

The Bishop Bell CE Mathematics & Computing Specialist School
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STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

The Right Rev John Hind BA
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Bishop John

I am writing following our recent discussion, as we agreed, in order to explain my response to the CRB check information returned on Canon Gordon Rideout, our Chair of Governors at The Bishop Bell CE Mathematics & Computing Specialist School. I hope that the following helps.

Though not required under safeguarding regulations, we felt it would be appropriate to undertake CRB checks on all our governors as they do come into contact with pupils, albeit in a limited capacity and always with other adults, usually members of staff, present. In May 2010, the CRB check returned an odd response that information was held but could not be revealed except on the express agreement of the Chief Constable of Sussex. At that time there was no indication about the exact nature of the information.

A few weeks later, I received clarification about the information which was held. It consisted of two incidents:

1. **November 1972, an army court-martial** where allegations were heard about alleged incidents relating to a confirmation class. The outcome of the court-martial was full and honourable acquittal. An honourable acquittal means, not that insufficient evidence was found to convict, but that the court is fully convinced of the absolute innocence of the person on trial and that there is no blot on his record.
2. **In 2002, allegations** were made by a woman relating to work he did in a Barnardo's home between 1962 and 1965. Following initial investigations, police decided there was insufficient evidence to support pursuing the matter further.

In addition to conversations with Gordon Rideout himself, I also discussed this CRB information with the relevant personnel officers at East Sussex Local Authority, with Mike Wilson, the Diocesan Director of Education, with my Head of School, John Ross, and with the Vice-Chair of Governors at Bishop Bell School. Following those discussions, I made the decision, with the full support of my Vice-Chair of Governors and my Head of School, and having taken appropriate advice, that we would take no further action with regard to the CRB allegations. However, we did agree to ensure that we reminded all governors of safeguarding protocols when making visits to school or dealing with pupils.

The reasons for that decision were:

1. A court-martial which scrutinised all the evidence at the time and was in the strongest possible position to judge whether any impropriety had even possibly taken place decided to fully and honourably acquit him. This decision is very significant as it is not an acquittal based on lack of evidence, but, on the contrary, a judgement that there is sufficient evidence such that the court-martial is convinced of the absolute and full innocence of the defendant. I would question how anyone nearly forty years later can decide that the court-martial may have made a mistake and upon what evidence they could do that?
2. That leaves the 2002 allegations, made forty years afterwards about alleged impropriety when he was involved in a Barnardo's home. As headteacher, I have had experience of a member of staff against whom allegations were made that impropriety had occurred many years previously and in a former job. Even though only one person made the allegations, they were about events many years previous and they were very tenuous, the member of staff was questioned by the police, before they decided he had no case to answer. He continued to work as a teacher with the full knowledge and agreement of East Sussex County Council Personnel Department. I know that the police take these matters very seriously and 2002 was the year of the Soham murders when matters of child protection were especially carefully investigated. The police will have made every effort to find other people from the Barnardo's home in question and, if Gordon Rideout had done anything untoward, it would be surprising if other evidence was not found. It is significant that the allegations made by this woman were not pursued by the police.
3. In 2009, a cross-party Commons Schools Select Committee warned that the "vast majority" of complaints made against school staff lacked foundation. In a report it published, the committee quoted a Government study that suggested more than 4,000 complaints were made against teachers and school support staff in 2006/7, but noted that only one-in-20 allegations ever leads to a criminal conviction. Barry Sheerman, the committee's chairman, said: "Allegations proven to be true must be punished. But the vast majority of complaints made against school staff have little or no foundation. My committee heard shocking evidence about the treatment of accused staff and the devastating impact unfounded allegations can have on those involved, which can ruin careers and can come at a significant physical, mental and financial cost." Considering those figures, when faced with a court-martial which completely exonerated Gordon Rideout and one person making allegations forty years after the event, which the police failed find anyone to support, I must question whether we are dealing with one of the vast majority of false allegations here and, potentially, an innocent person whose life and ministry is being devastated by such allegations.
4. Both incidents are around forty years ago. Despite Gordon's continued work involving children since 1972, over that thirty-eight years there have been no further allegations made at all.
5. I have known him as a governor at the school for nearly fifteen years and, during that period, I have never ever had any reason to question him in that role and in relation to his behaviour with children.

I hope that this explains my decision and is of some use in informing your own deliberations.

Yours sincerely

T S Boatwright
Executive Headteacher