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Review of Policies Practices and Procedures  
at  
Brisbane Grammar School

Minutes  
28 August 2000

In attendance: Professor Barry Nurcombe, Mr Sid Williams QC, Mr John Burge,  
Dr Peter Lennox

Dr Lennox distributed a copy of each of the following to attendees:

- i) Child Protection Act 1999 (which replaced the repealed Children Services Act);
- ii) Public Sector Ethics Act 1994;
- iii) Anti-Discrimination Act 1991.

Mr Williams suggested a need to ensure an environment and atmosphere where students and teachers will not tolerate abusive behaviour in any shape or form. With such an environment at the School this will be the best possible way of prevention.

The three key BGS policy documents relevant to the review were discussed.

Mr Burge noted

- That nothing specific is said in relation to racial discrimination in the Students' Handbook;
- School policies could be combined into a broader "child protection" policy;
- There is a lack of specificity about abuse and child /student protection policy. It appears that staff are now bound by letter of appointment although the letter of appointment could have something quite specific relating to child protection/sexual abuse/harm included.
- Education Queensland policy to be looked at as well as Board of Teacher Registration policies;
- An environment to be sought where there is an open agenda. Creating such a culture takes time. Addresses sexual abuse as a component in its own right. Documentation for staff needed which describes positive behaviour with a framework for cultural education. Suggest Code of Ethics; Code of Conduct.

Mr Burge will investigate the Public Sector Ethics Act regarding its applicability to BGS and the Grammar Schools Acts.

It was noted that all new staff appointed at Brisbane Grammar School sign a contract which does include the termination of employment at any time without notice in the event of serious misconduct which includes sexual harassment or discrimination towards any employee, student or other person, but is not limited to those outlined in the contract. However all staff are not locked into a contract as this has been a fairly recent development.



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*Can this apply to  
everyone if we  
make this a policy?*

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Issues of harm.

The meeting spoke of confidentiality between counsellor and student –

- If guidance officers (counsellor) in any way consider that there is the potential for harm it must be reported immediately to supervisor;
- Counsellor is to understand where responsibility lies;
- Mechanism of reporting to Headmaster - the Counsellor is obligated to report.
- The counsellor is an employee of the School and as such does not have the right to claim confidentiality clause.
- The counsellor is employed on the basis of providing a service to school which should not interfere with view of professional standing; not acting as an independent professional.

Professor Nurcombe spoke of patient/therapist relationship and the codes of conduct. He suggested three tasks for the committee:

- i) Issue of policies and procedures of recruitment of staff;
- ii) Policy reporting, dealing and handling of complaints/issues;
- iii) Promote an atmosphere and culture of openness at the school.

The following to be considered being included possibly into Terms of Appointment letter:

- i) suspension with or without pay in event of a complaint;
- ii) In the event that complaint is made it flows through a defined channel;
- iii) There would be a clearly defined channel but range of options as to how to get into this;
- iv) Letter of appointment to incorporate a code of conduct;
- v) A consent to suspension in the event of complaint.
- vi) Acceptance of an investigative procedure.
- vii) Incorporate a requirement that any complaint made to a member of staff must be passed on to the Headmaster;
- viii) Guarantee of confidentiality of source.

Mr Burge advised that Education Department does not investigate child abuse.

Opinion needed where employees of a statutory body were subject to requirement for reporting in the same way as employees of government are.

Mr Williams noted that

- At present Headmaster has no privilege or power to investigate;
- Duty of care requirement;
- Headmaster's only obligation is to report to police any suspected criminal act;
- Trivial complaints – within the Department of Education there is an obligation to report undertaken at ground level.

Need to get an opinion on the situation for each employer's statutory body.

Policies and procedures in recruitment;



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- i) every applicant must be able to provide criminal history
- ii) desirability of personal checking of references
- iii) pro forma application (cf medical forms) which has a consent to investigate; be able to make personal contact with people at schools where the applicant has taught.
- iv) The matter of timing in the process with regard to an applicant providing evidence of criminal history was discussed. It was suggested that applicants to be advised at the outset of any job application that they may be required to produce criminal history.

Re: Education department applications and interviews:

- After initial phase they will be required to provide the interview panel with a police check. This apparently is available from any police station for approx \$40. Queensland records are easy to get; however, there may be problems with interstate checks.
- A pro forma application with consent to investigate if invited to interview to be considered.

Dr Lennox advised that all reports of dismissal or suspension must be advised to the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration. At this stage this is not the process in NSW, VIC, or WA.

In terms of recruitment there needs to be as many things as possible in place for assurance.

Unpaid staff is a complex issue which may require an agenda and setting up of frame.

- Code of Conduct may cover these people
- Duty of care
- Make available to potential volunteers
- Non direct supervision role.

John Burge interested in the notion of ethics education knowledge noted some code of conduct code of ethics.

Dr Lennox advised that an Ethics Education unit is taught at Brisbane Grammar School.

There was discussion about whether there is a process of debriefing the School counsellor on her work.

Dr Lennox advised that the counsellor at BGS has opportunities for debriefing of cases she is dealing with. She is a member of the Pastoral Care Committee together with Heads of Year, Head of Boarding, and the Deputy Headmaster (Students). Her annual appraisal is with DHM(S).

Headmaster will talk through with Counsellor and DHM(S) notion of debriefing with centralisation of information for consideration.

Sid Williams has notes and will circulate as a draft. Next meeting Friday 15 September at 1.30pm.

