



Power and Abuse

The Caldicott headmaster shockingly abused his pupils. They have been let down by teachers and the legal system

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What happened to pupils at Caldicott School is such a dark story of depravity and abuse that it is hard to read about. The tale leaves everyone who follows it infinitely sadder. It is a small hope that it might make us just a little bit wiser, for there are lessons to be learnt from Caldicott beyond the capacity for lust of the main protagonists. That capacity is, however, a good place to start.

Even from a monochrome picture, it is obvious that in the 1960s, when he took over as headmaster, Peter Wright was a man of almost irresistible charm and power. He used it on parents and staff in a way that allowed him to abuse children and get away with it.

He also gave jobs to other child abusers, covering up their behaviour and encouraging staff to lie in order to preserve the school's reputation. Just one example stands for many. When, in 1973, Martin Carson was dismissed as a science teacher having admitted to serial child abuse, Wright did all he could to prevent other staff providing a full account to officials. He deployed all of his weapons — fear, charm, a plea for loyalty to the school — and he largely succeeded.

Carson, by the way, resumed his teaching career, serving a suspension but untroubled by any police investigation. He even became head of pastoral care at a prep school in Eastbourne. This one story tells the bigger one — that despite the knowledge that bad things were happening in Caldicott, they were able to carry on happening. The lesson is the same as in the Savile scandal. In the wrong hands, charm can turn into power and abuse. It also suggests that careful thought should be given to compelling schools to report allegations of child sex abuse to relevant authorities. The temptation to cover up for the sake of the school's reputation can be too great.

What occurred at Caldicott may be horrible and degrading, but it is at least simple to understand and condemn. What has happened since the authorities first became aware of the accusations is more tangled. A troubling amount of disturbing information about some of the offences was already available to the authorities in the years before the children themselves, grown to adulthood, broke the case open. Yet even when they did, they did not receive the justice they were expecting.

In 2003, when the story of Wright's alleged abuse of five pupils in the 1960s reached the courts, Judge Roger Connor terminated the prosecution. He was worried about the historical nature of the allegations and worried, too, about the possibility of witnesses having shared their stories.

Two concerns arise from this. The first is whether the judge was correct. In the recent trial, which resulted in Wright's conviction for abuse of five different boys during roughly the same period, the first set of five boys was allowed to act as witnesses, thus suggesting that, contrary to the original ruling, time had not diminished the power of their testimony. The second concern is that Judge Connor's termination prompted the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to reject all other attempts to bring charges against teachers at Caldicott. That continued for eight years during which time the courageous evidence of many victims of abuse was ignored.


It is now possible, as it was not in 2003, for the prosecution to appeal against judgments such as those of Judge Connor. And the CPS has clearly changed its attitude to historical allegations of abuse. Yet a careful inquiry into the Caldicott case would surely yield further lessons that might help to prevent such disasters happening again. The small and vulnerable boys of Caldicott were betrayed by teachers they had every reason to trust. They were, for many years, let down by the legal system too. We must stop something like this happening again.

16 comments

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 Brian Edwards ▾

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Mr Keith Robinson

5 days ago

These issues have appeared in a number of contexts, here for example in schools, also the BBC, the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. There seems to be a common denominator in that each institution in whichever context has initially focused on saving its own skin at the expense of the abused.

Rebuilding trust will take a long time.

2  [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Brian Ansell**

5 days ago

Keith the issues you raise are not restricted to organisations but also to communities and families and individuals. Each seeing their reputation as more important than each child. We have "every child matters" and I believe it should be "each child matters" we have many people who think that they have rights over children and how they are treated

. I believe that I have no rights over my own children or now my grand children but I do have responsibility, for doing my best to help each child I meet to have a healthier and happier life. That does not make me responsible for what anybody does as each has their own choice as to how they react to my offers of help. It was that desire that took me into being a teacher. I believe that if you ask any social worker, teacher, nurse they will all give you an answer that is similar to mine.

I left teaching as the system would not allow me to take that responsibility for each of my students seriously and then I had to sadly decide that for me to survive I had to take responsibility for myself and those I walked out of my last school in the middle of a day in flooded of tears and in a state of complete distress? I spent 8 months trying to work out what I wanted to do with my life and even if I wanted to have a future. I now use that same dedication that I used to use in schools daily to challenge all readers on here. Sadly many on here are like those who stopped me doing the job I loved and denied those young people my skills and attitudes I had honed over 37 years as a teacher.

Collectively the readers in here do not matter but individually you each matter.

Please help me to enable each child to matter. And for them to matter to each adult they ever meet.

if anyone disagrees with this then you are part of the problem. I am only interested in finding people who want to be part of the solution. Which are you? please do not try and answer for others as you cannot know their response to this question or any other question.

Society and schools are "complex" systems they are treated as "complicated" systems. Look them up if those ideas are just words to you.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Stellan Brandt**

4 days ago

I must say you use many words to say nothing really.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Brian Ansell**

4 days ago

Stellan have you found what I have witnessed over many years. That it takes more words to say something that ignorant people can understand, and often needs to be written in different ways until they finally say thankyou. If someone writes or says something I find usefull I always end the conversation with THANKYOU. You might have noticed that I have yet to use that word to conclude or respond to any of your comments!!! Please write something that I might possibly see as part of the solution instead of what you appear to me to be which is part of the problem. Take care with what you ignore, because it could have helped you to be less ignorant. In case you have not noticed there are no facts that are interesting only opinions are ever interesting as they can be agreed with with a thankyou or disagreed with with a question. I will not bother to write more of "nothing really" as you will probably ignore it but others that read this might manage a smile at your expense.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Stellan Brandt**

4 days ago

Brian Ansell: you seem to have a very high opinion of yourself!

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Brian Ansell**

4 days ago

Stellan only someone with a low opinion of themselves could say such a thing. Try changing your opinion of yourself. No one is more important than me but some think so and none is less important than me unless they think so.,it appears that you think you are less important than me. That is your choice and your opinion. I am normal. If you are not then you must be abnormal. Which are you. You choose. You will remain angry and unhappy with low self esteem and only you can change that. I could help you if you asked. The secret is to realise that you are a survivor of all your life experiences. But you think you are a victim. I am a survivor and I always have the last word, if I choose to do so. I prefer my last word to be thankyou. I wonder if this will be my last word to you.

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Stellan Brandt

3 days ago

What a load of utter rubbish! And this in one single comment!

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Stellan Brandt

3 days ago

Brian Ansell: Thank you.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

Brian Ansell

3 days ago

Stellan I laughed out loud at your "thankyou" you tell us all that what I say is rubbish and then because I like to have the last word and that word is thankyou, you try to end our conversation with the word I suggested. So clearly you found a use for one of my words and one of my ideas and so everything I say is not rubbish. Does that mean that you are stupid to claim that everything I say is rubbish? Or is there something you wish to thank me for? Which is it as both cannot be correct.

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Margaret Wheatley

5 days ago

A judge apparently thought that child abuse was unimportant. Similar remarks by another judge seemed to imply that he thought gang rape of a young woman was unimportant compared with the careers of these "well brought up" thugs. Are there many of these dinosaur judges still working?

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Matthew Martin

5 days ago

in Channel 5's 'Meet Ricky Gervais', Gervais interviews Savile who finds his questions clearly unsettling.

After the advert break, there's a skit involving Gervais, cowering in his dressing room, terrified - and coerced into a sexual act by Stephen Marchant, who tells him that 'Nobody would ever believe him if he blew the whistle: a powerful producer's word against his, etc.' The show then resumes with Savile looking ever more uncomfortable.

I'm not sure which part of this makes me more angry: Gervais for not speaking out directly - maybe he'd seen the reaction to Jerry Sadowitz's denunciation. Maybe discretion was the better part of valour. Maybe Channel 5 just couldn't handle the truth.

If you go to Channel 5's website, this episode seems to have been switched off: you can see further episodes but, try as I might, all I can get relating to this maiden episode is an anodyne summary.

Access to the series starts, weirdly, at episode 2. In North Korea this sort of thing is widely reported...

This is circumstantial but adds to the view that quite a lot of people were in the know here...

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Stellan Brandt

5 days ago

Part of this problem is that a number of people with either suspicions or knowledge failed to address these abuses to authorities. As with Saville it's it's startling that many people around him (even at BBC) well and truly knew about the abuses without doing anything. Furthermore I wouldn't be surprised if some media knew at least about the suspicions but decided to keep quiet for the sake of it being a celebrity in the case of Saville. Too often you realize that dark secrets been known in group without actions been taken.

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Brian Ansell

5 days ago

Power, fear, reputation. Remove them and children will be safe. People pay to attend schools with a good reputation, where discipline is based on fear where teachers have power.

1  Recommend [Reply](#)

Alan Hawkes

5 days ago

We now have a situation in which no adult, no matter whether, 'of good character' can be with children without CRB clearance . This seems a massive imposition of distrust on normal relationships. But along come Saville and Caldicott etc. It isn't just that failure to stand up and testify years ago abandoned many children then; it has also condemned all normal relationships to distrust, to the cost of us all, now.

7     Recommend [Reply](#)

Mark Startin

5 days ago

@Alan Hawkes

Why would Savile not have passed a DBS check? As far as I recall, he was never prosecuted, cautioned, or arrested?

2   Recommend [Reply](#)

steve davies

6 days ago

'They have been let down by teachers' This should surely read: Let down by THEIR teachers.

7     Recommend [Reply](#)

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