

Press statement in response to IICSA report

2 September 2021

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) has carried out a series of investigations into safeguarding. IICSA has now completed its thematic review of child protection arrangements in religious organisations and settings.

As part of our continuing progress towards excellence in safeguarding, the Baptist Union of Great Britain chose to be a core participant recognising that independent scrutiny by the inquiry panel would provide evaluation and feedback of our policies, procedures and safeguarding practices across our member organisations in England and Wales.

Today, IICSA have published their conclusions from this thematic review, and the report is available on [their website](#). Our initial response is outlined below and over the coming weeks we will closely review the findings and identify any key points of action to take to our Trustee Board and to share widely with our members.

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Today's report from IICSA, based on the findings of their recent review into Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings, highlights the huge importance of good safeguarding policy and practice in all faith-based settings. We are deeply saddened by the pain and long-term consequences of child sexual abuse both as identified in the report and shared with us by survivors of abuse.

The Baptist Union of Great Britain are grateful that the inquiry has acknowledged that we are an example of an organisation with effective child safeguarding policies in place.

We want to thank the inquiry panel, legal team and staff for all of the work that has gone into the inquiry hearings, information gathering and report writing process. We chose to be core participants in this review, anticipating many opportunities to learn and improve, and we are glad to have benefited already from our involvement.

The Baptist Union of Great Britain comprises of 1,945 churches, 13 regional associations and 5 Baptist colleges, which are supported by a national resource. Each member organisation is an independent charity, but we work together and support each other in our commitment to safeguarding. We are pleased that the inquiry has noted that membership of an affiliate body, like ours, can bring significant benefits, and we certainly see this in practice. (Part G, Inspection and Oversight, 64.1).

With more than 100,000 children and young people attending our churches and community activities each week, we endorse the main recommendations of the report:

1. that all religious organisations should have a child protection policy and supporting procedures, which should include advice and guidance on responding to disclosures of abuse and the needs of victims and survivors. The policy and procedures should be updated regularly, with professional child protection advice, and all organisations should have regular compulsory training for those in leadership positions and those who work with children and young people; and
2. that the government should legislate to amend the definition of full-time education to bring any setting that is the pupil's primary place of education within the scope of a registered school, and provide Ofsted with sufficient powers to examine the quality of child protection when undertaking inspection of suspected unregistered schools.

In Part D, dealing with child protection policies and procedures, section 31.2 cites The Baptist Union as providing an ‘example of being an organisation with effective policies in place’ and with ‘structures in place at a local, regional and national level to ensure that its policies are implemented in practice.’ We are encouraged by this and spurred on to continue this important work to reach our goal of excellence in safeguarding.

We are currently working to find ways to gather more data on safeguarding incidents and concerns in our churches, recognising the challenges of this in a non-hierarchical movement. We will continue to be working with our churches, associations and colleges to gather and analyse this data and to use it to provide more targeted support for those who are victims of abuse in church and community settings, and to prioritise our safeguarding resources for our churches.

Reverend Lynn Green, General Secretary of the Baptist Union says ‘We will continue to work together at regional and national level to support safeguarding teams in our churches. We commit ourselves to protect those who are at risk of abuse, and to listen to and support those who have experienced abuse. We believe that this vital safeguarding work is part of the underpinning of our mission and outreach and an expression of God’s love for all people’. Lynn went on to say, ‘I also want to express our thanks and appreciation to our National Safeguarding Lead Rachel Stone, together with national, regional and local safeguarding leads for all their dedication and hard work over the years. Their continuing vision and commitment to working collaboratively is making a Kingdom difference.’

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