

Seventh Day Adventist schools warned over safeguarding concerns

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Two independent Seventh Day Adventist schools, one of which demonstrated a "victim-blaming approach" to safeguarding, have been warned by the Department for Education.

[International Stanborough School](#) and [Stanborough Primary School](#), both in Watford in Hertfordshire, were issued warning notices in May after failing school inspections.

International Stanborough School was [rated](#) 'inadequate' by Ofsted after inspectors [found](#) safeguarding shortfalls that meant children were "at risk from harm".

In one incident, actions taken in response to concerns raised were "punitive" and "lacked consideration of the pressures that the child may have been under". The inspector said the school's "victim-blaming approach" does not safeguard children and "lessens the likelihood that children will come forward to share concerns in the future".

In another incident, some teaching staff, including the designated safeguarding officer, failed to follow safeguarding procedures in response to "an allegation of abuse". As a result, the allegation was not shared with relevant agencies for almost eight weeks, when it should have been shared within 24 hours. Despite the allegation being upheld, formal guidance was not provided to the member of staff against whom the allegation was made.

In a third incident, staff provided a reference for a child who was permanently excluded following "serious incidents". The reference was "misleading" and did not "contain significant information". As a result, those who received the reference "may not be apprised of relevant safeguarding concerns".

The inspector found neither of the designated safeguarding leads had undergone relevant training for over two years. The designated safeguarding lead "undertook a six-hour online course on the first day of the inspection". The lack of training meant staff responsible for safeguarding were "not well enough equipped to safeguard children effectively".

The inspector said the quality of safeguarding records was "poor" because it was "difficult to ascertain what has happened, what has been done, by whom and for what reason". The report said the records offer "little value" to governors and others whose role is to monitor the quality of care, and would provide "even less value" to children who may want to access the records in the future.

International Stanborough School accommodates students who are learning to speak English as an additional language and has a boarding house.

Stanborough Primary School was [also rated](#) 'inadequate'. Inspectors said the culture of safeguarding was "weak". They found staff were "not consistent in appropriately reporting concerns", and that the leadership of safeguarding processes and records was "not suitable". Leaders were "unaware" of these failings.

Inspectors found that staff had sometimes "taken matters into their own hands" before reporting a concern to the designated safeguarding lead. This had prevented the safeguarding leader from performing the role "adequately".

Staff were "not as clear as they should" be about identifying potential child protection concerns that need to be reported to the safeguarding leader. Records of child protection were "muddled" and "not kept in line with the school policy".

Older pupils receive identical information about how to keep safe using the internet as younger pupils. Inspectors said this meant they were "not prepared well enough" for identifying and protecting themselves against the risks posed by online technologies.

Pupils also reported that there was "some bullying" at the school, that it was "not necessarily dealt with and that "there is nothing a teacher can do". Inspectors also found that "incidents of unkindness" were not addressed effectively.

In addition to safeguarding concerns, pupils said they do not learn about "protected groups" in school. They also did not make sufficient progress in subjects outside of maths and English, meaning they were "not well prepared for the demands of secondary school".

International Stanborough School and Stanborough Primary School are both run by the British Union Conference of Seventh Day Adventists, a registered charity. Its charitable objects include "to proclaim the everlasting gospel of our lord and saviour Jesus Christ", "to teach the commandments of God as the supreme rule of life" and "to persuade people to become his disciples and responsible members of the church".

Schools that receive warnings must improve within a specified period or they will be removed from the independent schools register.

International Stanborough School occupies the same facilities as [Stanborough School](#), which is also a Seventh Day Adventist independent school. Stanborough School was rated as 'requires improvement' in its latest Ofsted inspection.

NSS campaigns officer Megan Manson said: "The British Union Conference of Seventh Day Adventists runs three independent schools in England, all of which are struggling.

"It is especially concerning that these latest reports suggest that safeguarding is an area of serious concern at these schools.

"We should question whether charities that are primarily motivated to evangelise religious faith are adequately placed to meet the educational and welfare needs of children."

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