



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops Conference receives strong result in safeguarding audit

MEDIA RELEASE

April 12, 2021

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has fully implemented or substantially progressed the implementation of 97 per cent of relevant safeguarding indicators, an external audit has found.

Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd last week published its findings after selective interviews with Conference staff, interaction with the Conference's leadership and Safeguarding Committee, and a review of policies and procedures.

Trudy Dantis, the director of the National Centre for Pastoral Research and the chair of the Bishops Conference's Safeguarding Committee, said the audit process helped the organisation strengthen its policies and procedures.

"The Bishops Conference has relatively little direct contact with children, but there is an important role to play in demonstrating a proactive approach for other Church entities," Dr Dantis said.

"There are many Catholic groups whose current ministries and activities aren't directed towards children and young people. Yet we are still responsible for making sound decisions to limit the possibility of any behaviours that could harm children or other vulnerable people."

The two areas where Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd recommended additional attention related to people attending events and monitoring the online environment.

"When the Conference sponsors events that see young people gather, they are invariably a collaboration with a diocese or other group, which typically has responsibility for safeguarding and child protection matters," Dr Dantis said.

"We will work towards clearer policies for such events, particularly around managing persons of concern who might be seeking to attend Conference-sponsored events."

Dr Dantis said the Conference will similarly assess its policies regarding how staff interact with people online, noting that it is not always clear when those making contact with the Conference electronically are children or young people.

Bishops Conference president Archbishop Mark Coleridge, who was also involved in the audit of the Archdiocese of Brisbane, said the process is aimed at improving the safety of children and young people through a collaborative approach.

"There will be times when shortcomings have to be called out, but a commitment to addressing issues when they are identified – within and outside the audit framework – is what will continue to enhance our processes," he said.

"We are grateful for the approach Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd took to the Conference's audit and for their advice in helping support continuous improvement."

The audit report has been published on [the Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd website](#).