

STATEMENT OF:

MARTIN AARTSEN

REDACTED

I was appointed as a classroom teacher at St Ann's in September 1984.

I took over Claude Haman's class when he was appointed Principal.

I was interviewed and appointed by the then Principal REDACTED

My interview with the Principal was a one-to-one interview, which has been, to my understanding, the usual practice at all times at St Ann's.

I became Senior Assistant to Claude Haman on 20th May 1991. There is no Deputy Principal position at St Ann's. The position of Senior Assistant was the next most senior position to that of Principal. The position does not involve the usual responsibilities of a Deputy Principal because it is a full-time teaching position with other administrative responsibilities.

I recall meeting Brian Perkins immediately after he was appointed. Claude Haman introduced him to the staff as the new bus driver. That was in 1986. I am reasonably sure that he was appointed as permanent part-time bus driver (and not as a volunteer) from the outset.

I had nothing to do with the appointment of Brian Perkins. I assume Claude Haman interviewed him alone.

I have no specific knowledge of any strict policy or practice in relation to staff appointments. My role has been concerned with appointing relief teachers on a needs basis.

Claude Haman discussed the day-to-day curriculum and staff issues and student behaviour management matters with me, but the appointment of staff members was the Principal's function.

I never at any time had any reason to be suspicious of Brian Perkins. On the contrary, I recall having spoken to several staff members who congratulated him for the extra work which he did around the school. I was also aware that the President of the Parents and Friends association thanked Brian Perkins for all the weekend work he did for the Parents and Friends, such as taking part in working bees etc.

Perkins was held in high regard as a worker for the school. He was generally regarded as "a good bloke".

When Claude Haman was informed by the police of the complaints against Perkins in 1991, I am pretty sure that Claude kept a file on the subject. A short time after the police visit Claude told me he was keeping a file of his notes. He told me it was at the back of the desk drawer on the right-hand side of his desk.

I have some recollection of seeing that file but not of reading it.

I cannot recall what colour it was. It is possible it was a notebook rather than a file.

To the best of my recollection it contained notes of what Claude did and said after the police visit.

I have a recollection of seeing Claude writing notes in that file or notebook.

After the police visit, I have a strong recollection of Claude and me going to the office of Family and Children Services which was somewhere behind the Glandore Community Centre. I recall we spoke to some social workers about what the police had told Claude.

At that time I believed the alleged victims were MX and LH who had been going away on weekends with Brian Perkins.

I am aware that Brian Perkins was offering weekend respite services to families and was taking boys on camps. At the time I thought it was only the Family 3 who were involved in the camps.

I am not aware of any other staff member or adult going with Brian Perkins as a support person.

I recall that those two boys particularly were excited whenever Brian Perkins was taking them camping.

Perkins used to pick up the boys from school on Friday nights. I recall that the boys used to be ready to be picked up by Perkins after school and had overnight bags packed.

The school did not officially sanction those camping trips. I cannot recall any permission slips or any other parent authority being requested by the school in respect to them.

Brian Perkins dealt directly with the parents of those students who were on his bus run.

I believe that MA may have also been involved in weekend trips.

I later became aware that ME had become involved and reported Perkins to the police.

Excursions conducted by the school during the day always involved at least two staff members.

I do not recall Claude Haman expressing any concerns about Brian Perkins taking the students out on his own on weekends.

I don't think Brian Perkins used the school bus for those weekend trips. It was a private thing between Perkins and the families. I thought he had the best intentions to help those families.

I never suspected that anything wrong was occurring.

All the staff at the school had by then undertaken mandatory reporting lectures.

Had I been aware of any complaints by a student I would have reported it immediately.

When Claude and I went to FACS at Glandore it was part of what I considered to be the mandatory reporting process. My recollection is that we spoke to a man and woman at FACS. I recall that we caught a taxi to Glandore, which was not part of my normal routine.

When the police called and told Claude of the allegations and he then reported them to the staff, it hit us like a brick.

I was relying on Claude to do what he had to do as Principal, and I was supporting him.

Although I was not involved in any appointments prior to 1991, I am not aware of any practice of making police checks on applicants.

When I was appointed in 1984, I have no recollection of the Principal asking me anything about a police record. I do recall that she contacted one of my referees at a previous school in Victoria.

I believe that Robert Hawkes may have been in the school for only one day. I believe I saw him for a brief moment on that day. At the time I had no knowledge of his background or past record. He was a volunteer working in another class and I had no involvement with him.

REDACTED has told me that he was asked to leave the school. She told me she had an uncomfortable feeling about him.

When I took over from Claude Haman as Acting Principal later in 1991 I was aware that Claude kept all the present and past staff files in the drawers on the right-hand side of his desk. I had no need to look at them because I was very much acquainted with the current staff. I had to hit the ground running and was flat out trying to run the school without spending time looking at old records.

After I took over as Acting Principal I had no reason to consider the policies and practices on appointment of staff. That was not a relevant issue because I was not to be involved in any appointments.

There was a good deal of information available in the Catholic Education Office folder on employment issues if I needed anything.

I have no recollection of being on the Board of Management in the early years prior to 1991. I am very sure that I was not on the Board when the discoveries about Perkins were made.

Irrespective of whenever I joined the Board, I have no recollection of any of the Perkins issues being discussed at the Board.

I assumed that Claude had not been able to speak about those issues because he had told me of a police warning to him that if he discussed the matter it might interfere with their progress towards an arrest.

We (the staff) were all waiting for Perkins to be arrested. It was very frustrating for the staff and for Claude that there appeared to be no satisfaction following the raising of the allegations. We were waiting for the police to act, but it seemed that Perkins had got away.

I gained that impression from my discussions with staff at the time which makes me sure that Claude had raised all those issues with staff at various meetings.

The husband of one staff member was a police inspector and she had expressed frustration that Perkins had not been apprehended.

I suspect that Claude Haman discussed the allegations against Perkins with the Board of Management at some time. It is the sort of the matter which I would have expected him to raise with the Board. Everything which affected the school to that extent was generally brought up with the Board. The Board was an effective management committee on which Claude relied for guidance on many things. Back in 1991 it was more likely that Claude went to the Board first rather than to the Catholic Education Office because we were a non – systemic school.

I do not know if Claude contacted the Catholic Education Office.

The director of Catholic Education was on the Board of Governors.

I have no recollection whether or not the matter was reported to the Governors at the time.

I have never been to a Board of Governors meeting and do not have much of an idea of what might have been expected to be submitted to the Governors in the Principal's report, although I have read a few of Claude's reports to the Governors.

Claude Haman had numerous meetings with Family 3 after 1991. NE had a lot of anger following the allegations.

I understand that Claude and NE came to terms with what had happened. By that I mean that there was a sense of forgiveness expressed by NE towards Claude and the school. She told me that herself.

At the time I thought that they were the only family involved in the allegations.

Although a social worker from Catholic Education Office had become involved, the staff received little or no support from the outside agencies. I cannot recall receiving any support from the CEO, the Church, the Police or FACS.

It may have been that Claude Haman got some support, but the staff felt that they had been left out of the loop.

I believe Claude Haman to be a caring and compassionate person who followed instructions and that he did his best at the time.

In his entire time as Principal he showed himself to have the utmost concern for the safety and dignity of the students.

I have a deep sense of sorrow and regret that I was not able, at the time, to identify that our students were not safe with Perkins.

I do not believe that any of the staff knew of his intentions at the time.

I have deep empathy with parents of the students involved and can relate to their feelings of anger and with their concern that they were not given proper information at the time.

Dated 2nd September 2002

Signed: 