

The case of paedophile William Landman shows why Daniel Andrews's inquiry won't 'go where it needs to go'

ABC Investigations / By Russell Jackson

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For decades, the Victorian education department shuffled serial paedophile William Landman from school to school. (ABC News)

"The person who's running the inquiry ... we've given to her the power to go where the evidence takes her."

So said Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews last Thursday, explaining the role Kathleen Foley SC will play in leading the government's recently-launched Board of Inquiry "into historical child sexual abuse in Beaumaris Primary School and certain other government schools".

Warning: This story contains details of child sexual abuse

In the case of Beaumaris Primary, where a cluster of paedophile teachers abused alarming numbers of children in the 1960s and 70s, the evidence is likely to take Foley and her inquiry on hellish journeys that sometimes end in cemeteries.

And to be clear, those who survived, the loved ones of those who didn't, and the brave few who ensured this inquiry is even taking place, certainly deserve its fullest attention and respect.

But on launch day, even the inquiry's title, trailing off into vagueness, already begged uncomfortable questions. "Certain other government schools"? Which ones? Any and all to which, using the premier's description of Foley's role, "the evidence takes her"?

To be blunt, probably not.



Even a [cursory glance at the terms of reference](#), which Premier Andrews misidentified as "very broad", spelled out Foley's limited remit with crystal clarity. Presently, her inquiry is solely an examination of abuse perpetrated by the Beaumaris Primary offenders — at that school and 17 other government schools they were shuffled through — and the contemporaneous institutional responses to that particular abuse.

Never mind the painful, often traumatising legal ordeals such survivors have faced in recent years when they've sued the Victorian Education Department. The inquiry won't tackle those present-day indignities.

And never mind that the Beaumaris abuse represents a small fraction of the degradations inflicted on blameless children by the incalculable number of paedophile teachers who infiltrated Victoria's state school system in the 20th century. As it stands, those will go unexamined too.



On Thursday, Premier Andrews was asked about that bigger picture.

"They [the inquiry] can go where the evidence takes them," he repeated. "That's the way it was structured. But again, I just want to make this point, it was not for us to be naming a whole bunch of other schools. There needs to be evidence led, there needs to be a process."

Unfortunately for the premier and his education department, a mountain of evidence has already shown that child sexual abuse was rife in that "whole bunch of other schools". One law firm alone, Arnold Thomas Becker, says it is currently pursuing claims related to 70 Victorian government schools.

'It will go where it needs to go'

Two weeks ago, ABC Investigations revealed that the Victorian Education Department not only knew about the widespread sexual abuse of children in its schools in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, it spent at least three decades covering it up and enabling abusers.

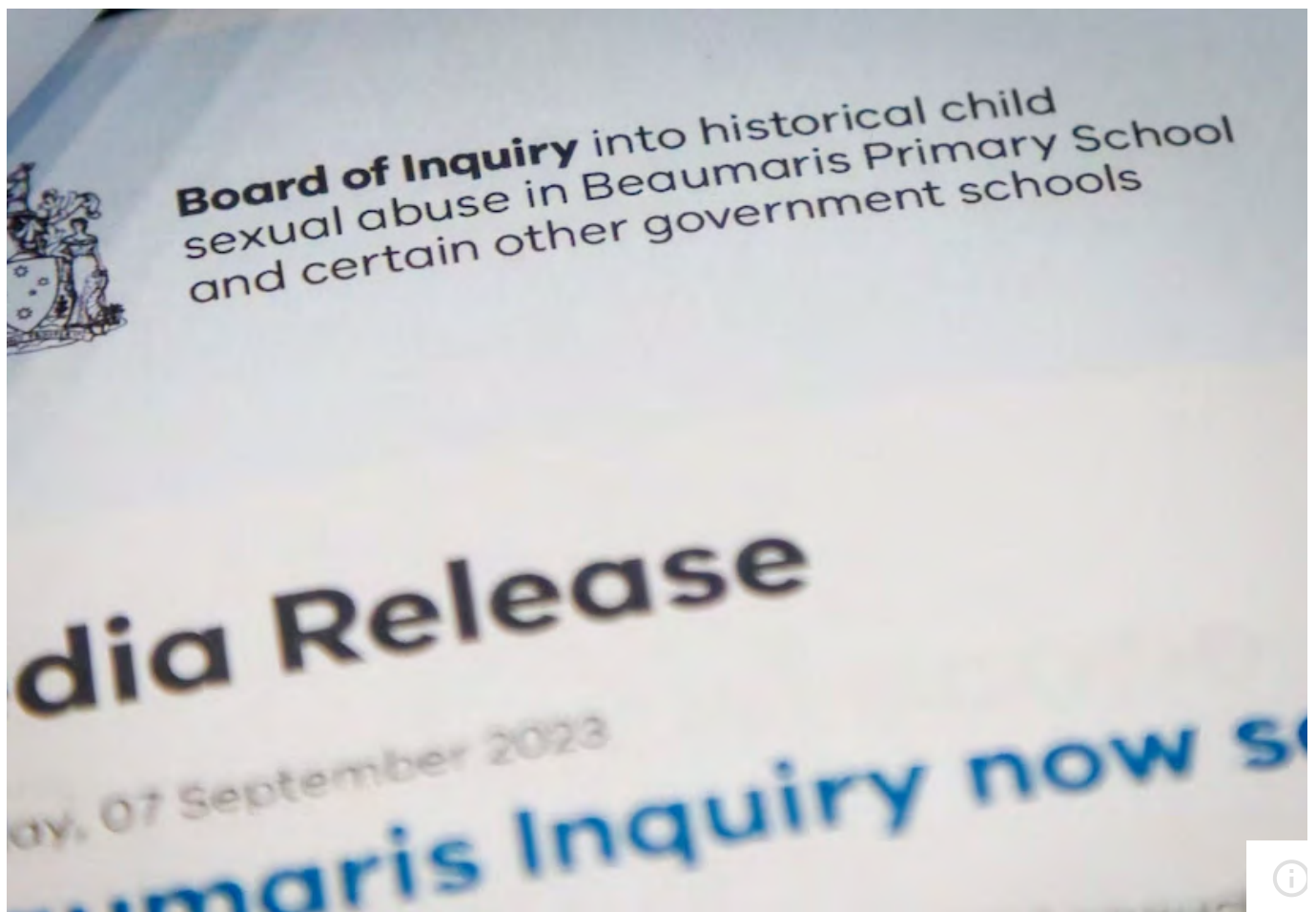
It was a system personal injury lawyers have likened to the worst excesses of the Catholic Church.

The [ABC's investigation revealed that recidivist child abusers often enjoyed 30-year teaching careers](#), being shuffled from school to school by the Victorian Education Department's district inspectors — even when whistleblowers begged for the horror to end. Instead, the so-called "boundary riders" of the system knowingly exposed generation after generation of children to life-changing abuse.

Even when paedophiles were removed from classrooms, we found, their employment terminations were often not accounted for in official statistics reported to the Victorian parliament. This means it is almost impossible to know how many sexually abusive teachers were sacked for their crimes. Hundreds of civil law suits suggest the true figure would be alarmingly high.

Since these details were revealed in their full depravity two weeks ago, ABC Investigations has been flooded with disclosures from survivors of government school abuse dating back to the early 1950s.

One was dismayed to learn that her abuser had enjoyed a 50-year teaching career. Many more wrote of emotional breakdowns, incurable addictions and lifelong traumas that have accompanied the loss of siblings and friends.



Others — the sort of people who never command media headlines — have simply soldiered on in silence. They are our parents, grandparents, siblings, neighbours, and friends.

We also heard from former teachers and Victorian Education Department staff who, when the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was announced in 2012, had been prepared to lift the lid on what they'd witnessed. Only, they couldn't. To their dismay, the royal commission didn't examine a single case specifically related to abuse in the Victorian Education Department system.

These could-be whistleblowers outlined a system in which district inspectors and the department's regional managers protected their own, routinely dumping paedophile teachers into other regional

districts where country children were treated as expendable.

Do you know more?

Contact **Russell Jackson** at jackson.russell@abc.net.au or please [use this form](#) to get in contact with the ABC Investigations team, or if you require more secure communication, please choose an [option on the confidential tips page](#).

Naturally, they now ask: 'what do I do with these stories if nobody wants to hear them?'

You wonder what such credible and well-meaning individuals would make of Premier Andrews's conclusion on Thursday that an inquiry into a mere handful of offenders will "go where it needs to go" and "look at the schools it needs to look at".

Such comments sit at odds with Premier Andrews's strong track record for confronting the problems that afflict survivors of institutional childhood sexual abuse. Even personal injury lawyers have commended his removal of longstanding time restrictions on abuse claims. Survivors whose advocacy campaigns have landed in his office testify to his personal decency.



But even as the state's debts mount, and Andrews's thoughts perhaps turn to leadership succession planning, he will continue to face calls for a dedicated, root and branch investigation of this avoidable travesty.

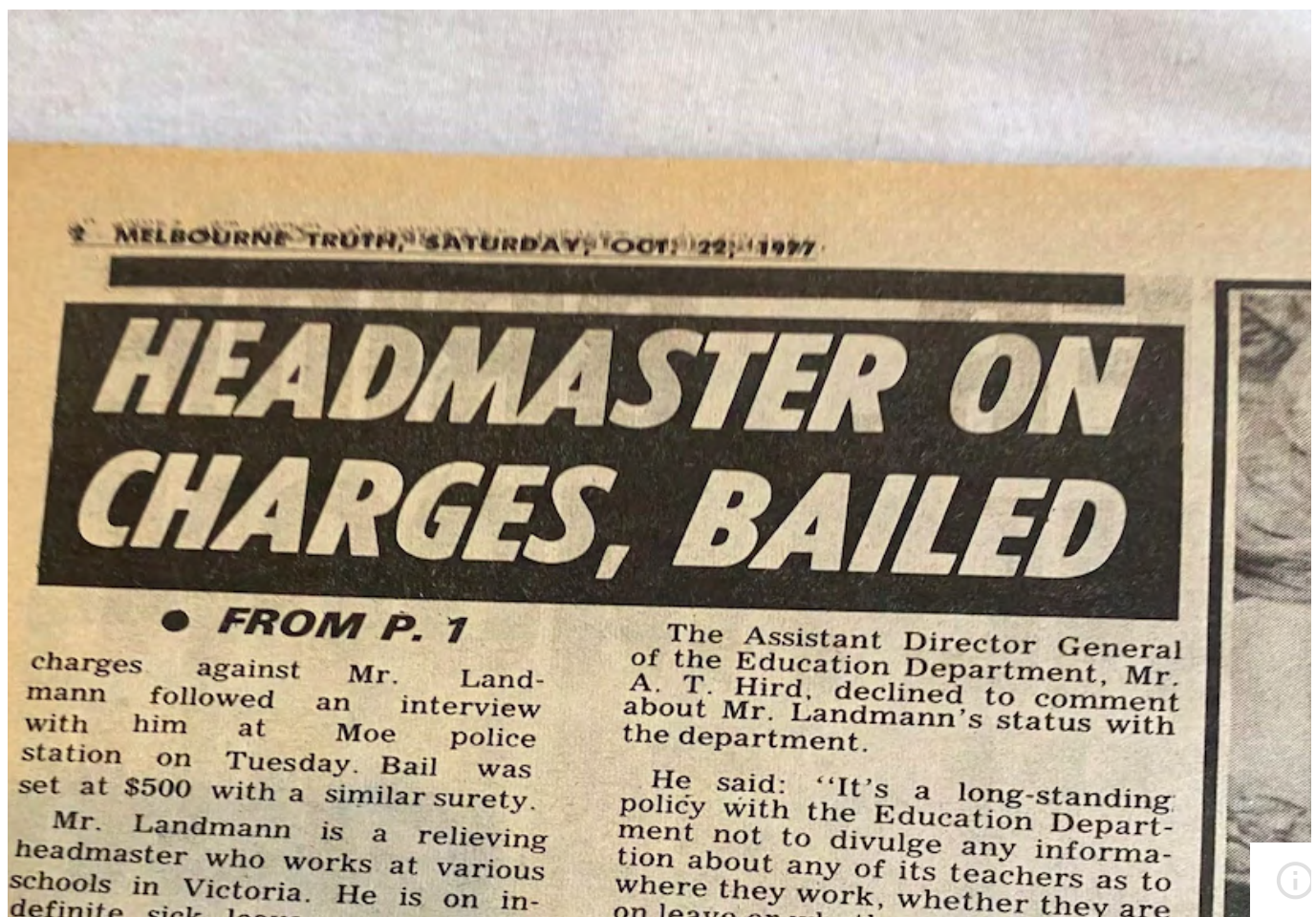
Because the simple fact is that even those who've spent years understanding the trail of devastation caused by child sexual abuse in the Victorian school system are constantly surprised by the shameful stories that keep emerging from the past.

Right now, Victoria has a \$4.5 million inquiry whose small staff will be asked to untangle a web of horrors related to a single cluster of offenders. It would be ludicrous to expect it, in its current form, to examine possibly hundreds more and provide adequate support to survivors.

'The community will naturally feel outraged'

Among the more extraordinary stories brought to the attention of ABC Investigations in the past fortnight, but by no means exceptional, was that of a former Victorian Education Department teacher and headmaster named William Stuart Landman (sometimes spelled Landmann).

Landman's story receded from public view 45 years ago, but there was a brief period in which it must have shocked Melbourne. In October 1977, a particularly lurid front-page headline in local tabloid newspaper The Truth screamed: "Headmaster charged over girl pupils — 43 counts".



It detailed charges of wilful and obscene exposure, indecent assault, gross indecency and unlawful assaults. They were committed by Landman against more than a dozen girls aged eight to 11 years old in the course of just four months at Chelsea Primary, a Victorian government school in Melbourne's bayside south-east.

The Truth's reporter did not have much information to work with — the department's assistant director general A.T. Hird was quoted saying "it's a long-standing policy with the Education Department not to divulge any information about any of its teachers" — but he gathered some telling details: "Mr Landman is a relieving headmaster who works at various schools in Victoria" and "is on indefinite sick leave".

To say William Landman worked at "various schools" is a great understatement. Sources familiar with his case this week told ABC Investigations he was a sexual predator and incurable child abuser for most of his 34-year teaching career, but was shuffled all over the state regardless. Somehow, they say, Landman even assaulted children in a period when the Victorian Education Department assigned him correspondence teaching jobs to keep him away from classrooms.



One source said Landman's offending was common knowledge at the Victorian Education Department by 1960, when during a posting in the department's recruitment office, he was caught exposing himself to teenagers being interviewed for trainee teacher positions. For four years, Landman was given a position at the Turana youth justice centre, teaching Melbourne's most vulnerable.

Public records indicate that between 1944 and 1959, Landman taught at the primary schools in Auburn, Auburn South, Deepdene, Malvern, South Melbourne, Mt Evelyn, Clarinda and Preston East.

After his time in the Department's recruitment division, Landman moved into the visual education branch in 1962, worked as a correspondence teacher between 1963 and 1971, at Turana from 1971 to 1974, and from 1974 at Moe Special School (now Baringa Special School). It was as a relieving headmaster that he landed at Chelsea Primary in 1977.

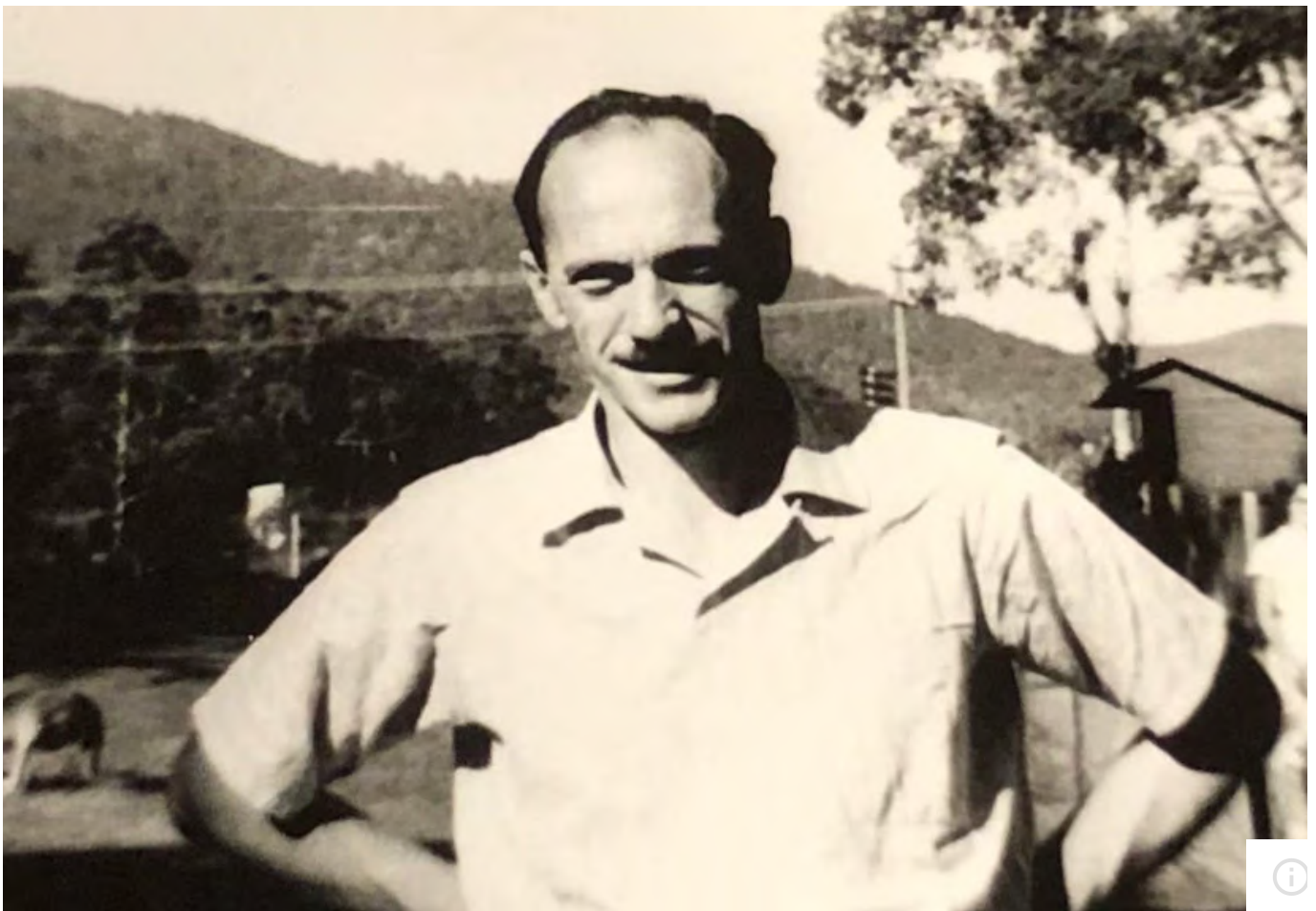
By the time of his conviction on 22 counts of child abuse in August 1978, William Landman's sentence of three and a half years with a minimum of 12 months was a landmark case in Victoria. In those days of discredited child witnesses and good behaviour bonds, jail time was considered severe punishment.

So too was the dressing down from Judge Ogden of Melbourne's County Court, who suggested the establishment of a specialised centre for treating "sexual deviants" like Landman.

According to one report, the court heard that Landman had "masturbated to the point of ejaculation in his headmaster's office in front of students who were either in the room or looking through the window" and indecently assaulted girls in the same room — assaults that a police source familiar with the case told ABC Investigations had been endured by the girls both alone and in pairs when they were regularly called into Landman's office.

Sexual assault support services:

- [1800 Respect national helpline:](#) 1800 737 732
- [Lifeline \(24 hour crisis line\):](#) 131 114
- [Beyond Blue:](#) 1300 224 636



Least surprising of all to those who knew of Landman's offending, Judge Ogden was "told by psychiatrists that Landmann had a 30-year history of disturbed and erotic behaviour and suffered from a complexity of sexual problems".

Judge Ogden concluded: "The community will naturally feel outraged at your behaviour."

Outraged, yes, but probably not aware of the most galling aspect of Landman's teaching career, which was that he never should have been let in a classroom at all.

This week, an ABC Investigations search of public records found that in 1944, when Landman was an 18-year-old trainee teacher bound by the supposedly strict regulations of the Victorian Education Department's 12-month probation system, he pleaded guilty to a charge of burglary.



Under the Registration of Teachers and Schools Act of the time, this surely would have qualified Landman for removal under a provision for those "guilty of conduct unbecoming a teacher". Two years later, the Teaching Service Act of 1946 was equally clear: the education minister should "dispense with the services of any student teacher for misconduct".

Yet, the Victorian Education Department simply waved Landman through, promoting him and shuffling him around the state for four decades until he became, for a time, the state's most infamous headmaster.

You might ask: "why does a story like this still matter?"

The simple answer is that the knock-on effects of such crimes are still being felt now; the youngest of Landman's government school victims are women in their mid-50s now, and their suffering should matter to all of us.

We should be asking another question: how many other children were abused by William Landman across his inexplicable career in Victorian government schools?

Sadly, without a dedicated inquiry that accounts for him and all the other William Landmans of the Victorian Education Department, we may never know.

Do you have more information about this story? Contact Russell Jackson at jackson.russell@abc.net.au

