Statement

Name: BIR
Address: Known to the Royal Commission
Date: 9 September 2015

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

2. I known in these proceedings as BIR. I was born on [REDACTED] 1971.

3. I was a student at Geelong Grammar at the Glamorgan Campus in Toorak ('the School') from 1976 until 1982, from Prep until Grade 6.

4. In around April 1997 when I was twenty six years of age I disclosed to my parents that I had been sexually assaulted by a teacher at the school, BIM, during a school activity. The sexual assault occurred when in 1980 when I was in grade four and nine years old. It took me seventeen years to be able to finally tell someone about the sexual assault.

5. After I told my parents they then contacted the School. We hoped the School would acknowledge, take responsibility, and apologise for the assault. We also wanted to know whether any other accusations of sexual assault relating to BIM had occurred, and whether he was still teaching and in contact with children. Over the next fifteen months, the School refused to acknowledge any of these issues.

6. We made an appointment to meet with the Principal of Glamorgan at the time, Philippa BEESON. This meeting was held at Glamorgan. Present at the meeting were myself, my parents, Philippa BEESON and Jo BREADMORE.

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7. At this meeting, Mrs. BEESON struggled to respond to our complaint, but did tell my parents and I that she did not have the authority to discuss this matter any further. She said that in order to get any further clarification that we would have to speak with the then principal of the Corio Campus of Geelong Grammar, Mr. Lister HANNAH.

8. I came away from this meeting feeling that Mrs. BEESON was not prepared, in any way, for dealing with a complaint of child sexual abuse. In retrospect I believe that any policies that the school had in place at the time were not sufficient to deal with complaints of this nature.

9. After several weeks, Mr. HANNAH had still not contacted us. My father contacted Mrs. BEESON and eventually he arranged a meeting with Mr. HANNAH. I recall that my father went to Glamorgan to meet with Mr. HANNAH. My father informed me immediately after this meeting that he spoke with Mr. HANNAH very briefly and was informed that BIM was not employed by the School in 1980, and that subsequently, the School held no responsibility.

10. At this point I began to realise that the School's intention was to delay any communication with us, and to deal with us dishonestly, by insisting that BIM was not an employee of the School; a statement that I knew to be untrue, as I clearly remembered that he was my emergency teacher in 1980. I believe that it was at this time that I contacted my Grade 4 teacher, Mr. Gary PETERS, who confirmed with me that BIM was teaching at the School in 1980. I then began to suspect that the School were acting solely in the interests of protecting their reputation. Consequently, I decided to seek legal advice in relation to approaching the School for compensation, as I felt this was the only recourse available to me.

11. On August 15th 1997, I met with Mrs. BEESON and Mr. HANNAH at Glamorgan with my legal representatives. At this meeting the School did acknowledge that BIM had been teaching at Glamorgan in 1980, but that as the assault had not occurred on the property of the School, that the School held no responsibility. At this point, I clearly understood that the School's intention was to distance themselves from BIM in any way they could, through whatever legal avenues possible, in order to deny responsibility.

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12. By this stage I had absolutely no trust that the School was dealing with me honestly and in good faith. I was certain that they were concerned only with defending their reputation and understood that they had no intention of acting compassionately towards me. I recall becoming frustrated, emotional and very angry at this meeting. I realised that any acknowledgment of the abuse I suffered and the effect it had had upon me would not be forthcoming from the School. I resigned myself to the fact that the only resolution I could expect would be the result of a legal negotiation.

13. On October 8th 1997, there was another meeting with the School between myself, my legal representatives and the legal representatives of the School. By this stage my relationship with the School had deteriorated to the extent that I felt the entire process was out of my control. My strongest recollection of this meeting is a debate between my Counsel and Counsel for the School, concerning the issue of which party had breached their duty of care, and was therefore responsible for the assault. My Counsel argued that the School had breached their duty of care, whilst Counsel for the School continued to argue that BIM was solely responsible. It was extremely distressing for me to realise that the trauma I had experienced was in no way going to be acknowledged by the School and had been reduced to a legal argument whereby the schools primary concern was to protect their reputation. Their secondary concern was clearly to protect their financial interests. They demonstrated absolutely no concern for my welfare.

14. On June 1st 1998 there was a final meeting between my Counsel and Counsel for the School. I did not attend this meeting.

15. On July 23rd 1998, I signed a Deed of Release agreeing to receive a compensation payment of less than half the amount my Counsel had originally requested and had indicated to me was modest. After over a year of protracted negotiations, in which the School had stubbornly focused on legal technicalities and intentionally limited disclosure of relevant information to me in an attempt to limit their financial liability and protect their reputation, I was frustrated, disappointed and completely exhausted. I reluctantly signed this agreement, as I felt there were no other options available to me. I did not feel that the School had acknowledged what had
happened to me in any way. I did not feel that the small financial settlement in any way recognised the pain and suffering the assault had caused to me. If anything, the settlement was a token of how little the School cared, and how heartless they were in dealing with me. I had tried to make the School accountable but I had failed to do so.

16. In particular, I resented the confidentiality clause in the document which forbade me from discussing the assault and the School’s response to the assault in both private and public. This has prevented me from contacting other individuals that I know have been assaulted by BIM at the School in the hope that they too may try to make the School accountable. It has prevented me from discussing an event that has had profoundly negative repercussions on my health and well-being, and impacted greatly upon my family.

17. The School’s attitude towards me was very distressing. If the School had been honest - which I naively hoped they would be in 1997 - I believe it would have helped the process of healing from the serious emotional and psychological damage caused by BIM whilst under the School’s care. By intentionally withholding information from me, by being dishonest and attempting to minimise the seriousness of the assault and deny all responsibility, the School caused me a great deal of stress and made my psychological condition much worse. I had hoped that contacting the School, and asking for acknowledgement and recognition would make recovering from the effects of the assault easier. Unfortunately it had the opposite effect and made things much more difficult for me.

18. Between 1998 and 2015, I had no further contact with the School. Earlier this year I read a newspaper article regarding a letter that the School had sent out to all former and current students encouraging them to come forward to the Royal Commission if they had been sexually abused at the School. I was surprised and very upset by this as I had not received this letter, and the School was fully aware of my assault in 1980 and my dealings with the School in 1997 and 1998. After I read this article, I contacted the School in the hope of speaking to Stephen Meek. I was told that he wasn’t available and I instead spoke to his secretary and left my email address, asking for a copy of the letter. Some days later I received an email from Stephen BIR

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Meek which read "Dear Community Member, I attach an important letter relating to the Royal Commission". I was disappointed, but not surprised that I had to make contact with the School in order to gain access to this letter, and that I had received a generic and impersonal response from Mr. Meek, when he should have been well aware of who I was and that I had a specific and manifest interest in this Royal Commission.

19. Discovering that the School were withholding information from me in the course of this hearing was a shock, but of no surprise as I had never believed the School was being honest with me in any of our dealings in 1997 and 1998. Similarly, discovering that the School's legal strategy was to feign concern did not come as a surprise to me. The pretence of concern they demonstrated was patently obvious.

20. The psychological effects of the assault and the School's response to the assault have impacted on me in ways I never could have imagined when the assault took place when I was nine, or when I reported it to the School, aged twenty six. It has been devastating for myself and my family. It has taken me many years to even begin to understand the ways in which I internalised the shame and guilt associated with being abused as a child, and the ways in which this has affected me.

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21. I hope that Geelong Grammar is now an environment where students are safe from harm and sufficient policies are in place to protect them. I believe that the School has much work to do in terms of acknowledging and taking full responsibility for the legacy of crimes committed against children under their care.

Signed: 

Date: 10/09/2015

Witness: 

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