



2012/0028110POSoS

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 0002288 ministers@education.gsi.gov.uk

Rt Hon Malcolm Bruce MP
House of Commons
LONDON
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RECEIVED 30 MAY 2012

Your Ref: JP/3295/O'Brien

25th May 2012

Dr Michael

Thank you for your letter of 8 May enclosing correspondence from your constituent, Mr P O'Brien, of 12 Elgie Crescent, Balmedie, Aberdeen, AB23 8WH, about the *Stop Church Child Abuse* campaign.

I am aware of the campaign's call for a public inquiry into child abuse by adults working at institutions run by the Catholic Church and the Church of England. Campaigners would like to see mandatory reporting of allegations of child abuse, an independent statutory body to receive reports of abuse, and safeguarding procedures within the churches to be monitored and reviewed.

This is a complex subject which Mr O'Brien is clearly concerned about. I can assure you that the safeguarding of children remains a top priority for the Government. No child should ever have to tolerate abuse from an adult. I am not, however, convinced of the need for a public inquiry, as the key issues are already being addressed by reforms we have underway.

We are improving disclosure and barring arrangements that prevent unsuitable adults working with children. Any organisation (for example a school run by a church) with individuals who look after children has clear statutory duties with criminal penalties for non-compliance. For example, any organisation that has removed a person from work, due to the risk of harm they posed to children, or would have posed had they not left first, must refer that person to the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). The ISA will then consider barring that individual from working with children. It is an offence to fail, without good reason, to make such a referral.

It is also an offence for an organisation to allow knowingly a barred person to

work with children. Schools and a range of other bodies that are regulated by my Department also have a duty to check that a new entrant is not barred. Mr O'Brien may be interested to know that from 2013, this duty will apply for any organisation that arranges for an adult to work with children.

In addition, if a barred person continues to work with children, they too are committing an offence. Where any member of the public has evidence that an adult poses a risk of harm through work with children, they should inform their local authority children's services department or the police.

As part of the work to implement the recommendations made by Professor Eileen Munro in her review of child protection, we are committed to strengthening the role of statutory Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs). LSCBs coordinate the effectiveness of organisations' safeguarding activity, and they should also secure the involvement of faith groups in their arrangements.

In the tragic event that a child is seriously harmed and there is cause for concern about how local professionals and services involved have worked together, then the LSCB will carry out a Serious Case Review (SCR). We are developing a new approach to SCRs, that will allow professionals to look at what they did in a case and why. This Government has also committed to the publication of SCR overview reports. The emphasis will be on ensuring SCRs have a strong impact, leading to sustained improvements.

In November 2011, we published a national *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan*. This sets out actions for Government and other organisations, national and local, to protect children from this form of abuse. The Office of the Children's Commissioner in 2011 also launched an in-depth inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups. Therefore, we believe that we are already taking forward action that will broadly meet the outcomes that the campaign is seeking from an inquiry.

With regard to investigations by the churches, there have been investigations in the past, in relation to the Catholic Church, which Mr O'Brien may be aware of. These include the 2001 Nolan review and the 2006 Cumberlege Commission which involved members from outside the Catholic Church. There have been developments following these reviews, such as the setting up of the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission and the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service in 2008.

The Church of England carried out a review of its files between 2008 and 2009, and included the use of independent reviewers to consider the outcomes of the Church's handling of past concerns about child protection. This process led to further formal action and referrals to statutory agencies in a number of cases. Since that review the Church of England has published a revised version of *Protecting All God's Children*, its policy for safeguarding children.

These efforts do not, of course, compensate in any way for the appalling abuse suffered by the victims. Tragically, we cannot undo the damage of the past. We can, however, encourage all organisations working with children to continue to

improve their practices to ensure that today's children are kept as safe as they can be.

Thank you again for writing to me on this important matter.

With every good wish,

Mike



MICHAEL GOVE



2012/0030350POTL

Tim Loughton MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Gloria De Piero MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Your ref: FB/BURG01003/0112499

12 June 2012

Dear Gloria,

Thank you for your letter of 23 May, addressed to the Secretary of State, enclosing correspondence from your constituent, Mr D Burgin of 2 Coniston Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, NG17 7PH, about the *Stop Church Child Abuse* campaign. I am replying as the minister responsible for safeguarding policy.

I am aware of the campaign's call for a public inquiry into child abuse by adults working at institutions run by the Catholic Church and the Church of England. Campaigners would like to see mandatory reporting of allegations of child abuse, an independent statutory body to receive reports of abuse, and safeguarding procedures within the churches to be monitored and reviewed.

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Thank you again for writing to me on this important matter.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature consisting of a stylized 'L' with a horizontal bar extending to the right, and a long, thin horizontal line underneath it.

TIM LOUGHTON MP