

**Child Abuse Reference Team
Catholic Education Office Diocese of Toowoomba**

Meeting held on Tuesday 21st July 2009

The meeting opened at 4.00 pm

1. Present:

John Borserio (Director) – Chair
Robyn Sharpe, Principal, St Thomas More's Primary School
Margaret Battle, Principal, St Saviour's College
Sr Sue Flood
Dr John Davis
Phil Mulhall (Professional Standards) by teleconference

2. Apologies:

Sr Angela Ryan
Margaret Hendriks
Mike Byrne (QCEC)
Bishop William Morris
Barry Sheehan

3. Welcome/Prayer

Attendees were welcomed by John Borserio.

Prayer.

4. Updates and Current State of various issues as provided by John Borserio

NSSAB. The latest submission to NSSAB was completed on the 10th June. This is the third submission given that NSSAB required further information after the lodgement of the other two. To date there has been no response to this last submission. It is suggested that the Board could be waiting to see the outcome of the case against the Principal concerned. Following a query from Sr Sue Flood, John Borserio indicated that the Board were seeking information for the period 2001-2009. Information provided by Thynne and Maccartney has assisted the process of furnishing what has been required. To date the Principal, not because of any desire not to cooperate, has on the advice of his solicitor, declined to be interviewed.

John Borserio reported that on the 11th June when two NSSAB members visited St Patrick's School at Allora, he had an opportunity of visiting the school and speaking with them. The Board members in question were Professor Roy Webb and Tracey Jarrett. The ensuing conversation was conducted in a productive and professional manner. Following a question from Margaret Battle, John Borserio indicated that the focus of discussion included policies in respect of other diocesan schools. (This is an issue of some concern given that the policy covering schools is a generic – diocesan one.)

5. Internal Investigation i.e. The Investigation conducted at the behest of the Bishop

This investigation is not yet finalised and is continuing this week. This investigation team has not yet had the benefit of interviewing the Principal because his legal advice is to decline to be interviewed.

5. Principal

The first Magistrate Court hearing was held earlier this month.. The Principal was not required to appear and his solicitor sought an adjournment which was granted. The next hearing is set down for the 4th August at 9.00 am. The Principal's solicitor has now received the necessary brief of evidence required. It needs to be stressed that whilst this matter is heard in the Magistrate's Court there is no criminal charge but rather one in respect of the legislation and the possible failure to exercise the necessary professional judgement.

6. Teacher

The last hearing was in the Toowoomba Magistrate's Court on the 25th June. An adjournment was granted with the next hearing set down for 30th July. Whilst there is an expectation that there will be a plea of guilty, there are no guarantees as to what may occur. Following a question from Sue Flood, John Borserio indicated that the latest adjournment/s were initiated because of ongoing discussions/negotiations by the accused solicitors with the DPP.

7. Child-wise Sessions

These sessions are now completed in respect of schools and their communities.

April (Toowoomba; Warwick; Dalby)

July (Toowooba; Charleville; Roma)

All staff members across the diocese have had the opportunity to attend these sessions.

This Friday the staff from CEO will be attending these sessions.

8. Other

- Ron Rosentreter has returned to his position as Acting Principal at the [redacted]
- Both Assistant Principals continue to receive additional release time to assist current school circumstance. The school counsellor has been given additional time and is currently working with Years 5 and 6.
- The Visibility Audit of schools is now complete. Some schools are still to provide a response in respect of how any deficiencies are to be properly managed.
- The question of Library Resources is under development.
- This Thursday, Principals (Meeting) will be advised that that some of the financial resources for 2008 will be quarantined (\$750 000) to crisis management in the diocese. Included in this is an amount (\$500 000) to cover future class action suits (not covered by CCI) so that the Diocese will not be left exposed in these matters. John Borserio indicated that clarification is being sought from CCI regarding class action liability and questions that may arise if in fact the Principal is found guilty.
- Where counselling is being sought in respect of this current case that is being supported financially.

- Mindful of any future need all record keeping (hard copy) is being carefully logged chronologically.
- The media, (more particularly the local media) continue to take an interest, sometimes in a confronting manner, in what is occurring. Sue Flood asked about media interest other than the local media. John Borserio advised that responses were basically of a reactive nature and that all *holding statements* were approved by the diocesan solicitors before issue. Further, John Borserio commented that there had been some errors in media reporting but there was no point in entering into a debate at this time. There has been little radio or television coverage; however coverage includes newspapers, educational journals and websites.
- Margaret Battle and Sue Flood asked about the current role of the *concerned group*, and their level of activity. Phil Mulhall also raised some questions in respect of this *group*. John Borserio made it clear that all parents continue to be updated and have received written communication. The *concerned group* persist in wishing to question and debate points contained in outward correspondence.

9. Diocesan Focus

John Borserio requested that the meeting spend some time focussing on future diocesan matters that are directly linked with what has occurred. He indicated that whilst the Bishop, Parish Priests, Pastoral Leaders and Principals are kept fully informed; there is a need to look beyond the present

- a. to issues related to healing once the school is named in a more public way;
- b. to a possibility that processes (not necessarily policy) may need to be changed e.g. an employed child protection reference person/solicitor;
- c. to implications in respect students in other *church related* circumstances e.g. youth groups, camps, children's liturgies on Sundays etc

All present made contribution to the discussion about all of these protocols, questions of where the initiative should begin, consultation, and matters related to *codes of conduct* for those employed by/volunteering for the Church etc. The issue of the documents *Towards Healing* and *Integrity in Ministry* and their relationship to the discussion; was raised.

Phil Mulhall advised the meeting that

- ❖ whilst no overall *code of conduct* existed there were examples of very good initiatives
- ❖ a new document *Integrity in the Service of the Church* (2007 Draft) has seen consultation with and presentation to the Bishops Conference and the Religious Congregations
- ❖ the material will go to pilot and trial in three (3) weeks and this should be complete by the end of this year
- ❖ Phil advised that if there were groups in this diocese who would wish to be involved in such a trial; he would be happy to facilitate that

- ❖ It was agreed by those present that this would be a proactive stance and that it cements the fact that every agency in a diocese needs to have something in place

10. Additional matters

Sue Flood raised issues about future processes about student protection

Margaret Battle spoke of Student Protection in respect of terminology, the question of protection for the teacher, the school/system etc

John Davis spoke of the need to look to re-engaging those (young parents without children in a Catholic School) who may have been disaffected by what has occurred, those in the Catholic community who need reassurance that Catholic Schools are safe environments that value the dignity of each person.

The meeting closed at 5.00 pm.