

Gove has change of heart after victim talks



Michael Gove said told MPs a new obligation to report abuse in institutional settings is being examined Jim Clarke/The Times

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Teachers and other adults who work with children may face a legal duty to report suspicions of abuse as the Government considers a reversal of policy.

Michael Gove triggered surprise yesterday when he told MPs that a new obligation to report abuse in institutional settings is being actively examined in the Department for Education.

His willingness to reconsider follows a face-to-face meeting with Tom Perry, a victim of abuse in the 1960s at Caldicott prep school, in Buckinghamshire, that had a profound impact on the Education Secretary. He told MPs that he now found the case for action “compelling”.

Calls for a duty to report evidence or even suspicions of abuse have been growing since *The Times* highlighted the cover-up of historic sexual abuse in many boarding schools. Mr Perry is leading a campaign called Mandate Now.

Keir Starmer, QC, the former Director of Public Prosecutions, has backed such a change.

Maggie Atkinson, the Children’s Commissioner for England, has urged pilots to provide an evidence base for a decision on mandatory reporting of abuse, saying the arguments were inconclusive.

Mr Gove signalled his shifting position in the Commons, after he was challenged by the Labour MP Tom Watson MP who has campaigned to support victims of abuse and their families.

Mr Watson said a child had been sexually abused at Stanbridge Earls, a former independent special school near Romsey last summer several months after parents of victims of abuse at the school met with a minister to hear their demand for mandatory reporting. That school has since closed.

Mr Gove replied: “I have had the opportunity in a different context to talk to one victim of abuse who made a compelling case, I have to say, for mandatory reporting of abuse in regulated settings.

“I had hitherto been concerned that mandatory reporting might create more work for childrens’ services departments than it would generate safety for children. But I do have to say that the specific case for mandatory reporting in regulated settings is one that we are actively reviewing.”

Some leading charities have been wary of such a move, fearing that if a new duty to report suspicions of abuse was widely cast it could mean some social workers were faced with such a volume of precautionary information that it was unrealistic to examine it all in detail.

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 Tom Perry ▾

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