

**ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

**Case study 32: Geelong Grammar School
STATEMENT BY JOHN M COURT AM MB, BS, FRACP**

I refer to the letter from the Royal Commission Solicitor dated 18 August 2015.

In responses to the points set out in the Schedule to the letter I say as follows:

Part 1. Involvement with Geelong Grammar School:

a.

1. My involvement with Geelong Grammar School (**School**) was initially on an honorary consultative position responsible to the school Principal in about 1989. I was, at that time, a Senior Physician and Director of Adolescent Medicine at the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne. My association with the school followed a request for advice from the School, and I was nominated for this position by the Chief Executive Officer of the Royal Children's Hospital.
2. I initially met with the Principal Mr John Lewis on an *ad hoc* basis, responding to concerns from the school about overall health services at the School. I subsequently met regularly with the school doctor, who had a full time position at the School, and the nurses at the school medical centre at Corio (The Kennedy Centre) and staff of the boarding houses (matrons) responsible for the day to day care of the students. I reviewed medical practice and the provision of health care and the relationship of school staff and health care staff.
3. I also met regularly with groups of students, initially both boys and girls in year 10 to hear their opinions and concerns. It became evident that some girls were unhappy to have a male doctor and on my advice a local general practice was appointed to attend the school on a daily basis to provide the opportunity for girls to see a female doctor and for medical care to be independent from the School.
4. I subsequently made a comprehensive study of the provision of health care provided to boarders at the Corio Campus, and later the Timbertop campus, and met with senior school staff and medical staff and with groups of students on a regular basis to discuss this, including health education. This led to a half day each week at the school and other times in response to requests.
5. At this time I was appointed to a new position of Senior Medical Officer to the school. This position continued after I retired from the Royal Children's hospital but continued in private consultative practice. I was also involved in health policies and student health at a number of other schools in Melbourne, particularly in the field of drug abuse and general health education of students, but not in aspects of sexual abuse.
6. A summary of my position of Senior Medical Officer at that time is attached (**Annexure 1**).

b.

7. My role at the School has included responsibility and advice on all aspects of provision of health care, in advising senior staff about health matters when appropriate at the boarding campuses at Corio and Timbertop. I had occasional involvement, but only when requested, with the Junior non-boarding campus in Toorak.

8. I had weekly meetings with the school Director of Student Welfare to discuss any problems and the overall policies of health care. I was available to meet parents when requested, particularly when there was a concern about their child. I was involved with coordinating both physically and philosophically the health of students and their overall welfare and physical activities. This led to the new Well Being Centre aimed to coordinate health care, positive health measures and physical activity to provide a situation where they could discuss problems in a non-judgemental and non-disciplinary environment. This could make it easier for students to reveal sensitive matters such as sexual abuse. I developed a number of health policies, which included one on sexual abuse, and these were included in a published staff booklet (**Annexure 2**) and subsequently a version for the students (a "Student friendly version") (**Annexure 3**). There were many other informal policies in relation to specific concerns, including management of specific illnesses and adolescent problems.
 9. My regular procedure in developing policies was to provide a draft version and discuss this first with groups of students and later with senior school staff, including health staff, before producing the final version.
- c.**
10. To the best of my recollection, I retired from the position at the end of 2010.
 11. I have no current professional association with the School.

Part 2. Knowledge and understanding of the systems, policies and procedures in place at Geelong Grammar during the period of my association with the school.

12. My understanding is that the policies for staff and students on Sexual Abuse are set out in the following documents:
 - a. Guidelines for response to a claim of sexual assault.
 - b. Initial response of staff to a student reporting or alleging sexual assault.
 - c. Allegation of sexual abuse: Report form.
 - d. Concerns about sexual assault in school: student survey.

These documents are annexed to my statement (**Annexures 4 -7**).

- a.**
13. My understanding is limited to the response that would be expected to support and care for the student and that counselling from a school counsellor would be available. The response from the School is set out in the policy statement attached.
- b.**
14. My understanding is that staff were instructed not to make physical contact with any student, that interviews with students are only to be carried out in rooms where there is a window or open door so the room is visible to anyone outside. I was always aware of the general philosophy of responsible care for the students (**Annexure 8**).
 15. There was one instance in 2002 when the School was informed that a member of the staff had been involved in inappropriate sexual behaviour some years previously in Canada, though there had been no police or legal involvement. There were no concerns about the behaviour of the teacher at the School, but in view of this information he was instructed to meet with students only as a group, and subsequently he agreed to resign from his position at the School.

c.

16. I am not aware of disciplinary action for staff misconduct

d.

17. I am not aware of staff training on matters of child safety, but the Pastoral Policies book, available to all staff, addresses this. The relevant section of the book is attached. (**Annexure 2**)

e.

18. I am not aware of any formal policy on reporting allegations of child sexual abuse. I had no doubt any incident would be reported.

Part 3. The manner in which Geelong Grammar developed policies, practices and procedures concerning child protection during the time I was associated with the school.

19. The School had a senior staff member responsible for student welfare which would have included child protection. Heads of the Boarding Houses and staff had specific responsibilities in protecting students in their House, with a staff member on duty at all times.

20. As stated in my statement of my roles at the School above, in general, policies regarding health and safety including related to sexual abuse, were under review and development on a weekly basis. My procedure in developing policies was to consult with staff and discuss with students at each year level from year 9 to 12.

Response to Allegations

Part 4. Knowledge of all incidents, allegations or complaints of child sexual abuse occurring at Geelong Grammar and the responses by you or Geelong Grammar to those incidents, allegations or complaints during your period of association with Geelong Grammar.

21. I was not aware of any incidents, allegations or complaints of child sexual abuse at the School during my time at the school.

Dated: 27 August 2015



John M Court