

## **- MEDIA RELEASE -**

### **Child safeguarding standards embraced by Diocese of Townsville**

**19 June 2024**

Child safeguarding standards have been embraced by the Diocese of Townsville, according to a safeguarding audit report published today by Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd (ACSL).

The safeguarding audit, completed between March and June this year, assessed the Diocese's implementation of child safeguarding practices outlined in the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS).

The audit found that the Diocese has fully progressed or substantially progressed in the implementation of 100 per cent of the NCSS indicators relevant to their operations.

Speaking after the report's publication, ACSL Chief Executive Dr Ursula Stephens said that the audit's results demonstrate how committed leadership can translate into real results for child safety.

'The audit findings show that the Diocese of Townsville has invested in child safeguarding, at a leadership, cultural and resource level.'

'Bishop Tim Harris and his leadership team have championed safeguarding throughout the diocese. We saw some great initiatives, such as having all members of the diocesan clergy sign copies of Integrity in Our Common Mission, the National Code of Conduct for dioceses released last year. This signals that the Diocese is committed to ongoing formation of their people that emphasises thinking and acting in the best interests of children.'

'The diocese was able to show that all relevant aspects of the child-focused NCSS were either fully embedded or well on their way at the time of our audit. This is really significant as the standards cover core aspects of safeguarding including engaging with children, families and communities and best practice human resources, as well as core safeguarding systems, policies and procedures.'

'We take a developmental approach to our audits, so while we are keen to highlight good practice we are also able to offer recommendations that can build on a culture of safety and care for children.'

'Our audit team did note some areas for improvement and we are pleased to say that all our recommendations have been accepted by the Diocese. One area for improvement is in relation to centralising risk registers at the diocesan level. This is something we've now seen across several Catholic entities, where parish and ministry risk assessments are being completed but are not being centrally stored at the diocesan level. This is an important area to focus on as there does need to be oversight at the diocesan level.'

'Another recommendation is in relation to updating the Diocese's IT policy and Code of Conduct to confirm that all IT equipment purchased and used for the conduct of Diocesan and ministry activities will be monitored by the Diocesan internet filters. Online safety is such an emerging area of concern for all organisations, so it is vital to be emphasising online safety, taking preventative action and addressing risks immediately,' Dr Stephens said.

View the Diocese of Townsville's audit report on [ACSL's website](#).

ACSL is currently working with Australian Catholic Church entities to reach the goal of having all Catholic dioceses and large religious institutes audited or reviewed against the NCSS by the end of 2025.

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*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.*

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