

25 February 2021

The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
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Sent via email –
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Dear Mr Williamson

Ampleforth College

As you know from earlier correspondence I act for victims and survivors of abuse at Ampleforth. Further to my letter of 18th February, I have discovered some further matters of concern about the governance of Ampleforth College which I wish to draw to your attention.

Of the eleven current trustees of St Laurence Education Trust shown on the Ampleforth College website¹, nine are former pupils or parents of former pupils.

- Edward Sparrow: former pupil, parent of 3 former pupils
- Mathew Craston: former pupil
- Barbara Mathews: Parent of former pupil
- Robin Burdell: former pupil
- John Sykes: former pupil
- Richard Tams: former pupil
- Martin Rigby: former pupil
- Lynn Cooper: wife of former pupil, parent of former pupil
- Martha Byrne Hill: wife of former pupil, parent of former pupils

Only Meg Baines and Kieran McLaughlin appear to lack such a connection with the college, and only these two appear to have prior educational experience, though Robin Burdell appears also to have experience in the financial management of independent schools. The other eight trustees comprise four lawyers, one banker, two business consultants and a venture capital investment manager.

The trustees, though no doubt eminent in their own fields, appear collectively to lack a sufficient range of experience to be able to take the kinds of informed and independent decisions that would seem to be needed by a school in the difficulties currently experienced by Ampleforth College, and given the family connections of so many trustees, may also lack the detachment necessary to recognise and act decisively in the context of those difficulties. As you may be aware, a lack of

¹ <https://www.ampleforthcollege.org.uk/college/our-school/governance-and-reports/st-laurence-education-trust>

diversity of background within trustee boards and governing bodies has been identified by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse as a risk factor for safeguarding failings in schools.

Since the trustees of St Laurence Education Trust are appointed by Ampleforth Abbey Trust (the majority of whose trustees are Ampleforth monks) and supervised through joint committees with Ampleforth Abbey Trust, it can reasonably be inferred that they have been chosen specifically to assure continuity with the monks' past approach to governance of Ampleforth College. This directly contradicts a clear and decisive recommendation made by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse for the complete separation of governance between the school and the abbey.

There is also a concern with regard to the financial management of the St Laurence Education Trust. Page 10 of its Charities Commission return states:

Reserves policy

Historically and from the formation of the Trust any surpluses generated within the Trust were transferred to the Ampleforth Abbey Trust. The only reserves that were retained were sufficient to cover working capital requirements. The Trust is at present loss making and therefore does not have any reserves. It relies on financial support from Ampleforth Abbey Trust.

From this it appears that any surplus built up by St Laurence Education Trust above "working capital requirements" is immediately placed in the hands of Ampleforth Abbey Trust for it to dispose of as it sees fit within its own charitable aims. Without a degree of control over its own finances which it appears to lack, any kind of freedom of independent action can only be regarded as a mirage.

The Ampleforth College safeguarding policy² appears to be inadequately prescriptive in the arrangements for reporting suspected abuse to the statutory authorities. For instance at the start of page 10, it states that "the head should ensure that" a range of safeguarding activities are carried out. The use of the word "should" implies a degree of discretion as to whether he actually does. Later on page 10 the policy states "Hate crimes should also be reported to the police". Note again the use of "should" implying that this is an option. "Should" appears to be used excessively within the policy, including in the section "Action by the DSL" starting near the bottom of page 20 concerning the procedure for reporting concerns to outside authorities. All the bullets in this section are framed using "should" rather than "must" and the entire list is described as a set of concerns that "the DSL will consider".

The DSL procedures on pages 20/21 appear not to be entirely consistent with a separate set of procedures headed "Initial Action" on page 25 covering similar territory.

It is my experience that schools which have in the past failed to report abuse frequently attempt to draft their safeguarding policies in this manner, using "should" in key procedures and also having multiple versions of procedures in conflict with each other. The effect of this is that they can choose to report almost nothing outside the school and yet remain nominally compliant with what to unsuspecting eyes looks like a comprehensive and impressive safeguarding policy. That Ampleforth College has allowed this textbook example of bad drafting of key safety-critical procedures to remain in its policy is deeply troubling. The safeguarding policy is 55 pages long and the two sections described above on reporting suspected abuse to outside authority together comprise only about a page and a half. Since the reporting of suspected abuse to the authorities

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https://www.ampleforthcollege.org.uk/college/sites/default/files/u90/child_protection_and_safeguarding_policy_v_5.4.pdf

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is critical to an effective safeguarding policy, the impression is given that policy has been deliberately bloated with extraneous material to hide the inadequacy of the key passages.

Of course, this might not be deliberate, it may instead be driven by ignorance as to good safeguarding practice. But given its history, if Ampleforth College has not yet sought, obtained and implemented the best available advice with the aim of establishing itself as an exemplar of good safeguarding practice, then that is a matter for serious concern irrespective of the cause.

Yours sincerely



Richard Scorer
Principal Lawyer
Slater and Gordon

cc – Baroness Berridge