

1 of 26 DOCUMENTS

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Deaf school pupils sue over abuse

BYLINE: Antony Barnett, Investigations Editor

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DEAF CHILDREN who were sexually abused at a specialist school by the head teacher's husband are suing the Department for Education and Skills after winning a landmark appeal for legal aid.

The Observer revealed last year how dozens of girls and boys, some as young as four, were victims of one of Britain's most predatory paedophiles, who was allowed to work at the boarding school in southern England even though he had been prosecuted for sex offences.

The victims' difficulties with communication have made it almost impossible to win justice. However, their lawyers have won an appeal before the Legal Services Commission granting public funding for two former pupils to sue the department. One, now 49, was repeatedly raped as a four-year-old while other children slept, but could not call out.

At the time the school was the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Evidence has emerged that officials were aware of allegations. In 1964 the man pleaded guilty to sexually abusing nine deaf children; he was only fined £ 50 and continued as school 'handyman' until the Eighties. Many former pupils claim they were sexually abused after 1964.

Malcolm Johnson, the Surrey lawyer suing the department on behalf of the victims, said: 'This man went on to commit dreadful acts of abuse and ruined the lives of many deaf children. We believe the ministry failed in its duty of care.'

In March 2004, an attempt to prosecute the man in a criminal court failed. Since The Observer article was published, two of the victims have won thousands of £ from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority.

The perpetrator, now more than 80, lives in Wales and cannot be named. He still lives with his wife and has never been on the sexual offenders' register. The school is now closed and the DfES has denied any liability for the attacks.

antony.barnett@observer.co.uk

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