

# Sex Abuse Timeline

In October, 2012 the media carried a story that parents of a western suburbs public school had reported that a paedophile had been running their school's OSHC and had raped a young girl in 2010 and that it had been kept secret from the school parent community.

In the weeks and months that followed, SAASSO witnessed an outpouring of anger from parents, unprecedented in the last decade.

In response to all those questions of how, when and why, here is the timeline, so far.

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**October 30:** Education Minister Grace Portolesi confirms the crime and tells parliament it was kept from parents on advice from police.

SAPOL denies Portolesi's claim. Police say they told the school's principal to consult with the education department to decide how to advise the school community.

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**October 31:** Ms. Portolesi denies misleading parliament. Portolesi states she had no knowledge of any other cases where parents weren't told. Also states that department policy does not require parents be told.

Ms. Portolesi admits she knew of rape in March 2012.

It's revealed that following parent complaints, the State Ombudsman is investigating the case.

Premier Weatherill says parents should be told of any allegations.

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**November 1:** Parents reveal they were told the OSHC Director had "quit because of ill-health".

Professor Freda Briggs reveals the school's Governing Council had approached her a year earlier because they were unhappy parents hadn't been told. "They claimed that an administrator from the department had banned them from telling other parents...."

Ms. Portolesi says she doesn't know if the department pressured the school to keep the abuse secret.

*Professor Briggs says it's not the first time she's heard of sexual abuse being kept secret.*

SAASSO tells *The Advertiser* policies allowing for sexual abuse to be kept secret should change.

SAPOL agrees parents have right to know if allegations or charges are levelled against a teacher or school staff.

Jay Weatherill, education minister when rape occurred, claims he only found out two days ago.

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**November 2:** Parents formally told about sexual assault in their school.

Former justice Bruce DeBelle appointed to investigate.

Weatherill says, "all critical incidents are always notified to the Minister", but not this one.

Education department says it did notify Minister's office in December, 2010 - Deputy Chief Executive Jan Andrews emailed Mr. Weatherill's Chief of Staff, Simon Blewett and advisor Jadyne Harvey.

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**November 3:** Jay Weatherill defends Mr. Blewett's decision not to tell him about the rape. He claims "an impossible standard" for minister's office to check all advice from agencies.

Weatherill says counselling is now available to school.

Scouts SA confirms they knew of paedophile's conviction earlier in the year.

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**November 5:** Opposition does not accept Jay Weatherill was not told about the sexual assault in 2010.

Jay Weatherill says that OSHC staff are employed by Governing Councils, not schools, so parents “ultimately” responsible for decisions about those staff.

*“First Minister Portolesi blamed the police for secrecy, then Premier Weatherill blamed his chief of staff for not telling him, now he is blaming the parent volunteers of the governing council.” (David Pisoni)*

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**November 6:** Ms. Portolesi says while Governing Council is the employer, in this case the government “accepts full responsibility for the non-disclosure”.

The school’s Governing Council meet with Minister Portolesi. They tell her, at all times DECD maintained it was illegal to inform the community and could invite personal litigation against the Governing Council.

Governing Council says it was “misled about its rights and obligations”.

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**November 10:** SAASSO tells *The Advertiser* two thirds of OECD countries have an Education Ombudsman to receive complaints related to public schools.

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**November 11:** Liberals announce they will create an Education Ombudsman if elected.

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**November 12:** Jay Weatherill admits Governing Council was given incorrect advice by education department to not tell parents about rape.

Weatherill now says Governing Council not to blame.

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**November 13:** Premier Weatherill apologises in Parliament for the “suffering” experienced by school community.

Weatherill convenes taskforce to check for other incidents where parents weren’t told of abuse.

Weatherill maintains he was not told about rape, but in Question Time doesn’t directly answer whether he was told ‘in any way’ about the rape before it was publicly revealed.

*“The governing council was given information, it is just that the information given to parents appears to be the wrong information...” (Jay Weatherill)*

Mr. Weatherill tells parliament parents want role in ensuring this never happens again.

*Governing Council minutes reveal children were aware of paedophile and were scared of OSHC.*

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**November 14:** Another rape in a public school is revealed. Jay Weatherill (minister at the time) says not sure if he was told.

Victim’s mother was offered little support by education department and fears there are other victims.

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**November 27:** A June memo from DECD legal services manager Don Mackie says Governing Council has no role in deciding whether parents should be told children were in the care of a man charged with rape.

Memo also says not the view of the government that community have a right to information.

Memo warns council the minister will be told if they take any steps to inform parents.

Opposition spokesman, David Pisoni accuses government of “intimidating the governing council into silence”.

# Sex Abuse Timeline *continued*

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**November 29:** Journalist from *The Australian* banned from Parliament House after attempting to get comment from Grace Portolesi's staffer Jadyne Harvey about his knowledge of the rape.

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**December 6:** Report released detailing '*culture of cover-up at the education department*'.

Family First MLC Dennis Hood, who sued under FOI for the report says, "There was a perception among those interviewed that there is an effort to protect the reputation of schools, to suppress bad news".

"Incidents don't get reported to head office and the police as often as they should".

*"We need to change the way we relate to parents." (Grace Portolesi)*

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**December 10:** It's revealed the rapist previously worked in two other public schools from 1994 to 2006. He also worked as an SSO.

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**December 15:** *The Advertiser* reveals two more cases of sexual incidents in schools which have been kept from parents. Premier Weatherill says he only found out the day before.

However, Portolesi knew for months, while the government taskforce was investigating whether such cases existed.

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**December 17:** A sexual incident in a public school has been kept from parents for three years.

Grace Portolesi says it involved an arrest in December 2009, but it was still being decided who should be told.

Opposition spokesman, David Pisoni says he was denied access to any record of meetings between the Education Minister and DECD CE over the past two years.

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**January 2:** *The Advertiser* reports on *six separate schools where questions remain about sexual assaults*.

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**January 13:** *The Advertiser* reports the husband of a principal of an Adelaide Hills school threatened the father of a victim of a school assault. The man who threatened the father is also believed to be a school principal.

DECD refuses to disclose if disciplinary action was taken.

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**January 16:** Premier Weatherill says, "I found a department that had problems with its culture. That's why I changed the chief executive and it's disturbing that we still see some of these difficulties".

*"There have been a number of errors made by the department and this was another one". (Jay Weatherill)*

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**January 20:** Education Department concedes it mishandled critical incidents in schools.

New documents reveal the department also failed to act in the case of a 10 year old autistic boy who was assaulted, despite having told the Minister's office it had investigated the incident.

A letter from the Education Minister's office, asks the department executives to properly investigate, saying the Minister had been told this had been done, but later found out no such examination had taken place.

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**January 21:** Grace Portolesi 'dumped' as Education Minister.

Ms. Portolesi states there are clearly issues within the education department that need to be addressed.

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**January 28:** New Education Minister Jennifer Rankine says parents should have been told about sexual abuse.

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**January 30:** Freda Briggs says education department should employ counsellors to visit schools when sexual incidents occur.

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**February 8:** An eastern suburbs primary school teacher is arrested and charged with child pornography offences.

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**February 13:** *The Advertiser* reports that SAASSO had requested the Education Minister to convene a parent panel to decide what rights parents have to information about their children's safety and well-being.

*The Advertiser* reports on a SAASSO phone survey of parents which finds 95% believe parents should decide their rights.

Then Education Minister, Grace Portolesi, ignored SAASSO's request. New Minister, *Jennifer Rankine tells The Advertiser she would consider SAASSO's proposal.*

SAASSO, is yet to yet hear from Ms. Rankine directly.

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**February 15:** It's discovered that on January 15 a man was arrested and charged with seven counts of unlawful sexual intercourse and two counts of indecent assault with a 16-year-old, but parents weren't told.

The offices of Jennifer Rankine and Grace Portolesi were notified - both women were on leave.

Police told the education department "it would not impede the ongoing police investigation if they notified parents".

Jay Weatherill declines to comment on the case.

The alleged offender's police check revealed a previous offence. Ms Rankine states there was no "child protection issue".

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**February 19:** Jennifer Rankine back-tracks on her statement that there were no child protection issues in this case.

David Pisoni, tells Parliament he was told the man had previously committed an indecent behaviour offence in public, in front of a mother and child.

The man was subsequently contracted by the education department to work on a program to re-engage youths.

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**February 28:** It is suggested the man may have had contact with 15 other students.

A parent whose son had contact with the man, was only told by the department this week and says she should have known sooner.

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**March 1:** A north eastern suburbs teacher appears in court charged with sexually abusing and photographing two girls aged three and ten.

The man continued to teach until November and the children in his care were not removed until a few days ago.

The Opposition raises concerns the Government knew about this in November 2012.

Jennifer Rankine asks the education department to look at how to conduct deeper screening of teachers.

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**March 21:** Education department hires more investigators to look into alleged serious misconduct by its employees. ■