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December 17, 2001

Mr Malcolm Buckby MP
Minister for Education and Children's Services
GPO Box 778
Adelaide SA 5001

*copy to
—
James
my desk*

Dear Minister,

I write to raise with you my concerns over reports of sexual abuse at St Ann's Special School and to seek the expert advice of your government in ensuring the matter can continue to be handled effectively to assist those affected by the alleged incidents.

I am aware that my Director of Catholic Education, Mr Allan Dooley, has already met with you and quite properly briefed you on the situation. I am also aware that the Member for Elizabeth, Ms Lea Stevens has also raised her concerns about this matter with you.

As you are aware, questions about possible sexual abuse of children in the care of St Ann's Special School were raised with Mr Dooley in July this year. He immediately set in train a formal process to explore these disturbing allegations, including reporting the matter to the relevant authorities within the South Australian Police. He also briefed me and as a result of this I also acted quickly to set in train the Catholic Church's *Towards Healing* process, a rigorous and professionally designed programme for investigating such complaints. The complaints refer to a period at St Ann's prior to 1992 and concerns by some parents that during this time their children may have been the victim of sexual abuse by a volunteer bus driver and casual employee, Mr Brian Perkins.

Since July, Mr Dooley and his staff have worked closely with the SA Police in providing information in an endeavour to have Mr Perkins investigated and brought to justice if the offences are found to be proved. He has also held many meetings with the parents who raised their concerns, the staff of the school, and with various other affected and relevant parties.

At all times the overriding concern of the Catholic Church has been two-fold. Firstly, I believe it is paramount to provide support and care for the children and their families affected by this matter. Secondly, I believe we must make every endeavour to work with the police, and with the government, to have these allegations fully investigated and the matter brought to justice.

As you would be aware, Ms Lea Stevens MP in writing to you and some others expressing her concerns, many of which I share, has asked that other parents from the school are informed of the allegations and that an inquiry be established. I can assure you that as Archbishop of Adelaide, I regard these matters with the utmost seriousness. I can also assure you that the Catholic Church would cooperate fully with any properly constituted inquiry into this issue.

Our advice from the Police Department, however, is to avoid taking any action that might jeopardise or inadvertently undermine their attempts to investigate Mr Perkins and have this matter resolved in the judicial system.

I am also acutely aware that some of the parents whose children have been affected are reluctant to have the allegations made public, at this stage.

Mindful that the matter needs to be handled in such a way that the possibility of bringing Mr Perkins to trial is not jeopardised, my position would be that investigations undertaken by all appropriate parties be open and transparent.

As well, Mr Dooley has informed me of his request to you that extradition proceedings against Mr Perkins be reconsidered by those responsible for making such decisions. This request has my full support.

We take seriously our responsibility to the parents who have directly raised this issue with us. And we have a wider responsibility to the previous parent community of St Ann's, who may be unaware of the allegations, the current parent community, and the wider school community, both in the Catholic and government systems.

Because of these and other factors, I am seeking your advice and the possible cooperation and support of the government to ensure that we achieve justice and healing for all those affected.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

+ Philip Wilson .

Most Rev P Wilson DD JCL
Archbishop of Adelaide