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# Sexual, physical abuse alleged at deaf school

*Lawyer says he plans to launch lawsuit against provincial government*

By **Stephanie Hounsell**  
 CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

A lawyer says he plans to launch a class action lawsuit on behalf of former students of E.C. Drury School for the Deaf who allege they were abused.

Saskatchewan-based lawyer Tony Merchant told the *Champion* he has been contacted by former students of Milton's school for the deaf who allege they were physically and sexually abused.

He said he expects to file a class action lawsuit against the Ontario government within a couple of months.

Merchant wouldn't say how many students have come forward or when

the abuse is alleged to have taken place.

What he did say is that the primary claim against the Milton school is "female sexual wrongdoing" and physical abuse occurring sometime between 1963 and 1996.

The allegations involve "girls with significant sexual contact with older male students and male staff in some instances," Merchant said.

Former students from the school are not alleging any of the sex acts were forced, he said.

Merchant said the Ontario government should have known the school structure created an environment conducive to abuse.

"It's our submission (the government) ought to have known it was a prescription for trouble," he said.

This week, Merchant filed a lawsuit against the Alberta government alleging physical and sexual abuse of students at the Alberta School for the Deaf.

He said he plans to launch similar class actions across Canada against provincial governments in the months to come.

Patricia MacNeil, a spokesperson for the Ontario Ministry of Education, said she couldn't comment specifically on the allegations, since nothing has yet been filed in Ontario.

She said students' safety is of utmost importance and that many safeguards are taken to protect them.

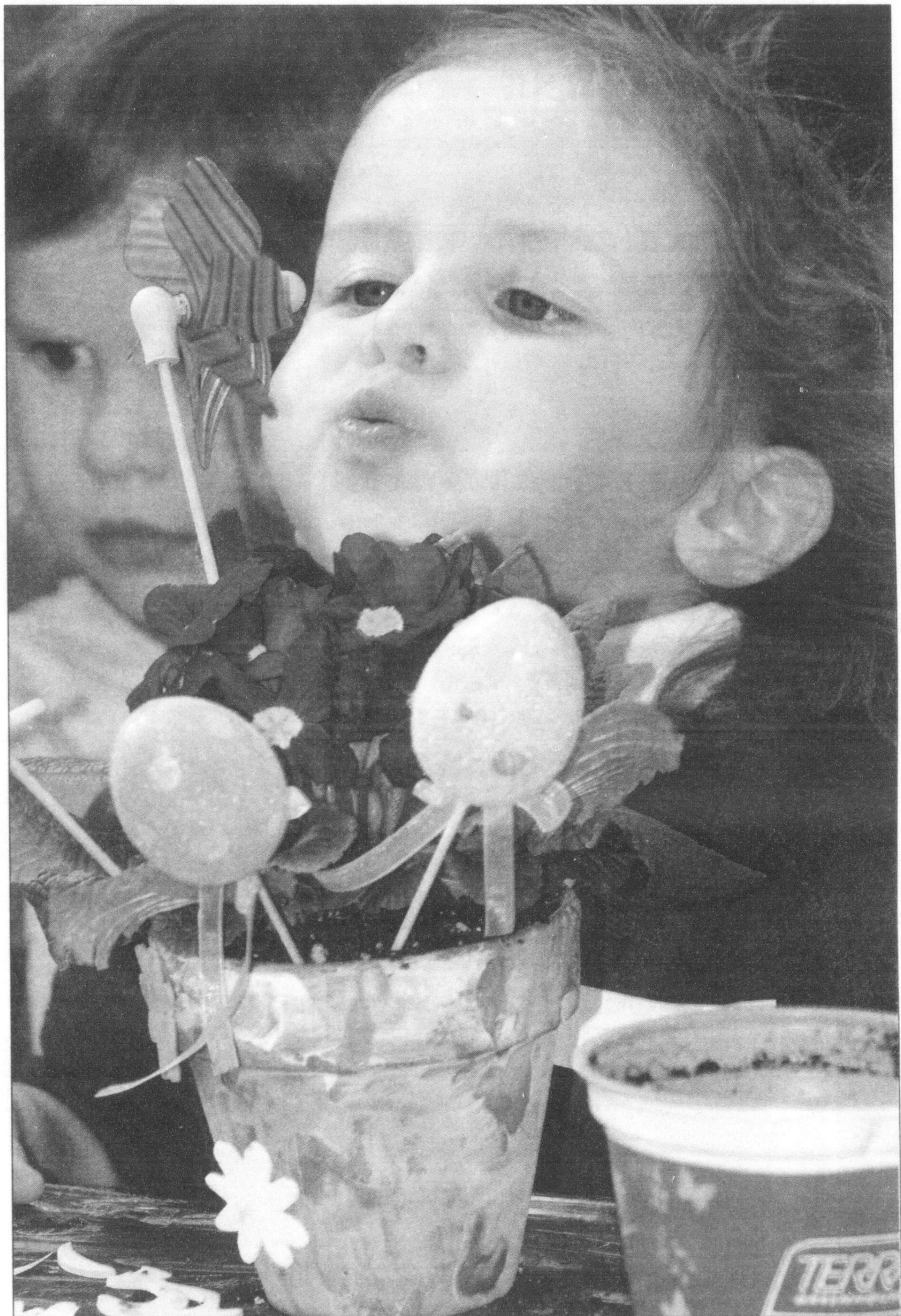
She added if a lawsuit is filed in Ontario, "Any allegations will be taken very seriously and investigated."

E.C. Drury School for the Deaf on Ontario Street is the largest of the 12 deaf schools across Canada allegedly involved, with about 15,000 students passing through its halls during the time the abuse is alleged to have occurred.

Abuse is also alleged against two other Ontario schools for the deaf.

Merchant said the allegations against

• see ABUSE on page A4



GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

**SIGN OF SPRING:** Three-year-old Amelie Walsh blows on her miniature wind spinner that decorated her flower pot during the March Break Paint-A-Pot event Wednesday morning at Terra Greenhouses. The first-time event, which was free, attracted about 50 children. After painting their flower pots, they got to add one of their favourite spring plants.

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