

From: West, Jonathan
Sent: 29/03/2010
To: CCD Email Team; zCRM Email Admin2
Subject: Statutory Enquiries into The Trust of St Benedict's Abbey Ealing

Registered Charity Number 242715

Please pass this on to whoever is responsible for follow-up actions after the two statutory enquiries for which a report was issued last year

<http://www.charity->

commission.gov.uk/our_regulatory_activity/compliance_reports/inquiry_reports/benedicts.aspx

Paragraph 54 of the report mentions that "the trustees have confirmed publicly that an independent review will be carried out to ensure that this situation can not reoccur", and Paragraph 58 states "The Commission has requested a copy of the independent review and will actively monitor the Charity to ensure that this happens."

A summary of the Independent review has now been published on the Abbey's website <http://www.stbenedictsealing.org.uk/Ealing%20Abbey%20-%20Independent%20Review%20Feb%202010%20Summary%20Final.pdf>

I have taken a look and I find it extremely unsatisfactory, for the following reasons:

1. It addresses only the period of the restricted covenant applied to Father David Pearce (Individual A in your report), from the summer of 2006 when he was supposedly "removed from access to any vulnerable beneficiaries within the school and parish" as described in paragraph 15 of the report until January 2008 when he was arrested. It does not address the previous 35 years during which he was apparently able to molest children undetected and unhindered.
2. It addresses only his activities on Abbey premises and not within the school or parish.
3. It addresses only the procedures within the Abbey and improvements to them which are required. It does not address procedures for the school.
4. The document does not provide the names of those who carried out the review.

You may also be interested to note that the summary of the review includes the following conclusion

The Abbey Child Protection Policy is undated, does not identify a review date and is a statement of intent rather than a clear guidance document to identify and support safe practice. The absence of provenance details and review arrangements can allow such documents to be treated in a rather mechanistic manner rather than viewing them as a contribution to active, positive safeguarding behaviour.

This seems to contradict Paragraph 17 of your report "The Commission obtained copies of the Charity's child protection policies and procedures. The Charity was able to demonstrate that these policies had been reviewed by the appropriate authorities and that these were adequate."

I have published a more detailed description and analysis of the review.

The "Independent Review" at Ealing Abbey
<http://scepticalthoughts.blogspot.com/2010/03/independent-review-at-ealing-abbey.html>

In addition, you should know that another teacher at the school has been convicted of sexual offences against boys under the age of 14. His victims were pupils at the

school.

The teacher's name is John Maestri. He left the school suddenly in 1982, it having earlier been announced that he would be taking over as headmaster of the Junior School (a post subsequently occupied by David Pearce).

In 2003, he pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 2 1/2 years imprisonment
In 2005, he pleaded guilty and was given a Community Rehabilitation Order
In 2008/9 he pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 2 years imprisonment suspended for 2 years.

He has been required to sign the Sex Offenders Register for an indefinite period.

On departing from St Benedict's he went on to teach at other schools. I have no information as to whether complaints of abuse have been made against him elsewhere. Given his sudden departure when about to take up a senior post at the school, it is reasonable to speculate that a complaint was made against him, and that in order to keep the matter quiet, he was required to leave, but was given a reference which made no mention of the reasons for his departure.

All these were notifiable events and should have been reported to the DCSF Teacher Misconduct Section, even though they related to historical cases concerning a teacher no longer at the school. However, the most recent inspection report of the Independent Schools Inspectorate makes no mention of it, and merely described Father David Pearce's convictions as "a serious recent incident" in the singular.

I have examined the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy published on the school website

<http://www.stbenedicts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/child-protection-and-safeguarding-policy-sep-09-final.pdf>

It is in my view seriously inadequate. I have raised my concerns with the Abbot and received no reply, and with the Headmaster, who has replied only stating

I do assure you that we do take our child protection procedures most seriously and review our policies regularly and with the guidance of both the Diocese and the Local Authority. The safety and welfare of all the children is of paramount importance to us.

When we are next reviewing our policies, which will be towards the end of this academic year, we shall take your comments into account.

You can see my comments here

http://scepticalthoughts.blogspot.com/2009/11/open-letter-concerning-child-protection_27.html

The definition of "sexual abuse" within the document is particularly inadequate.

I remain concerned that the child protection policies of both the school and the Parish run by the Trust remain seriously inadequate, to the point that if there were another person within the Abbey or on the staff abusing children, the procedures would not be capable of ensuring that the abuse is detected and brought to an end.

I request that you require the trustees to commission a further independent review which;

1. Addresses processes and procedures in the Abbey, the Parish and the school
2. Examines the actions taken in the past in response to complaints of abuse against priests and other members of staff. Since Father David Pearce has been convicted of sexual and indecent assaults over a period of 36 years, the review of historical cases should go back at least that far. Perhaps 40 years is an appropriate cutoff point.
3. Defines robust safeguarding procedures which are regularly subject to external review and audit.

Regards
Jonathan West