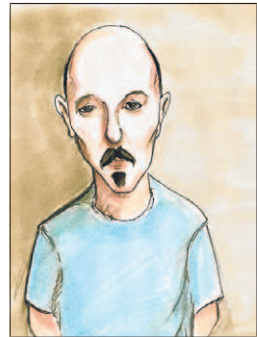


Parents may be told about paedophiles



Mark Christopher Harvey

PRESSURE is growing for laws requiring parents be notified when their children have come into contact with an accused paedophile.

The case of a sexual assault at an Adelaide school, which was kept from parents for two years, has sparked public debate about what policies and laws are in place to protect the community's right to know.

The State Government has launched an investigation, MPs are drafting new laws and parents groups are push-

POLITICAL REPORTER

LAUREN NOVAK



ing for more of a say in what they are told about their children's education.

Police also have weighed in, saying it is "preferable" for the community to be notified if they have come in contact with a convicted paedophile but difficult to

trace their histories and notify all those affected.

Mark Christopher Harvey was convicted in February of unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl in late 2010 at an out-of-school-hours care program he ran at a public school. It later emerged he had worked at a Catholic school for almost five years and had been involved with Scouts SA for two decades.

SA Police Deputy Commissioner Grant Stevens said there was "a real concern when anybody seeks a

career within industries that look after children... when their behaviour (later) comes to police attention".

However he said it was "somewhat problematic when we're talking about a person who's had a continuous association for a very long time (with a community group) - how we actually go down the path of contacting possible victims without re-traumatising" them.

Opposition education spokesman David Pisoni has asked Parliamentary Coun-

sel to draft amendments to the Children's Protection Act to make it mandatory that parents are told of certain incidents in schools within seven days.

However, there would be a provision to withhold information in circumstances where it may be detrimental to a police case.

Family First MLC Robert Brokenshire will introduce changes to the Education Act requiring the minister be personally notified within 24 hours of any alleged sexual

misconduct between a school staff member and a student. He has also renewed calls for an education Ombudsman.

SA Association of State School Organisations director David Knuckey said about two-thirds of OECD countries had an Ombudsman to receive complaints related to public schools.

He said parents wanted more say in "what information they have a right to know about what happens to their children in schools".



DISCUSSION: Premier Jay Weatherill and Education Minister Grace Portolesi talk to parents and teachers at a community meeting in Salisbury North on Thursday.

Picture: NICHOLAS WRANKMORE

Making sense of the mess

Q: WHO made the decision not to notify the parents?

A: THE key to this story is why parents were not told and who made that decision.

We know in the two days following the arrest on December 1, 2010, when the incident was first reported to the Education Department and the minister's office notified, a letter was being drafted to parents.

But that decision was reversed by the time the school's governing council was told about the incident on December 9.

At that meeting, the department told members it would break suppression orders to inform other parents.

Q: WHAT was the follow-up action to the email sent to the Education Minister's office?

A: LAST week, Premier Jay Weatherill, who was Education Minister at the time of the incident, said that "all critical incidents are always notified to the Minister" but affirms this one was not.

The department's deputy chief executive sent an email to

Call for action to protect children



How The Advertiser has covered the story

Mr Weatherill's chief of staff Simon Blewett and adviser Jadyne Harvey.

Four other people also received the same email but their names have not been released.

Mr Blewett said: "I did not advise the Minister." Mr Harvey has not made a statement. It is still unclear as to whether Mr

Blewett or anyone else in Mr Weatherill's office followed up with the department to find out how the incident had been handled.

Q: HOW is it possible that Jay Weatherill was not told of the incident?

A: THE best outcome for Mr Weatherill will be to plead ignorance.

But why did his most senior advisers believe there was no need to inform their boss of such a serious incident?

Q: WILL anyone be sacked over this?

A: Labor is doing all it can to protect its own - Mr Weatherill first and is foremost in this regard.

Questions about whether Mr Blewett will be disciplined have gone unanswered.

Responsibility for the non-disclosure has been passed around by Mr Weatherill and Education Minister Grace Portolesi between the government, the department and the school council.

If anyone gets the boot, it's most likely there will be a departmental scapegoat - which is probably unsurprising.

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