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INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM

From : John Harley, Public Advocate
To : The Hon K Trevor Griffin, MLC, Attorney General
Date : 29 November 2001

Subject : St Anne's Special School

On Wednesday 21 November 2001 at 7 pm, I attended a meeting at Parent Advocacy, 5 Ninth Street, Bowden at their request (Karen Rogers, Advocate).

I met with 7 parents of children who had attended St Anne's Special School prior to 1991. Also present was Lea Stevens MP and her electorate office secretary Vic Symons. Linda Clifford of Parent Advocacy chaired the meeting. A copy of the minutes are attached.

St Anne's is a school for intellectually disabled children previously operated by Catholic Welfare. It is now conducted by Catholic Education.

This was the second meeting of parents convened by Parent Advocacy. The previous meeting was held on Wednesday 31 October 2001, the minutes of which are attached.

Between 1987-1991 a Brian Perkins worked as a bus driver and general factotum for St Anne's. It would seem that he was a paedophile which was discovered by police in September 1991. The Principal and one staff member were informed by the police of this fact. Perkins absconded and was not found until May 1993, when he was charged.

He subsequently skipped bail and was found in Queensland in 1998. The police do not propose to extradite him because of the cost and the fact that the only charge which they consider he can be convicted of is possession of child pornography. There is no evidence that he actually took the 300 photographs and videos himself. They apparently depict the children under his care. A 'situation' report is attached.

The parents permitted Perkins to have overnight and weekend care of their children. It seems that the victims were mostly children with poor or no verbal skills. Accordingly the likelihood of them giving evidence is highly unlikely.

I am informed by the parents that the Principal spoke to 2 parents in 1991 about the likelihood of their children having been sexually abused. No other parents were informed. I believe the police interviewed those parents also but no others. Somehow some other parents have recently found out and at the meeting at Parent Advocacy on 31 October 2001 one parent was told by the police for the first time that her son had also been a victim.

All parents gave testimony to the aberrant and sexualised behaviour they have experienced from their children. Now they have received this information about the alleged sexual abuse, they realise that such behaviour commenced about the time that their children were in contact with Perkins. Some of their individual stories about how the sexualised behaviour has affected their children, family, marriage and home life are horrific.

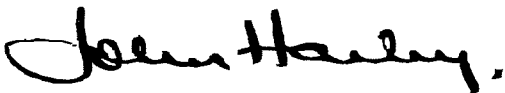
The parents are very angry about:

- The failure of the police to contact them to ascertain from photographs if their children were involved – and the failure to prosecute.

- The failure of St Anne's and Catholic Welfare/Catholic Education to advise them both in 1991 and recently or to offer any help, advice or support. (Attached is a copy of a recent letter sent by a parent to Catholic Education)
- The failure of the mandatory reporting system to alert the authorities to Perkins' alleged conduct or, if alerted, the failure by them to take away any appropriate action
- The failure of the Education Department and the Disability Services Office to ensure that St Anne's Special School had the appropriate systems in place and adequate staff training to deal with incidents of this nature.

The parents feel abandoned by 'the system' and are very bitter in their attitude towards the Catholic Education authorities and the police. They feel that because their children are disabled no-one cares. Where was the so-called mandatory reporting system under the Child Protection Act? Where were the Education Department and the Disability Service Office to ensure proper standards of education and care at St Anne's?

To restore confidence I am of the view that an independent inquiry should be instituted without delay. An internal inquiry will not receive any endorsement from the families and will be regarded as a further effort by authorities to avoid the issue.



John Harley
Public Advocate