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## Inquiry into sex abuse at school

Colleen Egan and Kate Bastians, The West Australian

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Education Minister Peter Collier is preparing to launch a "full and thorough investigation" into the way an elite private school handled a series of warnings about a sexual predator among its teaching staff.

*The Weekend West* revealed on Saturday the school, which is not named for legal reasons, received detailed reports from other teachers about concerns that their long-time colleague was inappropriately touching boys in his classes.

He was given three written warnings by headmasters in 1999, 2001 and 2004 about the school policy prohibiting physical contact but was allowed to continue teaching until 2009, when a police investigation was launched following a complaint by a former student.

The 60-year-old, who has not been identified for legal reasons, was jailed for five years last week after being convicted of 13 sexual offences involving five former Year 4 and 5 students between 1999 and 2009.

Private schools are not required to make the Education Department aware of police investigations and it is understood Mr Collier was unaware of the school's inaction before Saturday.

He said yesterday he had asked the Department of Education Services to seek advice from the District Court about identifying the school before launching an inquiry.

"If the court provides this information, I will be in a position to use my powers under the School Education Act 1999 for the department to conduct a full and thorough investigation into the matter," he said.

Mr Collier said the case had highlighted some potential inconsistencies between the way allegations of sexual abuse were reported to the appropriate regulators in government and non-government schools.

"I will instigate changes to the regulations for non-government schools to ensure these types of allegations and incidents are reported directly to the Department of Education Services, similar to requirements in place in the government schools sector," he said.

"I have also asked this department to investigate a Memorandum of Understanding with WA Police that ensures the regulator of non-government schools is made aware of any allegations or investigations relating to sexual abuse of independent school students.

"This would be similar to the MOU in place between the Department of Education and WA Police."

Child Protection Minister Robyn McSweeney said teachers and principals would now handle complaints differently under mandatory reporting requirements.

"The introduction of mandatory reporting in January 2009 should have made a difference," she said. "Under this scheme, every teacher understands that if they have a reasonable belief of sexual abuse towards a child, they are required by law to report it to the Department for Child Protection's mandatory reporting service."

Opposition child protection spokeswoman Sue Ellery said that even before mandatory reporting, the school's principals had a "moral obligation" to refer the warnings to teachers to authorities.

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