

- MEDIA RELEASE -

Safeguarding of children and adults at risk a clear area of focus for Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

6 December 2024

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (Oblates) have invested in safeguarding resources and its leaders are championing best practices in safeguarding, according to a safeguarding audit report published today by Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd (ACSL).

The Oblates are a congregation working in ministries across dioceses, hospital chaplaincy, youth ministry, school governance and homeless ministries in Australia.

The audit reviewed the congregation's safeguarding framework, and then interviewed key personnel to evaluate implementation of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS).

The audit found that the Oblates have either fully embedded or developed 99 per cent of the NCSS indicators relevant to their ministries and governance. One indicator is at the developing stage of implementation.

ACSL CEO Dr Ursula Stephens said that while the Oblates have previously been audited for their child safe practices, this audit also checked for processes which prioritise the safety of adults at risk.

'Our audit team found that safeguarding is an important area of focus for the Oblates, and commitment from leadership has been backed up by an investment into centralised safeguarding resources,' Dr Stephens said.

Dr Stephens noted that a site visit to one school ministry demonstrated a holistic approach to education which includes faith development, personal growth, physical development, and social and emotional growth.

'An emphasis on close and supportive relationships between staff and students in both the formal and informal learning situations is what makes this possible. We saw a great partnership between school and parents which supports students to develop, and do so in a safe and comfortable environment.'

Speaking more broadly about the audit findings, Dr Stephens noted that while recommendations from the first audit have been addressed, some further areas for improvement have been identified.

'One area is in relation to clarifying responsibility for safeguarding governance for one of the ministries, which is an important risk mitigation action.'

'Our recommendations will help shift the dial from very good to excellent, including updating existing safeguarding training, developing easy to read charts to make reporting a concern as simple as possible, and rolling out more information about safe and respectful relationships for adults at risk.'

'We commend the Oblates for their commitment to use these recommendations as a roadmap for improvement,' Dr Stephens said.

Fr Christian Fini OMI, Australian Provincial of the Oblates also said that implementing the audit's findings will be a priority.

'We extend our sincere apologies to the victims and survivors of child sexual abuse by Oblates or those associated with our ministry. We deeply regret the suffering endured and the impact on families and communities. We apologise for any failures in listening, believing, and providing a just response,' Fr Christian said.

'The Australian Province remains dedicated to prioritising safeguarding and is committed to implementing the audit's recommendations so that we may continue to minimise the risk of harm and ensure appropriate responses to disclosures and allegations.'

'We want to thank all the employees and staff for their ongoing commitment to ensuring safeguarding is an integral part of their work and to the team at ACSL for working alongside us to achieve a great result,' Fr Christian said.

The full audit report for the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate is available [here](#).

--ENDS --

ACSL works with Catholic entities to promote and oversee a nationally consistent, comprehensive and sustainable framework for the protection of children and adults at risk within the Church in Australia.

Media contact: Kat Beavis 0400 825 954