

May 8, 2010

Sex abuse priest has his jail sentence reduced

David Brown and Sean O'Neill

A priest at the centre of allegations that the Catholic Church failed to prevent him continuing to abuse schoolboys despite repeated complaints had his jail sentence cut yesterday.

Father David Pearce had his eight-year sentence reduced to five years after the Court of Appeal ruled that the judge had been too harsh when sentencing him last year.

The Benedictine monk and former headmaster at the prestigious St Benedict's School in Ealing, West London, admitted abusing five boys between 1972 and 2007.

Pearce, 68, started to abuse the final boy after being forbidden by the church authorities from having contact with children at Ealing Abbey when he was ordered to pay £43,000 compensation to a previous victim.

Sir Christopher Holland, sitting with Mr Justice David Clarke, said that the indecent and sexual assaults were "moderate", consisting of "genital groping whenever the opportunity presented itself combined with stolen kisses".

He said that the sentencing judge was wrong to elevate the breach of trust committed by Pearce because he was a teacher "to the level of a crime".

Anthony Nelson, Pearce's solicitor, said after the hearing: "It had always been the case that the nature of the offences were all the lower end [of seriousness]. The new sentence properly reflects that and also the great deal of good work this man has done over a 30-year period as demonstrated by the written character references of past pupils."