

Telephone 762 7300

CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE  
OF VICTORIA

AD:CL  
30th June, 1987.

Wantirna South Group  
Suite 2, 173 Boroonia Road,  
Boroonia 3155

CONFIDENTIAL

Rev. T.M. Doyle,  
Director,  
Catholic Education Office,  
P.O. Box 146,  
EAST MELBOURNE. 3002.



Dear Father Doyle,

Re: Holy Family, Doveton

Recently I spoke with Norm Lalor in regard to a number of incidents which have recently taken place at Holy Family Primary School in Doveton.

Whilst any one of the incidents on their own might seem relatively innocent, I am concerned at the increasing provocative nature of the actions of Father Peter Searson, and of the nature of the questions that he is putting to individual members of staff.

Please find listed below, in point form, brief information in regard to these incidents.

1. Lighting in the Classroom

During the early part of this term Father Searson removed half the lighting from many classrooms in order that the S.E.C. account be reduced.

Whilst the lighting is currently satisfactory, his action was a clear attempt to provoke teachers who, I believe, were genuinely trying to save on their electricity costs.

Further, he removed the lights from the downstairs boys' toilet block and went on holidays. The Principal could not repair this lighting situation until his return. The toilet block was in total darkness during this period. This situation has since been rectified.

2. Attendance at Mass

Father has continually questioned staff and implied disloyalty because they have not attended regular 8.30 a.m. Mass of a week day. He has likened such attendance to the situation which existed between Howard and Peacock and has asked the teachers to examine their priorities, e.g. God versus children - who is the more important? These challenges have generally been made at staff meetings.

.../2.

2.

3. During last week, and please note that Mrs. Lalie McGrath, the Principal, was on leave during last week, he began approaching individual members of staff, four of whom have had specific conversations with me and who have made specific complaints about these discussions.

In each case he approached the individual members of staff and expressed the wish to see them in the Presbytery after school. This included meeting with him after school on the last day of school. He asked each one about attending the 8.30 a.m. weekday Mass and indicated that in the interviews for employment they had said that they would be happy to do so. In one instance, he asked the teacher if she was still living at home. This was the subject of a specific complaint to me.

In another instance, he directed the question to the teacher in the following words: "I would like to know something about your faith commitment?"

4. He also interviewed a teacher, who was leaving to take up employment at Marcellin College. This teacher has been employed as a teacher-aide during this year and has just graduated from Christ College. The clear implication of Father Searson's comments to this teacher was that Father had looked after him in regard to employment and that this teacher had not attended Mass. Questions such as, 'Why haven't you been to weekday Mass?' and 'If God asked you why you hadn't been to Mass, what would you say?' were asked.

He also commented that he (Father) was disappointed with the young people who do not "listen to the chief" or "take orders from the chief". "They go their own way for their own priorities". He noted that none of the young teachers turned up for his Jubilee. He further indicated that this teacher's time at Doveton was heavily balanced on Father's side and that he was clearly disappointed with the balance sheet as this teacher was leaving. This particular teacher was particularly upset at the character and professional inferences that were being made.

#### 5. Reconciliation

The school recently held a First Reconciliation evening and it was found during the afternoon that one of the children had not presented their Baptism Certificate from Sydney. Father Searson, without permission of the parents, immediately took the child across to the church and baptised the child in the presence of the Acting Principal. Needless to say, the school and the parents are upset by this action. The parents have not spoken to me in regard to this matter.

.../3.

3.

On the same day, Father instructed another child, who had recently enrolled in the school, not to come to Confession without knowing the correct Act of Contrition for Holy Family Parish Doveton.

7. School Debt

Father has, on a number of occasions, announced that the school debt for 1986 was in excess of \$20,000 and has clearly implied that Graeme Sleeman was responsible for such a debt. It is clear that the debt of the school was not more than \$2,000 and that this statement of his is grossly incorrect.

Whilst we still do not have a precise figure, it is my hope that he will publicly announce the debt as soon as such figure becomes available. Father knows the statement of \$20,000 to be incorrect, and yet he mentioned it again at a public meeting two weeks' ago.

8. Holiday Pay Arrangement

I have had discussions with Father on a number of occasions in regard to holiday pay arrangements and he has agreed that, if money is in the accounts, he will pay the teachers in advance when pay days are during holidays.

Again this term he has issued post-dated cheques. I am not sure of the current balance of account in the parish, but this act has been seen as a further provocation on the part of Father toward his staff.

There are many more minor incidents that I could quote, however, the above, I believe, demonstrates Father's inability to be able to cope with the role of employer in a competent fashion in this school. He has a fine staff of dedicated Catholic educators. He continually provokes them, tests their loyalty and questions their personal life styles. He undermines the morale of the school by his questions and lack of affirmation. If affirmation is given, it is on the basis you have done well, but you could do better. There is no doubt in my mind that many teachers in the school will be looking for alternate employment in 1988.

I wish to advise that whenever a complaint comes my way, I always indicate my preparedness to take it up with Father Searson. In each of the above instances the parties concerned have not wished me to do so because of fear of retribution. Those concerned are aware that I am forwarding notes in regard to their complaints to you as Director of the Catholic Education Office of Victoria.

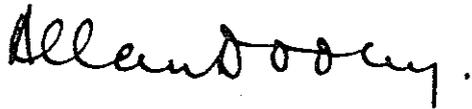
.../4.

4.

The discussions which took place last year between myself, the staff and Father Searson have resulted in no change in his approach whatsoever, and the recurrence of a number of matters which were causing teachers concern last year, concerns me greatly.

I shall keep you informed of any further contact I have with the school.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Allan Dooley".

Allan Dooley,  
Educational Consultant.