



NSW Ombudsman

Our reference: Y/2002/20

14 January 2004

Mr Peter Weekes
Principal
Knox Grammar School
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Wahroonga NSW

FILE COPY

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Web www.ombo.nsw.gov.au**Attention: Mr Martin Gooding, Director of Staff**

Dear Mr Weekes

Ombudsman Audit of Knox Grammar School on 16 and 17 September 2003.

I am writing to provide you with our final report in relation to the Ombudsman Audit of Knox Grammar School (the school).

On Tuesday 13 January 2004 we spoke with Mr Martin Gooding about our statement of provisional findings and recommendations from our audit which we issued to the school on 11 November 2003. I clarified with Mr Gooding whether or not the school wished to make a written submission or provide any further comment about our provisional statement. Mr Gooding indicated that the school did not think it was necessary to provide a written response and had commenced an action plan to implement all of our recommendations. We have now proceeded to make our final report.

This letter and the attached document 'Ombudsman Audit Assessment' constitute our final report and recommendations from the audit.

Audit Findings

The audit interviews that we conducted showed that staff were committed to the well-being and education of the students in their care. The staff indicated their respect of and support from the school's executive management team and we were impressed with the school's commitment to the professional development of all staff. The students stated that they felt safe at the school and they were all able to nominate staff members who they felt confident would deal with any concerns they may have.

The school had worked hard in implementing positive strategies to minimise the risk of child abuse and bullying within the school environment, and creating a culture where students, parents and staff felt comfortable in reporting any concerns.

The school had three handbooks: Boarding – Student and Parent Handbook; Boarding Staff Handbook; and a Staff Handbook which included comprehensive information on what was required from staff, parents and students and included information about a number of school policies.

Staff displayed a good understanding of practices that are inappropriate in the workplace and were clear about their responsibility to report allegations of child abuse against employees to the senior staff and/or the Principal.

The school demonstrated that it was committed to good practice and ensuring the safety and welfare of the students in its care. We have made some provisional recommendations for the school to consider. These are detailed more fully in the attached document 'Provisional Ombudsman Audit Assessment'.

We make the following final recommendations:

That the school:

1. Reviews and updates the school and boarding school child protection policy (refer to pages 4 and 8 of the audit assessment for suggested information to be included in the school's child protection policy). The updated child protection policy should be included in the school's handbooks.
2. Request that the Association of Independent Schools (AIS) provides the school with an updated version of its protocol for undertaking disciplinary investigations, if available and/or with information to replace outdated legislation.
3. Provides information and training to all staff about the school's code of conduct and relevance to child protection legislation.
4. Develops a central register for complaints, including child abuse allegations against employees (refer page 8).
5. Includes information about the complaints procedure (including allegations of child abuse against employees) in the 'Student and Parent Handbook', 'Boarding Staff Handbook' and 'Staff Handbook'.

The Ombudsman will also review the school's central register for complaints by June 2004.

As you may be aware, the *Child Protection Legislation Amendment Bill 2003* (the Bill) was passed in the Legislative Assembly on 3 December 2003. The Bill will result in some changes to what conduct by employees is reportable to the Ombudsman. One of the significant amendments has been the change of wording from notifying 'child abuse' allegations to 'reportable allegation' and/or 'reportable' conduct. The Bill is due for commencement in April 2004.

As some of the amendments will affect your review of your child protection policy, we would suggest that the school be mindful of the changes and wait until the legislative amendment is commenced before reviewing the section of your policies and procedures that deal with handling and responding to child abuse allegations (will be amended to 'reportable' allegations) against employees.

We will be providing information and a fact sheet about the changes in due course. You can also obtain information from the Association of Independent Schools. In the meantime, please contact us if you have any questions about the recommendations or require assistance in the future. I also encourage you to complete and return the

'Audit Questionnaire' that I have enclosed with this letter. It contains questions that are designed to assist us with the evaluation of our audit process.

If you would like to discuss any of the matters raised in this letter or in the attached documents, please contact Kylie Symons on **REDACTED** or Elizabeth LeBrocq on **REDACTED**

REDACTED

Yours sincerely



Anne Barwick

Assistant Ombudsman (Children & Young People)