

# Pope orders inquiry into child sex abuse at West London school

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The Vatican has ordered an inquiry into claims of decades of sexual abuse at a London abbey and school.

Monks and teachers at Ealing Abbey and neighbouring St Benedict's independent school in west London have been accused of abuse from the 1960s until 2009. Last year the *Times* revealed four decades of abuse by Father David Pearce, a priest at Ealing Abbey and former headmaster of St Benedict's junior school.

After the revelations about Fr Pearce, allegations of abuse were made against other former priests and teachers at St Benedict's — and other schools — over the decades as further victims came forward, prompting police to begin a fresh inquiry.

The Catholic hierarchy in England regularly insists that it has very strong child protection policies. The Vatican has come under fire after it emerged the results of the inquiry will not automatically be made public.

Keith Porteous Wood, NSS Executive Director, said: "The procedures in place now completely lack independence and are bound to lead to this kind of problem. Complainants should be able to contact directly someone completely independent of the Church. Until this happens, the problem will continue. The lack of transparency also shows how the Vatican continues to act behind closed doors and think of its own reputation before the victims."

Peter Saunders of the National Association for People Abused in Childhood, said the inquiry was a public relations exercise and akin to "putting Dracula in charge of a blood bank". Graham Wilmer, who heads the Lantern Project and says he was abused by a priest as a teenager, commented: "We can't trust them. What effectively has happened is nothing."

Police are trying to find Father Laurence Soper, former Abbot of Ealing Abbey, who jumped bail before he could be charged with child abuse offences. He has disappeared from the headquarters of the Benedictine order in Rome, where he was treasurer of the Benedictine Confederation.