

Kingston and Richmond LSCB.

Summary of the Westminster LSCB Southbank School Serious Case Review January 2016.

In January 2016 Westminster LSCB published its Serious Case Review (SCR) regarding Southbank International School, where a perpetrator sexually abused 54 students. The school was owned by the Cognita group of schools, which owns 66 schools across the world, including 43 schools in the UK. The perpetrator joined the school from an international school overseas. He had a conviction for sexual offences against young boys from 1969 from the United States – this was not picked up at any point in his career. His wife was prominent in the international school community.

The perpetrator built up a reputation of informality and unconventionality – he was popular. He organised many school trips, where he hand-picked students to attend – those young people were either vulnerable or very popular. On those trips, he drugged students and sexually abused them. He was known to have pupils in his room and this became normalised. He was “hiding in plain sight”. Staff had some concerns, but students made no formal complaints. However, he was known by some pupils as a “paedo”.

The perpetrator managed to groom his victims and manipulate his environment.

The report can be found here:

<https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/pdf/SB%20SCR%20FINAL%20REPORT%2012%201%2016.pdf>

This has raised questions regarding:

1. The perpetrator's behaviour towards other members of staff in the school, who did have concerns;
2. The open culture of the school;
3. The leadership, governance and management of the school and its relationship to its Board (safeguarding was not on its agenda);
4. The importance of staff in any setting knowing the signs and symptoms of grooming, power and control;
5. The importance of thorough employment checks, including with workers from abroad;
6. The importance of debriefs after trips, and incidents; and
7. Record keeping.

Initially, the school did not act on reports or concerns. When allegations were made, there was a focus on policies and procedures, instead of the emotional needs of the students at the school. Cognita was insufficiently proactive, although they did commission the independent Davies' Report. There was high staff turnover, particularly of staff from other countries.



The SCR found that conditions were created in the school, so ***that “an experienced perpetrator easily got around the safeguarding systems”***.

This summary raises some important questions for every agency in Kingston and Richmond:

- Does our organisation have an explicit safeguarding culture and ethos with well-articulated and lived values and behaviours at each level of the organisation?
- Do we have clear policies and procedures, which facilitate the raising of concerns?
- Do we have courageous management, prepared to act appropriately and staff prepared to challenge and raise concerns?
- Do our children, young people, parents and carers have a voice? Are there mechanisms to raise concerns?