

National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland, Annual Report 2022/2023

(13/06/2023)

The majority of the reporting period (1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023) for this annual report followed the lifting of restrictions following the COVID 19 pandemic. This allowed the National Board to return to carrying out in person safeguarding reviews and saw an increase in the number of requests for safeguarding advice from 258 to 282. In addition, a total of 19 safeguarding reviews have now been completed with a further 10 under way as this Annual Report went to print (March 2023). This period also saw an increase in the number of allegations made against members of the clergy to 251 compared to 178 the previous year.

“Many of these relate to boarding schools during a time when they were run by religious orders,” said Teresa Devlin, CEO, the National Board. “We have consistently welcomed opportunities that give complainants a voice and a mechanism for sharing what happened to them as children. While we can be fairly confident that existing practice with children is well regulated, our work in safeguarding will not be completed until all of those who have been abused as children within the Church are enabled to come forward.”

Because of the need to comply with data protection legislation, the information has to be anonymised. Consequently the National Board cannot be certain what level of unique complaints have been made as cross-checking is not possible.

During 2022 the National Board also carried out the following tasks:

- (i) a review of the Church’s 2016 child safeguarding policy,
- (ii) work on developing a draft ‘adults at risk’ safeguarding policy,
- (iii) Reviews of safeguarding practice in Dioceses and Religious Congregations

This latter review included a focus on the work of the National Board, as well as of Towards Healing and Towards Peace, and we are advised that a report will be delivered to the IEC and AMRI in the coming months.

As part of carrying out the safeguarding reviews mentioned above, the reviewers who are employed as independent consultants meet children, carers, safeguarding personnel, and, where available, complainants of and respondents to allegations of abuse. This live feedback is of great assistance to the reviewers in assessing compliance of the Church body with the Church’s standards. The National Board recognises the importance of regular audits and reviews, and we are pleased to report that all diocesan reviews will be concluded by August 2023, when we intend to produce a summary of key findings from this audit exercise.

ENDS

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