

It Can and Does Happen: The Independent Inquiry into Sexual Abuse

On the 20th October 2022 the [Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#) published its report. The report offers findings on the failings of both state and non-state institutions to protect children and young people from sexual abuse and exploitation. The inquiry looked at a broad range of institutions including religious organisations, parliament, migration, youth offending and custodial institutions – finding that all the organisations had failed in their duty to protect children.

The internet was also investigated, showing the wide-spread sharing of indecent images and use of the internet to groom and sexually exploit children.

The inquiry held 325 days of public hearings, evidence from 725 witnesses and the publication of 61 reports. The result is a horrific picture of a global, as well as national, sexual abuse crisis.

The numbers of children at risk of or known to have been sexually abused is astounding – estimates according to the inquiry state that 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 20 boys are sexually abused before the age of 16. The Office of National statistics reinforces these numbers, estimating that over 3.1 million adults were sexually abused or exploited before the age of 16 in England and Wales. Alongside the statistics, which we can safely assume are an underrepresentation of the true picture, there is also evidence of a lack of priority by child services, institutions protecting reputations and, horrifyingly, cover ups of long-term sexual abuse and exploitation.

The report shows that the message that we've been trying to deliver is very much true – it **can** and **does** happen here! Sexual abuse can and does happen everywhere and we cannot simply ignore this and sweep the victims of this abuse under the carpet.

Whilst the picture these 61 reports have revealed is an ugly one, it does also provide some stringent and strong recommendations – many of which will impact on the way we work in education. Some are highlighted below:

Prioritising our children and their protection

It is recommended that an Authority for Child Protection be created in both England and Wales – with powers to inspect institutions, improve practices across the country and advise the government on how to improve child protection procedures.

Make more frequent use of the barred list & improving compliance

This recommendation would simply allow employers or organisations to more frequently check the Disclosure and Barring Service. It is also recommended that this should apply to **all** staff, including those who are supervised.

It is also essential that the reporting systems and arrangements for reporting breaches are clear and the Disclosure and Barring Service as well as UK police, should

improve compliance with reporting breaches. This is also extended to UK residents when applying to work or volunteer with children abroad.

Mandatory Duty to Report

The English and Welsh Governments, the report states, should introduce 'Mandated Reporting' – people who work with children would be known as 'Mandated Reporters' and would very much include teachers, staff working in education and volunteers.

This would make it a UK law that all suspected (i.e. there are signs and indicators of abuse) or known sexual abuse or exploitation of children **must** be reported, as well as if a child or abuser discloses abuse and if a 'Mandated Reporter' witnesses the sexual abuse of a child.

The final report made public on 20th October 2022 also calls for it to be a crime to fail to report in certain circumstances.

Specialist therapeutic support for Victims

The English and Welsh government should also guarantee support for the victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation. This should be offered by accredited specialists and should apply to all parts of England and Wales.

Above are just some of the recommendations taken from the 61 reports – what is clear is that we need to continue to safeguard children, to constantly review and assess practice and training to ensure that we are effectively protecting children from harm and abuse. Staff should continue to be aware of the signs and indicators of any form of abuse and keep it in our minds that 'it can happen here'!

Blog written by Alyson Knowles

28 October 2022