

# Inquiry hears of serious concerns about approved schools in Scotland

[UK News](#) | Published: Apr 4, 2019

## The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry heard that heavy punishment regimes were among concerns raised in a report.

An abuse inquiry has been told of serious concerns in the past surrounding a number of approved schools in Scotland.

The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI) heard that the potential for a mass walkout, heavy punishment regimes and a lack of psychological treatment facilities for “disturbed” youngsters were among the fears raised about the institutions in a report from the late 1960s.

The probe heard there was a concern that “something would happen” at one of the establishments that could “embarrass” ministers.

The details emerged as Professor Ian Levitt, emeritus professor of social policy at the University of Central Lancashire and an honorary professor at the University of West of Scotland, gave evidence to the SCAI on inspection regimes linked to children in care from 1968 to 1992.

He told how approved schools were “high on the agenda” following the introduction of new social work laws in 1968.

The witness referenced a report from a school inspector to the newly-in-post chief social work adviser from that year, setting out the issues at some approved schools.

According to the report, one school with 120 boys had seen “heavy absconding” and a “mass walkout is a hazard not to be ruled out”.

Another wanted to move away from being a “barrack-style school”, the inquiry heard.

“There were serious concerns at a number of schools at the time,” Prof Levitt said.

He told how the report spoke of “major strains which could lead to a deterioration” at one institution, “disgruntlement” at another and “issues with the management of the school” at a third.

Other concerns raised elsewhere included a new headmaster who was keen on “maintaining a punishment regime to maintain discipline” and a “lack of psychological treatment facilities for disturbed girls” at another approved school.

Reading from the report, senior counsel to the inquiry Colin MacAulay QC, said: “Some of the situations are the breeding grounds of incidents which may result in publicity and end in inquiry.”

Prof Levitt told the hearing: “There was a concern that something would happen in Scotland which would result in embarrassment to the Secretary of State.”

The inquiry also heard how a report published in 1961 found that the form of care in remand homes was lacking.

“There was certainly no attention to caring for children in a way that modern ideas of childcare were being developed,” Prof Levitt said.

The report found that there should be some element of childcare assessment, such as by an educational psychologist, at the homes “rather than simply providing them with bed and board”, the witness said.

In one specific case, the inquiry heard how, following press reports into the alleged ill treatment of boys at Larchgrove remand home in Glasgow, the city’s social work department set up an independent inquiry to examine the claims in 1973.

It concluded that there was evidence of abuse at the institution, that corporal punishment was exceeded on numerous occasions and that there was little care provided – findings which prompted a change in the management team, the probe was told.

Prof Levitt, who compiled a report for the inquiry based on historic records he had analysed, spoke of “limitations” when it comes to searching through old documents.

In the 1960s, records about children in approved schools only had to be kept for 10 years, the probe heard.

The inquiry, before Lady Smith, continues on Wednesday next week.