

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

BRIEFING NOTE

ISSUE:

Investigation of multiple sexual/indecent assaults allegedly committed by boarding students upon other boarding students at Trinity Grammar College, a male gender-specific school at Strathfield.

BACKGROUND:

- On 5 October 2000, a notification was received by the Ashfield Joint Investigation Team (Ashfield JIT) from Strathfield Community Services Centre, (Strathfield CSC). The notification alleged a number of sexual/indecent assault offences perpetrated by two Year 10 boarding students upon four other boarding students whose ages ranged from 12 to 16 years.
- Enquiries with Strathfield CSC indicated that the notification had been received from Kate Pearce, School Counsellor at Trinity Grammar, on 8 September 2000, the last day of school term. The two main perpetrators had apparently made partial written admissions to Ms Pearce on the 11 and 12 August, 2000, copies of which had been given to the Principal. The Manager of Strathfield is reviewing the handling of the initial notification by Strathfield CSC.

KEY ISSUES

- On 6 October 2000, Ashfield JIT contacted parents and the alleged victims to arrange interviews.
- The four nominated victims were interviewed by Ashfield JIT, with three disclosing numerous offences committed upon them by the two main perpetrators. During the interviews, the boys also nominated two additional perpetrators and six additional victims.
- Ashfield JIT has since interviewed these additional victims and they also disclosed additional victims and perpetrators.
- Currently there are fifteen victims and four perpetrators.
- The 15 known victims/witnesses have been interviewed to date.
- The victims have indicated that the ongoing offences commenced in March/April of this year with the most recent offences committed in August.
- The nature of the offences range from Year 10 students bullying younger students through to holding them down and simulating sexual acts with implements upon their anal area. These implements are said to be made out

of wood, in the shape of a dildo or similar, by the main perpetrator in woodwork class. On no occasion has clothing been removed. None of the victims have reported injuries other than minor bruising and soreness although none have been medically examined at this stage.

- At this stage, all children interviewed have not wanted medical examinations. This offer will be available to these children.
- The RPA and Sydney Children's Hospitals are involved in providing support to the children involved. Mr David Taplin, Manager of the Child Protection Unit, has been involved and attended the meetings held on 13 October 2000 that are detailed below.
- One victim aged 16 years and also a Year 10 student, has alleged that the perpetrators have assaulted him approximately 25 times and on at least 10 occasions have forcibly and violently pushed a wooden implement in the shape of a dildo into his anus through his clothing. He has also been bound and tied up on two occasions whilst other students watched.
- Another victim aged 14 years, alleges that there have been at least 50 occasions when abuse has occurred upon him. Many of these incidents involved pinning him down and the perpetrators simulating sexual acts upon him through his clothing. There have also been at least 9 or 10 times when wooden implements have been forced into his anal area through his clothing.
- A third victim aged 12 years, has complained of being pinned down, tickled and hit with an implement but has not disclosed any incidents of sexual acts. Other victims have been interviewed and allege incidents involving varying degrees of physical and sexual abuse.
- In view of the nature of the disclosures, search warrants were executed on the school on 12/10/00 in an attempt to retrieve evidence.
- Meetings occurred on 13 October 2000, one as a JIT planning meeting, and one with school authorities. These meetings defined the planned actions to occur in this matter.
- Attending these meetings were Janice Stirling, Detective Senior Sergeant; David Harris, CPEA Intelligence Unit; Wayne Penniall, A/Director, Child and Family; Barry Ward, Manager Strathfield CSC; Cheryl MacDuff, A/Assistant Manager Ashfield JIT; Tania Ehsman, JIT; David Taplin, Manager of the Child Protection Unit, Sydney Children's Hospital.
- Also present at the second meeting was the Senior Master, Trinity Grammar School and school Counsellors Kate Peirce and Paul Mayne.

It was agreed from the planning meeting that:

- Police would seek AVO's against the 4 identified offenders.
- Interviews of other possible victims and witnesses (including teachers) will occur so as to establish the extent and severity of the abuse and identify further victims and offenders.

- Parents of some of the victims reside interstate and overseas and Ashfield JIT are currently attempting to contact them.
 - Interviews of alleged offenders will then occur. The anticipated time frame is expected to be another 2 weeks, ie 27 October 2000
 - The school would be asked to clarify the current status of the 4 alleged offenders, and to clarify what actions were being undertaken to protect and support current students.
- It was agreed from the meeting with School staff that:
 - A Protective Planning meeting would occur within 2 weeks, involving School and JIT staff. School Council representatives will be requested to attend this meeting.
 - The School would clarify the enrolment status of the 4 alleged offenders. JIT staff stressed that the school had a duty of care to ensure the safety of school students at all times in this matter.

Proposed further actions will include:

- Interviews of other possible victims and witnesses (including teachers) are continuing to establish the extent and severity of the abuse and identify further victims and offenders. Parents of some of the victims reside interstate and overseas and Ashfield JIT are currently attempting to contact them.
- Interviews of alleged offenders will then occur. The anticipated time frame is expected to be another 2 weeks, ie 27 October 2000.

ATTACHMENTS

- Draft internal Advice from JIT Police re this issue dated 13 October 2000 (written prior to the meetings above).