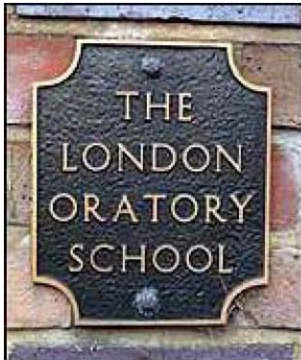




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Prime Minister's choice of school for his sons hit by child-abuse scandal



An investigation has been launched into allegations of child abuse at the London Roman Catholic school attended by Prime Minister Tony Blair's two teenage sons. The inquiry focuses on a former chaplain and governor at the London Oratory School in Fulham, south-west London, who died of a suspected Aids-related illness, as several newspapers have reported. Police and social services were alerted after pupils wrote letters about Scots-born "Father" David Martin to Childline.

While Mr Blair sends his sons, Euan, 16, and Nicholas, 14, to the school, there has been no suggestion that they are involved in the investigations.

The former chaplain is alleged to have met at least six pupils in his rooms at the London Oratory Church, to which the school is affiliated. Two boys were said to have expressed fears that they may have contracted the HIV virus from the priest, who died two years ago, aged 44. A Scotland Yard spokeswoman said: "Allegations of abuse at a London school have been received by Hammersmith and Fulham child protection team." "The allegations are being investigated."

Parents dropping their children off at the school after the news broke had mixed feelings about the allegations. "Obviously it is very serious. I think all parents are very concerned and will want to hear more about it to make sure it never happens again," said one father. But another boy's father felt the Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph, the two newspapers which highlighted the story, were using the story as an excuse to attack the prime minister. "The priest is dead, the abuse is over - there is nothing we can do to punish the man," he told a BBC reporter. "This is an attempt to knock Blair because Blair's kids are at this place. Look at the papers which are running the story." The Daily Mail said Hammersmith and Fulham Council confirmed an inquiry began after a letter was sent to social services from a boy at the school.

A spokesman for the Catholic Media Centre said letters had been received by the Church in the summer. "It passed them on straightaway to the social services, so that they were dealt with properly," he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. The spokesman confirmed that the Archbishop of Westminster, Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, was among those who received the letters but said it "wouldn't be appropriate" for the Church to hold its own investigation. "It is investigated properly by the police and the social services; it is not a church matter once allegations are made," the spokesman said. However he admitted it was a "cause of considerable distress and embarrassment" for the Catholic Church in a year which has brought strong criticism for its methods of dealing with paedophile priests.