



The leader of a paedophile ring which sexually abused young children and shared the images has been jailed.

Colin Blanchard, 40, of Rochdale, admitted a string of sex offences. He received an indeterminate sentence and must spend at least nine years in jail.

Two women were also sentenced. Tracy Lyons, 41, of Portsmouth, was jailed for seven years and Tracy Dawber, 44, of Southport, for four years.

Plymouth nursery worker Vanessa George, 40, was jailed in 2009.

She received an indeterminate sentence, as did the fifth member of the ring, 40-year-old Angela Allen, of Nottingham. They were given minimum terms of seven years and five years respectively.

'Svengali-like influence'

Mr Justice Royce, sitting at Bristol Crown Court, said Blanchard was guilty of "breathtaking depravity", and described him as "warped, wicked, dangerous, devious and manipulative".

He told the three defendants: "This case involving the three of you, together with Vanessa George and Angela Allen, has caused widespread revulsion and disbelief.

"Your influence, Colin Blanchard, described this morning as Svengali-like over four separate women so they engaged in sexual abuse of children [of] such tender years, is frightening.

"It is more extraordinary when one appreciates you never actually met three of them face to face.

"It is beyond the ken of decent people how any of you could stoop as disgustingly low as you did."

Prosecutors described five defendants as being involved in "one of the most sickening paedophile rings this country has seen".

Blanchard, a father-of-two, met the women over the internet and convinced them to sexually assault young children and send him the images.

The ring was broken when a colleague of Blanchard found child sex abuse images on his computer in June 2009 and called police.

'Dim woman'

The net closed in on the others when detectives identified George, Lyons, Dawber and Allen as being the other members.

George - who was described as being obsessed with Blanchard - abused young children at Little Ted's nursery in Plymouth.

Ex-prostitute Allen and mother-of-nine Lyons also assaulted youngsters to please Blanchard, an IT consultant. The two women were in regular contact on Facebook.

Dawber had a face-to-face relationship with Blanchard after meeting him on Facebook. She sexually assaulted a child and allowed Blanchard to take pictures of the abuse on his mobile phone.

Blanchard admitted taking indecent photographs of children, distribution of an indecent image and sexual assault of a child under the age of 13. He had previously admitted 19 other sex abuse charges.

Dawber, a former care worker and grandmother, was convicted in October of sexual assault, arrangement or commission of a child sex offence and five offences of permitting an indecent image to be taken.

Lyons admitted assault of a child by penetration, sexual assault of a child under 13, causing a child under 13 to engage in sexual activity and three offences of distributing indecent photographs of a child.

George was jailed in December 2009 after admitting seven sexual assaults on children and six counts of distributing and making indecent pictures of children. Allen admitted four child sex assaults and distributing an indecent image.

Greville Davis, for Blanchard, said his client was a "broken man" who had been diagnosed by a psychiatrist as suffering from bipolar disorder.

Stephen Smyth, representing Lyons, said Blanchard had a "Svengali" hold over his client, who was a "dim woman".

Anne Brown, defending Dawber, said her client had grown dependent on Blanchard after being manipulated by him and had "stepped over the boundary".

In his summing up, the judge said Blanchard had encouraged Vanessa George into abuse

which "shook Little Ted's nursery and those in Plymouth to the roots".

Mr Justice Royce told Blanchard: "Even though, once drawn in by you, they played a full part. If there is a predator in this, it is undoubtedly you.

"The sentence is an indeterminate sentence of prison for public protection. It is in effect a life sentence."

If the parole board is not satisfied he is safe to be released, Blanchard could spend the rest of his life in prison, the judge added.

"There would be many who would say that is no more than you deserve," he said.

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