
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INDEPENDENT REVIEW

EVENTS AT ST AMBROSE SCHOOL

JUNE 2016

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The independent reviewer was contacted in October 2014 as a review had been requested by a statutory multi-disciplinary Safeguarding Strategy Group chaired by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) of Trafford MBC Children and Young People's Service. The reviewer is a highly experienced investigator, mainly in high-profile public sector cases. Her experience includes investigations for the NHS in both Scotland and England, the Office of the Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman, the Independent Police Complaints Commission, the Commission for Social Care Inspection, Standards for England, the European Patents Office and a number of other public authorities, as well as conducting historical abuse investigations within the Catholic Church. She is a Conduct Panel Member for the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) Tribunal Service, is contracted to carry out Domestic Homicide Reviews reporting to the Home Office and is an academic with the Open University, teaching health, law and social care. She has maintained her professional registration as a social worker; she is also a qualified family therapist with a background in working with children and families and has been an inspector for Children's Services.

1.2. The remit was to review the situation following the conviction and imprisonment of Alan Morris, a former Deputy Head at St Ambrose College. Alan Morris was convicted in 2014 following an extensive police investigation into historic sexual and physical abuse of a large number of pupils at the College, carried out between 1972 and 1990. Alan Morris was convicted of nineteen of the twenty charges brought against him and received a nine year custodial sentence. There was a total of 47 indictments with 27 laid on file and since his conviction, the Police were contacted by further complainants alleging abuse by Alan Morris.

1.3. Following publicity of the case, a complaint was made to Greater Manchester Police by a former pupil, who had concerns about his nephew who attended the College. The complainant alleged that two current teachers at St Ambrose College were contemporaries of Alan Morris and therefore must have been aware

of safeguarding issues and failed to report them. The complainant felt this inaction may pose a risk to current pupils at the school.

1.4. At a Strategy meeting on 24 September 2014, it was agreed that the two teachers were to be suspended pending an independent review; the allegation was insufficient to trigger a Police investigation but there was the possibility of further Police involvement depending upon the outcome of the review.

1.5. The Independent Reviewer was invited to a briefing meeting on 3 November 2014 at the Safeguarding Offices in Salford to commence the process and Terms of Reference were agreed. As well as investigations into the alleged complicity of the two suspended teachers, a parallel aim within the remit involved a consideration of concerns about recruitment, due diligence and the formation of Alan Morris as a Deacon in the Diocese of Shrewsbury in 1992 as well as any other learning points for the Christian Brothers, the Diocese, St Ambrose College and other agencies.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. St Ambrose College in Hale Barnes, Altrincham, in the Diocese of Shrewsbury, was opened as an independent Catholic school by the Christian Brothers in 1946. The parish of Holy Angels was constituted in 1958 and the construction of the Holy Angels Church, alongside a new school building, began on the site. The school was recognised as an independent grammar school by the Ministry of Education in 1963 which allowed pupils who passed the eleven-plus examination to have their fees paid by their local education authorities.

2.2. A Christian Brother was appointed as Headmaster in 1984. In 1989 Alan Morris, who had been at the school since 1972 and had been promoted to Head of Chemistry and then Senior Master, was promoted to the post of Deputy Headmaster. In early 1989 Alan Morris applied to begin training as a Deacon and was accepted on 7 June 1989.

2.3. In 1991, upon the retirement of the Brother Headteacher, the Christian Brothers opted to appoint a lay Headteacher in line with common practice at other Christian Brothers schools.

2.4. Alan Morris was admitted to the Ministry by the Bishop of Shrewsbury on 12 April 1991 and admitted to the Order of the Permanent Diaconate (ordained) on 1 September 1992 in a ceremony at Holy Angels Church, Hales Barns; he remained a teacher at St Ambrose but took early retirement from the school on 31 August 1996. He remained in Ministry as Deacon at Holy Angels Church, on the same site.

2.5. In 1998 St Ambrose College was transferred to the Department for Education and came under local authority control; a new Board of Governors was established. In 2000 a new lay Head was appointed. The College now has Academy status and is run by the St Ambrose College Edmund Rice Academy Trust. There are no longer any Christian Brother teachers at St Ambrose.

2.6. On 25 October 2012, allegations of historical sexual and physical abuse by Alan Morris were made to the parish Priest at Holy Angels Church by a former pupil. Alan Morris was arrested on 9 November 2012 and on 12 November he was withdrawn from active Ministry. The trial of Alan Morris began on 1 July 2014; on 18 July 2014 he was found guilty of 19 counts of indecent assault on ten children and one count of inciting a child to commit an act of gross indecency. The offences took place between 1972 and 1990 during the time Alan Morris taught at St Ambrose College. Alan Morris was sentenced to nine years imprisonment on 28 August 2014 and his name was entered on the Sex Offenders Register.

2.7. On 14 September 2014, a former pupil made a statement to the Police in which he alleged that two current teachers at St Ambrose were aware of the abuse perpetrated by Alan Morris; following a Strategy meeting on 24 September 2014, both teachers were suspended. It was agreed an independent review would be commissioned.

3. EVIDENCE

3.0. This review has not been easy to conduct as is often the case with historic abuse cases; witnesses are deceased, documentation can be scant or has been destroyed, legislation and policy has changed and memory of events up to forty years ago is usually dimmed or less precise than it would be for more recent events.

EVIDENCE WITH REGARD TO ALAN MORRIS, HIS ORDINATION AND SUBSEQUENT ALLEGATIONS

3.1. The evidence shows that Alan Morris applied to train as a Deacon in the early part of 1989 and was accepted with good references from the Church. It is not clear whether any references were sought from St Ambrose College at this time; if they had been, it is thought they would have confirmed Alan Morris' status in school as a good teacher who had been promoted more than once during his tenure.

3.2. In November 1989, a complaint from a parent about several alleged episodes of corporal punishment by Alan Morris resulted in a letter of warning from the Chair of the Governors. There is no record of a formal disciplinary hearing but there is a copy of a letter to Alan Morris. It is also recorded that Alan Morris promised never to cane any boys forthwith; he has since denied that he administered any corporal punishment after 1987 when it was abolished.

3.3. Although a conclusion might be drawn that the allegation of some eleven episodes of corporal punishment on the same pupil over a period of time was not an 'isolated incident' and his use of 'verbal harassment' may have been somewhat minimised, it must be stated that the St Ambrose Governors acted to prevent a repetition of any breaches or similar conduct by Alan Morris. The Governors did not ignore his behaviour and his breaches were taken seriously and recorded. Whether or not this information should have been shared with those responsible for his education as a Deacon is questionable. There was no evidence to suggest that his quest to become a Deacon would be compromised.

In any event, disciplinary information would normally remain confidential between the employer and the party concerned, unless there is good reason for it to be shared more widely. In this case, the warning letter pre-dated any requirements to notify other agencies, even in the unlikely event that Alan Morris' known breach of corporal punishment regulations would be defined as constituting child abuse.

3.4. Alan Morris was arrested and interviewed by the Police in 2001 and it is recorded that Shrewsbury Diocese was aware of the arrest; it is not known whether the local authority was notified. The Police took no further action and a note from the Diocese dated July 2001 stated that 'this matter has resolved itself.'

3.5. On 26 April 2002, the Diocese of Shrewsbury, received a telephone call from a former pupil in connection with the earlier Police investigation into allegations about Alan Morris. It was stated that a group of former pupils felt unable to come forward due to the way the Police investigation in 2001 had been conducted.

3.6. It seems there was insufficient evidence in 2002 to suggest that Alan Morris should be removed from his Ministry, given that the Diocese was unaware of the complaint in school as far back as 1989. It is also unclear how much of an inference regarding sexual abuse could have been drawn in 2002; there was certainly no indication of the extent of the historical abuse at St Ambrose. With the benefit of hindsight, the only flaw may have been that Alan Morris had ongoing access to children and young people in his parish and to pupils who attended services at Holy Angels, adjacent to St Ambrose. There is no evidence that he abused children and young people after he retired from St Ambrose College in 1996 or even after his ordination in 1992. It is thought unlikely that he would stop, given what is known about the nature of paedophilia, but it is possible that his ordination may have been a turning point in his conduct, or he found other means of sexual gratification. It may be also be significant that the last Christian Brother Head left his post at St Ambrose in 1991 to be replaced by a lay Head.

3.7. In 2006, when further anonymous information was brought to light, it may have been possible for the Diocese to make a decision to restrict Alan Morris' access and activities with children and young people. There may well have been discussions in professional supervision sessions, or with the Bishop, which remain confidential. However, the allegations were once again historical and the referrer wished to remain anonymous. The process of the risk assessment of Alan Morris is not documented and this may be something for consideration in future cases. It is not thought that Alan Morris was told of the allegations in 2006 and it is not known whether the local authority was informed.

3.8. The school's initial response was to show some concern for Alan Morris and assess that no one was at risk other than Alan Morris; such an assessment was not in the gift of the school. Due to the anonymity element of the referral, there also seemed to be a suggestion of the school gatekeeping information, rather than following procedures to the letter. However, the Bishop of Shrewsbury seemed to be very much in favour of contact with the Safeguarding Co-ordinator and advised the Head accordingly. When allegations were made in 2012, the Diocese acted swiftly to remove Alan Morris from his Ministry and pass on relevant information to agencies and parishioners.

3.9. The concerns expressed by former pupils, and relatives of pupils, raise the suggestion that teachers, the parish and the wider community were aware of rumours about Alan Morris; this evidence remains more nebulous. Those parties who were abused by Alan Morris were aware of their own experiences and made their own decisions about whether or not to continue their worship at Holy Angels or remain part of the Catholic Church. On the other hand, many pupils felt they had experienced a good education at St Ambrose, had high regard for Alan Morris and were not abused by him. Those who were victims, who inevitably have experienced a lack of trust in authority and the Catholic faith, may always be convinced that there was some sort of cover-up or conspiracy with regard to the activities of Alan Morris.

3.10. The concerns of the victims who have lived with the knowledge and experience of Alan Morris' offending for a number of years is completely

understood by the reviewer. However, no concrete evidence has been found to support the claims that leaders in the Catholic Church, either within Shrewsbury Diocese, within the Congregation of Christian Brothers, or those who were training Alan Morris as a Deacon, were aware of the extent of the abuse by Alan Morris over a period of years or of its sexual nature. The Judge in the Alan Morris trial shared his own opinions about why he felt the offending had remained a long-standing secret since the 1990s:

'You were confident that... boys coming home and moaning about being punished, wouldn't be believed against the word of a teacher or a Christian Brother and the boys described how their parents, being devout Catholics in many instances, felt that the staff could do no wrong. It is also clear that you calculated that by becoming the Head of Discipline that you had the respect of the Head Teacher. You yourself had limited respect for the Governors and you really were confident that you could act as you wanted; above the law..... Several of the [witnesses] were close to tears as they described what had happened to them. The investigation and the necessity to give evidence, had unlocked painful memories. It was clear that they were telling the truth.'

3.11. There is documentary evidence to show that as early as 1972, the Christian Brothers took appropriate steps to remove suspected offenders from teaching in their own establishments or in any others. Likewise, documents confirm that St Ambrose College took the correct steps to notify the Department of Education in other cases of teacher misconduct.

3.12. It is clear from the documented evidence that St Ambrose College Governors took action in 1989 when they became aware of issues and did not condone abusive behaviour. Little is known about the follow up to such cases, as this would not have been recorded in the Governor's minutes.

3.13. Shrewsbury Diocese removed Alan Morris from his Ministry as soon as allegations were made in 2012.

3.14. Nevertheless, there is a tenuous thread running through the evidence that the last Christian Brother Head until 1991, now deceased, may have been unwilling, unable, or chose not to challenge Alan Morris about his conduct. In terms of the role of the Christian Brother Head, there is a suggestion in Alan Morris' evidence in court that he was 'coached' by this Head prior to responding to the Governors in 1989; this is unsubstantiated and it is known that Alan Morris' evidence has been discredited. There is no documentary evidence of other complaints which were allegedly made by pupils or parents to the Head about over-use of chastisement or over-closeness; equally there is no reason to disbelieve pupils who gave testimony of this nature on oath during the court case.

3.15. It remains unknown whether the last Christian Brother Head was aware of more than one complaint against Alan Morris, or failed to act or to challenge his conduct as suggested by Alan Morris during his trial. If that was indeed the case, it can be seen as a possibility that pupils from this era might have developed the notion of a 'cover up'. If this Head had indeed been aware of the disquiet around Alan Morris, there is no evidence to suggest that he was aware of the extent or the sexual nature of the abuse; he may have been aware that Alan Morris was a strict disciplinarian, perhaps too strict and too fond of meting out punishment, but this was the role to which he had been personally responsible for promoting him. This Head was also described as 'a strong disciplinarian'. There is no evidence that Alan Morris' conduct was more generally known by the Congregation of Christian Brothers. It is known and documented that by 1996, Alan Morris had received a warning from the Provincial about maligning the school and his retirement was being actively pursued.

THE ALLEGATIONS AGAINST TWO TEACHERS

3.16. The referrer of the allegations chose not to expand upon his evidence when invited for interview by the reviewer. The long-awaited transcripts of Alan Morris' evidence in court shed no light on his relationship with one named teacher, and the second named teacher was not mentioned. Both teachers denied any knowledge of sexual abuse by Alan Morris and claimed to be shocked

by the revelations which led to his conviction. The evidence from current teachers who were contemporaries of Alan Morris or pupils during his period as a teacher supported this lack of knowledge; everyone interviewed denied any knowledge of corporal punishment after 1987 and no one had witnessed corporal punishment being administered after this date. There is no evidence to suggest that the two named teachers had any further information to which other teachers were not privy. Both teachers have since had their suspensions lifted.

3.17. The concerns were initially raised by a pupil who claims to be a victim. It is understood by the reviewer that the complainant did not give evidence in court and approached the Police only after publicity which reported details. The complainant may have been concerned for his nephew remaining at a school where he perceived teachers must have been complicit or, at a minimum, failed to protect.

3.18. It seems apparent that the group of victims who have known about the abuse for the many intervening years have had difficulty in coming to terms with the fact that other staff were unaware of Alan Morris' sexual abuse. There may well have been rumours among certain pupils, but it is known that others highly valued their education and the support they received, from Alan Morris in particular. To what extent comments about Alan Morris' sexuality were intermingled with allusions to sexual abuse is also not known, and may have formed part of the rugby pitch or changing room 'banter' back in the 1980s. There is evidence that Governors of the school acted appropriately and responsibly when faced with allegations of misconduct by staff. There is no evidence to suggest knowledge by any teachers of abuse by Alan Morris or any complicity in his crimes.

4. FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

4.1. In terms of evidence, it must be concluded that Shrewsbury Diocese, the Congregation of Christian Brothers and the Governors of St Ambrose College appear to have acted appropriately to information known at any given time.

4.2. It is known from documentary evidence that the Christian Brothers had a track record of removing those Brothers who committed misconduct and took steps to ensure they were unable to work in other schools or with children.

4.3. The Governors of St Ambrose College acted appropriately on information gained about corporal punishment through a complaint in 1989 and took action against Alan Morris to prevent a recurrence.

4.4. The Provincial of the Christian Brothers issued a warning to Alan Morris in 1996 prior to his retirement, following allegations that he was maligning the College and its staff.

4.5. Shrewsbury Diocese appropriately followed up allegations in 2001, 2002 and later in 2006. The Diocese acted swiftly in 2012 to remove Alan Morris from his Ministry.

4.6. This review has found absolutely no evidence of a 'cover up' by Shrewsbury Diocese, the Congregation of Christian Brothers or the Governors of St Ambrose College, either during the time that Alan Morris taught at the school or during his Ministry as a Deacon until 2012.

4.7. There is no evidence to suggest that two named teachers about whom allegations were made in 2014 were in a better position than any other teachers to be cognisant of Alan Morris' misconduct, or the extent of it. They have been reinstated as teachers.

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

4.8. The following points are offered in the spirit of lessons for the future. It is much easier, with the benefit of hindsight and knowledge of the outcome of the trial, to reflect on what might have been better practice at any given time.

4.9. It is unfortunate that there is an unsubstantiated element of doubt cast over the individual role of the last Christian Brother Head, now deceased, who has not had a voice in this review. If it was indeed the case that he failed to act upon information about over-chastisement, and this remains an unknown, the truth of the matter is unlikely to be revealed at a later date. It is thought to be most unlikely that he knew about the sexual abuse perpetrated by Alan Morris. There is no evidence that he shared any information about Alan Morris with the Governors, the Congregation of Christian Brothers or the Diocese. Although doubts were raised by Alan Morris in court, the truth of the matter is unknown; if the Head was acting as a gatekeeper of information, this might have given rise to the impressions felt by some former pupils of a 'cover-up'.

4.10. The arrest of Alan Morris in 2001 was known to the Shrewsbury Diocese and St Ambrose College. It is felt that in 2006, St Ambrose College should have dealt with allegations about Alan Morris more swiftly and decisively under the statutory procedures, even though it is recognised that the allegations were anonymous and of a historic nature. It is understood that any omissions may have been in the spirit of a legitimate duty of care for the accused individual prior to allegations being substantiated; it is also accepted there was little perceived likelihood of immediate risk, but it must be stated that misplaced empathy has no place in allegations of abuse. The Head's immediate reaction appears to have been concerned with protecting Alan Morris and possibly the reputation of the school. The requirement is that such information needs to be shared immediately, not least to avoid later repercussions. Any attempts to shield the school from negative publicity are ill-advised and invariably lead to greater feelings of anger when the full truth finally emerges. The *'Report of the Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry'* (2013, HMSO) by Sir Robert Francis QC highlights the need for a duty of candour.

4.11. More latterly, and with the benefit of reflecting upon the feelings of anger, hurt and betrayal of the victims about their experiences in school at the hands of Alan Morris, it is thought that St Ambrose College may have been better served to empathise more closely with the strong emotions of former pupils. The perception that the current regime has distanced itself from their early school experiences has possibly increased negative feelings about the College rather than appeased them; it is not known whether this has been an influence on the allegations about potential complicity of current staff.

4.12. Again, with hindsight, the assessment of ongoing risk when allegations of abuse have been made would benefit from strengthening. Following the *Report of the Independent Inquiry into Multiple Abuse in nursery classes in Newcastle upon Tyne* (Hunt, 1994), it is known that abuses can occur in the presence of other adults without their knowledge. Therefore, rather than considering risk to occur in only unsupervised or sole contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults, all forms of contact within institutions and within the wider community need to be assessed. It would be helpful to record the process of how such assessments are reached and outline the range of risk factors involved. The perceptions of the public also need consideration. The type of assessment outlined in a Covenant of Care agreement would be appropriate.

4.13. The National Catholic Safeguarding Commission published its Annual Report on 30 July 2015 as the writing of the draft review report was nearing completion. A strong focus was the recognition of the hurt felt by victims of abuse in the Church, as expressed in Pope Francis' letter to all presidents of Bishops Conferences and Superiors of Religious Orders in February 2015:

'The Church has the duty to express the compassion....towards those who have suffered abuse....which is why dioceses and religious orders should set up pastoral care....programmes. Priests and leaders of religious communities should be available to meet victims and their loved ones; such meetings are valuable opportunities for listening to those who have greatly suffered and for asking their forgiveness.'

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. It is thought by the reviewer that very little new information has come to light in this process; however, the documentary evidence from several sources and other parts of the jigsaw have been pieced together to show a full timeline of events. It is hoped that by presenting all of the available evidence in a report makes that information more readily accessible and coherent. Recommendations are made in the spirit of organisational learning and all agencies are asked to take serious note of the following recommendations.

5.2. The Police requested access from the reviewer to archived information held by Hill Dickinson on behalf of the Christian Brothers Congregation; the reviewer was unable to share such information due to a strict confidentiality agreement. It is recommended that the Christian Brothers agree to make all available information accessible to the Police; this would demonstrate their stated commitment towards ongoing transparency and co-operation.

5.3. Further thought needs to be given to the drafting and scope of Terms of Reference for similar historical investigations; it is recognised that each case will be different. Much more thought needs to be given to the pain, anger and suspicion of victims and their emotions when contacted by an independent reviewer. It would be helpful if all available information was shared at the outset and approaches made by statutory agencies in the first instance.

5.4. Aside from the usual recruitment checks and ongoing appraisals, when allegations are made about a person in a position of trust, there needs to be further consideration of how any access or contact with children, young and vulnerable people is defined and risk assessed. This evaluation process should be documented and must be transparent. Any potential access or contact with children and vulnerable people must be considered and risk assessed, even where this is supervised access, and in cases where the accused person does not have sole access to vulnerable people.

5.5. This report has highlighted the need for each agency to share all available information in an ongoing way; it is often only the cumulative effect of information which allows patterns of behaviour to be recognised. This aspect of inter-agency sharing cannot be emphasised too strongly; it is known from the various public inquiries into safeguarding that the same mistakes of poor communication have been repeated time and time again. For this reason, safeguarding training for agencies, including schools, should incorporate the findings and recommendations from public inquiries such as the Victoria Climbié Inquiry (Lord Laming 2003, HMSO), the Peter Connelly ('Baby P') report (Lord Laming 2009, HMSO), the Serious Case Review into the death of Daniel Pelka (2013) and literature to reinforce the message that sharing concerns is crucial; schools are often at the forefront. McAlinden's (2012) work on institutional grooming is also of high relevance.

5.6. As has also been seen time and time again, attempts at opaqueness in order to preserve reputations have a habit of serving to increase public indignation when the full detail of events is invariably revealed. In this respect, the 'Duty of Candour' recommended in the Francis Report (2013) for health professionals, now enshrined in the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014: Regulation 20, needs to be embraced by a much wider pool of professionals. Thought should be given to how those involved in safeguarding can be enabled to apply the principle of candour in contacts with other agencies. The National Catholic Safeguarding Commission may have a role in ensuring agreement of this principle across Dioceses. The Congregation of Christian Brothers may wish to consider how a duty of candour can be applied across its schools.

5.7. In addition, it is recommended that meaningful and sincere apologies are issued as early as possible when mistakes are detected, even in cases where current staff feel no responsibility for historical mistakes. The impact upon alumni of attempts at distancing the current regime from the past cannot be underestimated; this is especially true in situations such as St Ambrose where the on-site parish church still plays a major part in the lives of some former pupils.

5.8. It is felt that further consideration needs to be given to the victims of abuse at the College. To date, it appears that not all victims may have enjoyed the full recognition they deserve; it can be seen from the Alan Morris case that these barriers only serve to increase a lifelong sense of betrayal.

5.9. There is a need within all involved agencies for a robust and candid strategy for dealing with media inquiries if any summary of the findings is made public.

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