

The Herald 18th November 2016, Opinion page; by Stephen Naysmith

Swinney is right to limit child abuse inquiry remit

THE Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry was set up to shine a light on the abuse of children in residential care provided by the state, or by charities and others acting on its behalf.

The inquiry's job is straightforward: to acknowledge victims of the most horrendous breach of trust, and to attempt to learn from what happened so future children can be better protected.

But there has been an increasing clamour from groups representing child abuse survivors for the inquiry's remit to be extended. It is unjust, they argue, that some children who were abused by adults in positions of power are not covered by the inquiry because that abuse was not carried out in the care of the state. This may seem unfair.

But Education Secretary John Swinney is correct. Such cases cannot be covered by this inquiry.

The abuse of children in children's homes, residential schools and other care settings is a particularly appalling stain on our national conscience. Putting vulnerable children into danger, in the name of making them safe, was a grotesque failure and it continued over decades. The danger with extending the inquiry's remit is that focus on this essential truth would be lost, while the inquiry took years longer and costs spiralled.

A degree of clarity will no doubt be welcomed by the inquiry team itself, which has stabilised under the leadership of new chairwoman Lady Smith. However, Mr Swinney's agreement to consult victims and others over the crucial issue of financial redress seems like more delay and obfuscation. Other countries, including Ireland and Australia, have put in place compensation schemes for abuse survivors. Mr Swinney is right to try to learn from such examples but he and the Government have had time to consider this issue.

The fact is that more victims of historic child abuse will die as long this crucial question remains unanswered. A decision on redress is long overdue. He is right to limit child abuse inquiry

End