

Shaping the global Jewish community in combatting child sexual abuse

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MEDIA RELEASE

Children banned from Cheder Levi Yitzchok school after complaining of sexual abuse

Students from a small faith-based school in south-east Melbourne have been banned from attending after their parents failed to agree to a demand from the school gagging them from speaking about child sexual abuse allegations and cutting them off from support they were receiving.

Last week, the Principal of the Cheder Levi Yitzchok school in St Kilda, Eliezer Kornhauser, told the parents in a letter that “your children are no longer welcome to attend the school” and that “the continued presence of your children at the school is untenable due to your conduct”.

At the start of November, after meeting with Kornhauser and expressing concerns about the safety of their children, the family were sent a Memorandum of Understanding which required them to “not communicate allegations about the school, its students or staff to any third party which is not an Authority mandated by law to be notified of such an event (or a professional engaged to provide allied health services to the family)”.

They were required to “direct their concerns for the wellbeing of their children (in relation to child safety or sexual abuse) to the Principal of Cheder” or two other senior administrators but “not to any other staff”.

The concerns relate to the return to school of a student who is being investigated by police following reports by eight children who have allegedly been sexually abused in recent years.

In October, Kornhauser wrote to parents and staff advising them that “the best protection” for their children was to pray and to strictly perform certain Jewish rituals.

“The secular solution - education about child safety, protocols and procedures, visibility and vigilance (all of which are followed and applied within the school) - while vital, are not the ultimate answer”, Kornhauser wrote at the time.

Several of the incidents are alleged to have occurred at the nearby Yeshivah Centre, a Jewish religious centre linked to Cheder Levi Yitzchok, which was the subject of a public hearing of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

VoiCSA, the Jewish community’s advocacy organisation founded by child sexual abuse survivor Manny Waks, confirmed that it had been providing support to several families and staff members from Cheder Levi Yitzchok and the broader ultra-Orthodox Chabad-Lubavitch community.

A spokesperson said that the organisation was liaising with multiple Government bodies, including the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, and was asking them to suspend the school’s registration due to immediate concerns for the safety of children.

“Attempts to silence victims/survivors of child sexual abuse in the interests of protecting the reputation of an institution are abhorrent, incompatible with the minimum standards of a registered school and contrary to Jewish law”, the spokesperson said.

Referring to the Royal Commission's findings regarding the Yeshivah Centre, VoiCSA said that "we are seeing history repeating at Cheder Levi Yitzchok".

In 2015, the Royal Commission had heard from a witness, identified only as AVR, whose scholarship to attend the Yeshivah Centre was removed after notifying the Principal that he had been repeatedly raped at the school in the early 1990's. David Cyprys, a former staff member of the Yeshivah Centre, was convicted and jailed for those offences in 2013.

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MEDIA ENQUIRIES

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