
What Does a Safeguarding Review Actually Look Like?

Demystifying the process — and why it matters more than you might think

If the phrase 'safeguarding review' makes your leadership team nervous, you are not alone. For many school directors, NGO heads, and church leaders, the words suggest inspectors, clipboards, public findings, and professional embarrassment. The reality is quite different — and understanding what actually happens in a review can transform it from something you dread into something your organisation genuinely benefits from.

ClearPath Safeguarding conducts independent safeguarding readiness reviews for international schools, NGOs, faith-based organisations, and child-care providers across Asia. This article walks through what that process looks like — from first conversation to final report.

It starts with a conversation, not an audit

A safeguarding review is not an inspection and it is not an investigation. It is a structured, evidence-based process designed to give your leadership an honest picture of how safeguarding actually works inside your organisation — not just how it looks on paper.

Before anything begins, we confirm fit. That means checking whether a review is the right intervention for your situation, whether we have the capacity and independence to conduct it, and whether there are any conflicts of interest that would compromise the process. If we are not the right fit, we say so and direct you elsewhere. No engagement starts without both parties being clear on what they are committing to.

The six phases of a ClearPath review

A standard review follows six structured phases. Depending on your package and the size of your organisation, the full process typically takes eight to fourteen weeks.

Phase 1 — Enquiry and scoping (1–2 weeks)

An initial 45–60 minute call with senior leadership. We listen, ask questions, and establish whether the scope is right. You receive a written summary of what we discussed and whether we are proceeding. Nothing is assumed.

Phase 2 — Engagement and intake (2–3 weeks)

Once engaged, we issue a written proposal, sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement (which includes a non-negotiable safeguarding override clause), and send you our Intake Questionnaire — typically 30–60 minutes across your senior leadership and safeguarding lead. We also request a document set: policies, training records, governance materials, and recruitment documentation.

Phase 3 — Document review (2–4 weeks)

Every document is reviewed against our eight-domain Standards Framework, which draws from Keeping Children Safe (KCS) international standards, CIS child protection standards, ITFCP guidance for international schools, and other globally recognised frameworks. We build an evidence log, note gaps and inconsistencies, and form initial hypotheses. We also conduct a red-flag check: if anything in the documents suggests a child may have been harmed and not properly responded to, the safeguarding override is activated regardless of the client relationship.

Phase 4 — Interviews and awareness snapshot (1–2 weeks)

We conduct structured, confidential interviews with six to fifteen people — typically including a board member, the designated safeguarding lead, a senior leader, and a cross-section of frontline staff and volunteers. Responses are anonymised. No one is named in the report without consent.

Alongside the interviews, we run an anonymous staff awareness survey covering policy knowledge, reporting confidence, and culture indicators. This gives us a ground-level view that leadership does not always have access to.

Phase 5 — Analysis and drafting (2–3 weeks)

Evidence from all three streams — documents, interviews, and the awareness snapshot — is triangulated. Each of the eight review domains receives a risk rating: High, Moderate, Low, Strength, or Unable to Assess. The draft report is peer-reviewed internally before it is shared with you.

Phase 6 — Debrief and follow-up (1–2 weeks, plus optional)

Before the final report is issued, we meet with your leadership to walk through the findings. Factual errors can be corrected; risk ratings are not negotiable — they are evidence-based. The final report includes a 90-day priority action plan and a 12-month improvement roadmap. Optional follow-up reviews at 3, 6, or 12 months allow you to track progress over time.

The eight areas we review

Every review covers eight domains, mapped to the relevant international standards — so you know not just what needs improving, but why it matters to the frameworks your funders, accreditors, and partners care about.

- Governance and leadership — Is safeguarding meaningfully owned at board and senior leadership level?
- Safeguarding policy framework — Is your written policy current, compliant, and comprehensive?
- Roles, accountability, and culture — Is there a named, trained safeguarding lead? Does your culture reinforce or undermine child safety?
- Reporting and response pathways — Do staff and children know how to raise a concern, and does the organisation respond properly when one is raised?
- Safer recruitment and staff conduct — Are you applying appropriate checks and behaviour standards before, during, and after hiring?
- Training and staff awareness — Do your people recognise a safeguarding concern? Do they know what to do with it?
- Risk management and specific-setting controls — Are risks specific to your context — residential, digital, off-site, cross-border — identified and managed?
- Monitoring, improvement, and accountability — Are you learning from near-misses and incidents? Is improvement resourced and reviewed?

What you receive at the end

Every full ClearPath review produces a board-ready executive summary, a risk heat map across all eight domains, key findings with evidence and standards mapping, a 90-day priority action plan, and a 12-month improvement roadmap. A confidential leadership debrief is included, along with relevant templates and policy starters matched to the specific gaps found.

The goal of a review is not to produce a perfect report. The goal is to know where you actually stand — so you can do something about it.

Who is a review for?

A safeguarding review is valuable for any organisation working with children that wants confidence its safeguarding is real — not just documented. It is particularly useful for organisations preparing for accreditation, those that have recently grown or restructured, those that have experienced a concern and want to rebuild confidence, and those that simply recognise that good intentions without good systems are not enough.

ClearPath Safeguarding operates across Asia, working with international schools, NGOs, faith-based organisations, and residential care settings. All reviews are independent, evidence-based, and aligned to internationally recognised safeguarding standards.

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