

NSS welcomes child sexual abuse inquiry into religious organisations

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The National Secular Society has welcomed a new investigation into child protection in religious organisations and settings which have previously been beyond the remit of an official inquiry.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) this week announced it would review child protection policies, practices and procedures across a range of religious institutions in England and Wales.

The investigation's remit will include non-conformist Christian denominations, the Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Methodists, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Hinduism and Buddhism.

This investigation is separate from the inquiry's ongoing investigations into the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches.

Religious settings such as mosques, synagogues, churches and temples will be within the scope of the inquiry.

Supplementary schools such as Muslim madrassas and Christian Sunday schools and places where children and young people gather in connection with their religious beliefs, including youth groups and camps, will also be investigated.

Since 2012 the NSS has been lobbying for [better regulation](#) of out-of-school educational settings, including religious supplementary schools, to improve child safeguarding. However, the government has refused to regulate madrassas and other places of faith tuition despite clear evidence of abuse.

Last year the Department for Education [abandoned](#) plans for the compulsory registration of out-of-school education under pressure from faith groups.

More than one in 10 survivors of [child sexual abuse](#) (11%) who shared their accounts with the inquiry's Truth Project reported sexual abuse in a religious institution. Of this group, almost a quarter (24%) told the inquiry they were abused in institutions in scope of this new investigation, including those linked to the Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Methodists, Judaism and Islam.

The NSS has for many years highlighted the alarming extent of sexual abuse in religious settings and the failure of religious organisations' response to child abuse. Over the last ten years it has worked to ensure that victims of institutional child abuse have access to secular justice.

As part of this work the NSS responded to a direct approach by IICSA to explain why sexual abuse of minors was more prevalent in religious settings. The society has also performed groundbreaking work on the issue at the UN.

Earlier this week, NSS president Keith Porteous Wood highlighted concerns over a lack of reporting of abuse in closed communities during an intervention at a seminar run by IICSA. He made a plea for new laws to require people in institutions to report child abuse to the secular

authorities.

Commenting on the launch of the new investigation, Mr Wood said: "Many minority religious groups form closed communities, and it is in such communities that sexual abuse of minors is both more likely to occur and less likely to be externally reported. Perpetrators escape punishment and continue to offend, but even more important is that victims are at great risk and most have little if any opportunity to bring their abuse to an end.

"They desperately need help and we very much hope that the extension of this inquiry will help achieve that."

A recent [equivalent inquiry in Australia](#) found significant abuse in numerous religious settings beyond the Catholic and Anglican churches.

An Australian academic advising that inquiry found especially high incidences of abuse by the Salvation Army, followed by the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Exclusive Brethren.

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