

UPDATE 14

Royal Commission Toowoomba Hearing



18 February 2014

The Toowoomba hearing of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse continued today.

Day 2 of the hearing commenced with Megan Wagstaff, a former teacher at the school, continuing to give evidence about the initial reporting of allegations of sexual abuse by Gerard Byrnes who is now serving 10 years in prison for child sexual assault.

Ms Wagstaff gave evidence about the training staff and teachers at the school received on child protection and the in particular the Diocesan Student Protection and Risk Management Kit pre 2007 which detailed the guidelines to deal with allegations of sexual abuse and concerns around child protection.

Ms Wagstaff said the kit, at the time of the abuse, was difficult to read and that substantive changes had been made to it since 2007 to make it clearer.

Ms Wagstaff also talked about the annual training teachers received which in her case included training from Queensland police on child protection.

During the evidence she was taken through her involvement in the initial reporting of the abuse by Byrnes and what she did. Ms Wagstaff said that while she failed to report the abuse on the right form she had in fact provided the school principal with a detailed report on what she had been told by a parent.

Following the completion of Ms Wagstaff's evidence Terence Hayes, the principal of the school at the time of the abuse gave evidence. His evidence continues.

Mr Hayes, along with two other senior staff in the local Catholic Education Office, was dismissed by the then Bishop of Toowoomba, Bill Morris, in 2008 for the way he handled the allegations.

Mr Hayes was examined closely by Counsel assisting the Commission Mr Andrew Naylor as to why he failed to report the allegations in accordance with the diocesan child protection kit. Mr Hayes said it was his understanding, despite the process spelt out in the kit, that his first 'port of call' on child abuse issues was the Catholic Education Office.

Mr Hayes was cross examined about what he had reported to the Catholic Education Office following the initial report of abuse, and the circumstances of Byrnes being engaged as a casual teacher at the school a month after Byrnes had resigned in mid-2008.

For more information on the Truth Justice and Healing Council go to: www.tjhcouncil.org.au
For information on the Royal Commission go to: <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/>

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