

Response to ASW

Chronology

At the end of the Step 14 Process (November, 1999) I had an interview with Peter Crawley. We discussed various issues that had been raised in that process, including a comment by Rex Ward that my teaching had lost enthusiasm. I had invited Rex to come and check for himself, as he had never been in my classroom. He declined to do so, saying that my assurance that this wasn't true was enough. However, his comment remained on my report.

Another comment made by Rex was that I was too close to some boys (not named). Peter informed me that there were rumours to this effect that he had heard; also that I took inappropriate photos of boys. I asked who had told him this; he declined to answer, saying they were only rumours.

In discussions about the photos, I asked him if he was aware that part of my job as Master in Charge of the Grammarian was to take photos. He had not been aware of this. I asked him which photos and he cited the example of the front cover of the Thistle of the previous year, which had a rear view of a semi-naked **REDACTED** on the front. I told him that I had no connection with the Thistle, that John Hunt had taken the photo and that Dr Paterson selected it as the cover. The first time I saw the photo was on its publication in the Thistle. There were several pictures inside that magazine of semi-naked swimmers, all taken by John Hunt. Peter agreed, verbally, that I had been maligned.

The other issue was about closeness to boys. He declined to mention names but the name of **REDACTED** came up. I asked Peter if he was aware that my involvement with **REDA** was with the active encouragement of his parents, that I spoke to his parents once a week and that I was also in regular discussions with **REDA** Year Master and with Gareth Clayton. Peter had not been aware of that. I told him of several other boys with whom I had similar relationships, all of which had begun or been fostered by the parents of the boys and that I was in regular contact with them about their sons. I gave him a list of names and told him that he was welcome to contact the parents of the boys to check my statements. He said that wouldn't be necessary. I also told him that in each case, I was also in regular consultation with Gareth, or their Year Master or Anne Cook.

Peter told me I had some fence mending to do and that I should go out and deal with the rumours directly. When I asked him how to do this, given that I didn't know who to speak to, he had no answer.

The next part of the process was deeply humiliating for me. I went to various members of staff, aware that some had been speaking about me but not to me, whilst not knowing which ones. I spoke to all the teachers in the English Work Room, plus Adrian Nisbett, Bruce Mclachlan, Gareth Clayton, Sue Van Strein, Jenny Earl, Cleve Mitchell, Amanda Hathaway and others. In each case, I had to explain that someone thought I was acting inappropriately. All of them expressed surprise and claimed it wasn't them.

The next event was the death of [REDACTED]. As many of you will know, I was close to [REDA] and his family. At his funeral I had many parents say to me that it was because of teachers like me, who openly cared about the boys, that they sent their sons to Knox. I also had two staff members ask me whether I taught/coached [REDA] and they expressed surprise that I cared about him despite not being his teacher or his coach. This perhaps reflects a prevailing view about care in this school, despite Rex Ward's comments that Pastoral Care is something we are all responsible for.

At the end of this painful interview process, which involved more than twenty staff, I wrote a letter to the Headmaster, where I outlined what I had done. He assured me verbally in response that the matter was closed, I had "spoken in the right areas", although he still declined to give names and that I had addressed the rumours head on. Two days later I got a hand written, undated letter confirming that conversation. I assumed that the matter was closed and not on my permanent record. I was wrong.

What follows is a chronology of my involvement with a student in Year 7 named [ASW]
[ASW]

- Mid First Term: I met [ASW] although I do not recall under what circumstances. Our relationship consisted of saying "Good Morning" in the corridor and occasional brief chats.
- 2nd April, 2000: I went to Year 7 Camp at Yarramundi and sat next to [ASW] on the bus. He complained of headaches for most of the trip. On arrival at camp we teachers were assigned to groups. These had been pre-assigned by Yarramundi staff and we didn't know which boys would be in our group until they turned up. [ASW] was in my group on the first day. Being ill, he only participated in some activities and spent a lot of time talking to me. I discussed his very obvious attachment with both Mark McCrossin and Bronwyn Steele who were present at the time, especially as he would come over to the adult group in preference to staying with his friends at breaks. On the same camp, I spent as much time with [REDACTED], who was homesick and spent hours every day crying. [ASW] went home with Isabel Deeble midday on Tuesday and I again discussed [ASW]'s case with Bronwyn and Mark on our way home that evening.
- Monday 10th April: [ASW]'s first day back at school. Concerned about his obvious level of attachment, I talked to [ASW] about appropriate contact and told him he needed to spend more time with his peers. I rang Mr [ASY] the next day to inform him of our conversation and to raise my concerns with him. Mr [ASY] told me that he had also been concerned, as [ASW] talked about me all the time, but only because I was not his teacher. He said [ASW] had done this (attach himself to a male teacher) the previous year, in Year 6 at his old school. I told him I was uncomfortable with [ASW]'s attachment and offered to cease seeing him. Mr [ASY] said "That would be too cruel", and asked me to merely limit my contact with him, which

I had already done. I immediately informed Mark McCrossin (as ASW's Year Master) of this phone call.

- 12th and 13th of April (Last two days of the term). ASW came to see me on each day and I told him that I was studying for a University test and could not speak to him. He asked me to e mail him to tell him how I went and, stupidly, I agreed. He told Mr ASY that I had done so, who rang me on Friday morning to ask me not to. I apologised for the lapse in judgement and again said I felt uncomfortable and was quite prepared to stop seeing ASW altogether. He said, "There was no need for that." He rang back 5 minutes later to ask if I would e mail ASW and tell him not to e mail me as "He didn't want to appear the heavy father." I agreed. I then rang Mark McCrossin and told him of this conversation.
- Tuesday May 2nd (First day of Term Two)
I saw ASW and put further limits on our contact as I felt uncomfortable knowing of his parents' reservations. He was unhappy but complied.
- Friday 5th May. ASW told me he had seen me playing squash with REDACTED (Yr7) at school and would I teach him to play. I told him that it was unlikely that his parents would agree but I would do so if he had their explicit consent.
- Monday 8th May. ASW told me his parents had agreed. I was sceptical and asked him to ask them again.
- Tuesday 9th May. ASW told me that his mother had said no. I rang Mrs ASZ to explain that it had NOT been at my invitation that ASW had asked to play squash and to clarify my position. She said, "It wasn't a big deal", that ASW had had a similar attachment the year before and that she hoped it would all blow over. I asked her if there was anything else I needed to know about ASW that would explain his attachment. She said no. I then informed Mark McCrossin about the conversation and the preceding events.
- Monday 15th May. ASY rang me to ask if I had been implying that their marriage was in trouble by my question. I said no, the thought hadn't occurred to me. I also told him that I thought ASW was cooling off. (In fact in the following two weeks I only saw ASW on three occasions for more than 10 seconds) I informed Mark McCrossin of this conversation who told me that in his discussions with Mr ASY, that Mr ASY had said, while he was concerned, that ASW was much happier about coming to Knox since he had been coming to see me.
- Friday 26th May. I received a letter from Peter Crawley at lunchtime instructing me to attend a meeting at 3 pm to discuss my behaviour with a student. He declined to tell me whom, although he later told me I should have guessed and been prepared. At the meeting I was told that a complaint had been made about the relationship with ASW ASW, although he declined to give details. He asked for my version of events, which I did my best to provide, although it was obviously not as detailed as the above. Peter

Crawley was unaware that I had offered to the parents to end my contact with ASW. He was unaware that ASW had done this before. He was aware that I had discussed every step with the boy's Year Master. Peter Crawley had already prepared a disciplinary letter, given to me at the end of the interview, which instructed me to cease all contact with ASW and threatened to terminate my contract if I did not comply. When I asked him what I should have done instead, he replied that in the context of our discussions last year, I should have had no contact with ASW at all.

Rex Ward had seen ASW follow me up from assembly on Friday afternoon while I was talking to Bronwyn Steele. ASW told me he had missed talking to me. Rex also saw me tell ASW to go away, our first contact since Tuesday morning. In the interview I was told I should not have talked to ASW then, despite not knowing at that stage that he was the subject of the interview. I asked the head what I should have done – his reply, tell him to go to class, which I had done.

In all this, I felt that I had been at pains to put ASW's welfare and my own professional standing on an equal basis. I had communicated my concerns to the parents, I had talked to the boy's Year Master and I had discussed clear limits with ASW about appropriate contact. ASW was plainly unhappy at the school and I had done my best to help him, including encouraging him to go and play handball while refusing to see him for more than a few minutes at a time. I wanted him to feel that he had a secure base from which to expand his integration with the school. Instead of being rewarded for this, I am now in danger of losing my job and have a permanent stain on my record. I was given no time to prepare a defence, nor were any of my statements checked for accuracy with the parents or staff.

The allegations from last year, still unspecified and from unnamed sources were raised again. Peter Crawley said I didn't need to know who or what had been said in those allegations as the important thing was whether he believed them and considered them reliable. They are therefore impossible to refute but Peter Crawley showed no interest in confirming my view of events, then or now. I also feel he has acted dishonestly in January by telling me the matter was closed, when from the wording of his disciplinary letter it is clear that those events in his view constituted a first warning.