervised queue during breaks between sessions. No student is allowed to separate themselves from the school group while they are in Ballygriffin, so if they are outside in the extensive grounds, they are supervised at all times.

The Province has produced a children's safeguarding leaflet which is available to school students participating in activities at the Ballygriffin centre, as well as a child-friendly Safeguarding Children Information Poster. The leaflet and poster provide safeguarding information for children, including the following:



**What should I do if someone hurts me?**

If someone hurts you, or makes you feel uncomfortable or upset you should always...

- Tell them to stop – Say No!
- Get away from them
- Tell an adult you trust

It is never your fault if someone hurts you and you should never keep secrets about it!

**How can I help to keep myself and other children safe?**

If an adult is hurting you, or someone you know then you should tell an adult you trust or ring any of the following:

Local Safeguarding Representative: [details given]

Designated Liaison Person: [details given]

The Provincial Leader is required to submit an audit return to the Congregational Leadership Team in September each year, and the most recent return will be commented on later in this report. It contains a question on whistle-blowing, ‘Has the Unit guidelines that encourage and support whistle blowing in this area’, to which the returned response is, ‘Yes, as part of training, the role of Mandated Person is thoroughly discussed, following guidelines from NBSCCCI. All Religious are Mandated Persons’. The Province follows the Congregational Whistle Blowing Policy effective from 28<sup>th</sup> June 2019, which has a date for review of 28<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

The Province in signing up to implementing the 2016 *Safeguarding Children Standards and Procedures for the Catholic Church in Ireland*, is also utilising the National Board’s web-based Guidance in matters such as 1.7 (Complaints Policy).

The schools that come to the Nano Nagle Birthplace for retreats have to follow the Child Protection Procedures for primary and post-primary schools, 2017 of the Department of Education and Skills.

More information on their work with schools can be accessed on the centre’s website at [www.nanonaglebirthplace.ie/schools](http://www.nanonaglebirthplace.ie/schools).

External groups

External groups that use the Nano Nagle Birthplace centre in Ballygriffin have to show proof of adequate insurance cover and have to be covered by their own child safeguarding policy and procedures, before they are allowed to bring young people on site.

The Child Safeguarding Statement of the Congregation is displayed in a wall-mounted frame inside the entrances of the Conference Centre and the main house at Ballygriffin; and child safeguarding leaflets, including a child friendly one are made available on tables inside the entrance doors. The Province has also printed translations of the statement in Irish and in Polish, which is commended.

In addition to the direct ministry with children provided under the auspices of the Province, a number of other Sisters work in either a paid or a voluntary capacity in ministries in which they have contact with children and young people, but which are the responsibility of other organisations or Church bodies, as follows:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Sisters employed by the Department of Education and Skills             | 2  |
| Sisters who work as Diocesan Advisors in Primary Schools               | 3  |
| Sisters who volunteer in Primary Schools (language teaching)           | 6  |
| Sisters who volunteer in Post Primary Schools                          | 2  |
| Sister who volunteers with Cork ETB                                    | 1  |
| Sisters who volunteer with Church (in Sacrament Preparation)           | 6  |
| Sisters who volunteer with Homework Groups attached to Primary Schools | 2  |
| Sister who volunteers as Church Organist and Choir Director            | 1  |
| Sister who volunteers with the Cork Migrant Centre                     | 1  |
| Total  | 24 |

The Provincial Leader informed the reviewer that she ensures that these 24 Sisters follow the child safeguarding policies and procedures of the external organisations and Church bodies in which they operate.

## **Standard 2: Responding to Child Protection Suspicions, Concerns, Knowledge or Allegations**

The Province has never had to respond to any child safeguarding concern. However, it does have in place the Child Safeguarding Policy of the Province, as well as its Child Safeguarding Statement, both of which are accessible on its website at [www.presentationisterssw.ie](http://www.presentationisterssw.ie). All staff and volunteers sign a document to verify that they have read the Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures of the Province and that they undertake to abide by them.

The PLT has on occasions contacted the National Board for advice in relation to matters to establish whether any report or notification needed to be made.

## **Standard 5: Training and Support for Keeping Children Safe**

As mentioned under the section on the Safeguarding Structure within the Province, there is a dedicated National Board registered Trainer, a Sister based in Tralee, who is very active and who often works with the trainer from the Diocese of Kerry. The Safeguarding Committee oversees the training needs of the Province, and training is planned ahead for people who require refresher sessions or role-specific training.

All Sisters involved with children's ministry are mandated persons, for which they have received appropriate training.

There is a register of child safeguarding training completed and regularly updated, including the names of those trained, the name of the training module and the date on which it took place.

As the safeguarding staff have not had to deal with any reports or case management, they have not needed additional personal supports.

The PLT ensures that the Province is represented at the annual Cashel and Emly Metropolitan Area meetings involving the National Board.

## **Standard 6: Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message**

The Province has safeguarding information on its website. The Child Safeguarding Statement is appropriately displayed in the Ballygriffin centre, and it has been made available in both Irish and Polish to ensure that it is accessible to people in the Gaeltacht areas within its administrative area and to members of the significant Polish community.

The links made with the National Board, the Diocese of Kerry and with the wider Congregation have all been described, each of which facilitates the sharing of best child safeguarding practice.

## **Standard 7: Quality Assuring Compliance with the Standards**

The Designated Liaison Person completes and submits an annual report to the PLT of the Province. The report for 2019 was presented in February 2020.

The Congregational Leadership Team's (CLT) annual child safeguarding evaluation exercise is especially commended. This requires every unit that comes under the Congregational umbrella to make a signed written return to the CLT in September every year. This is equivalent to the self-audit exercise required under Indicator 7.1.

There are 26 separate items that are reported on as part of this evaluation, and there is evidence that the CLT is aware of the specific details of safeguarding in the Province from the addition of tailored questions to the pro-forma monitoring document. Sr. Sheila Kelleher signed the returns for the last full year on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019. In addition to the information already considered in this Review Report above, the following details have been taken from the most recent monitoring document returned to the CLT:

- All staff and volunteers have signed forms stating that they have read and understood the Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures and have undertaken to abide by these;
- The PLT has underlined to the Director of the Nano Nagle Birthplace Centre the importance of teachers remaining close to the rooms in which their students are participating in retreat sessions;
- The PLT has ensured that it receives written confirmation that Sisters from outside the South West Province who minister with children within the South West Province have been approved by their own leadership to work with children;
- Garda vetting and child safeguarding training were up to date for all staff and volunteers.

In relation to the second bullet point, if there is a Special Needs Assistant (SNA), or more than one SNA, attached to a student group, this / these staff members always sit in on the retreat sessions, in case their assigned student has a difficulty that needs to be attended to. In relation to teachers, experience suggests that the students are more forthcoming when the teachers are not sitting in on the sessions; so the Sisters have the full responsibility for safeguarding during that time. The teachers however are available in a nearby room and are not free to exit the site while the students are there. They are 'on duty' during all breaks and when the students are moving around between retreat sessions.

There is a Safeguarding Action Plan for the period October 2019 to September 2020. This has nine actions listed, with named persons responsible and time deadlines for completion set. The actions identified include updating training as required; initiating Garda vetting for those who need this; ensuring that child safeguarding is addressed in all newsletters, reports and meetings within the Province; updating the database; monitoring attendance of teachers at school retreats; meeting with community leaders and cluster coordinators to brief them on safeguarding developments; and completing the annual audit exercise.

The Provincial Leader was proactive in requesting this Review from the National Board.

### Evidence

Evidence that has been examined in the course of this Review includes:

- The signed Congregational Child Safeguarding Policy, 2015.
- The signed Congregational Leadership Team Monitoring Form, September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019.
- The signed Annual Report 2018/2019 from DLP to Presentation Sisters South West Province.
- The signed Action Plan for Safeguarding Children from October 2019 to September 2020 for the South West Unit, Ireland.
- The Child Safeguarding Statement of Presentation Sisters, South West Province, Ireland.
- Nano Nagle Birthplace Ballygriffin - 2019 Bookings involving children.
- Nano Nagle Birthplace Ballygriffin - Primary Schools: Confirmation and Post Confirmation Retreats (standard letter to schools).
- Nano Nagle Birthplace Ballygriffin - School Retreat Practices.
- Nano Nagle Birthplace Ballygriffin – Secondary School Retreats Information.
- Presentation Sisters South West Province Pre-Fieldwork Questionnaire, received February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020.
- Presentation Sisters South West Province Ministries with Children and Young People, completed on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020
- Safeguarding Children Policy of Presentation Sisters Union South West Ireland
- The signed Child Safeguarding Statement of Presentation Sisters, South West Province, Ireland.
- The websites of the Presentation Sisters South West Province,<sup>5</sup> the Nano Nagle Birthplace, Ballygriffin,<sup>6</sup> and the Presentation Sisters Congregation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://presentationsisterssw.ie/>

<sup>6</sup> [www.nanonaglebirthplace.ie](http://www.nanonaglebirthplace.ie)

<sup>7</sup> [www.pbvm.org](http://www.pbvm.org)

## **Conclusion**

The South West Province of the Presentation Sisters takes its child safeguarding responsibilities seriously. The planning, resourcing and management of child safeguarding are being addressed in a full and accountable manner. While various tasks are, delegated, the leadership retains close oversight and has adequate reporting structures in place. Child safeguarding is a dynamic activity within the Province and is not simply a troublesome chore to be, performed. Safe recruitment and induction practices are followed, adequate and relevant training are provided, the safeguarding message is shared and reinforced, and on-going evaluation is being conducted. The Provincial Leadership Team participated openly and generously in this Review process, for which the National Board is very grateful.