

UPDATE 27

Royal Commission St Ann's Special School Adelaide



24 March 2014

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse continued to hear evidence in the case of St Ann's Special School in Adelaide today. Paedophile Brian Perkins died while serving a ten year sentence for the abuse of three students at the school between 1986 and 1991.

Sue Cain, as the Director of the Professional Standards Office in the Archdiocese of Adelaide since September 2002, was responsible for *Towards Healing*, the church's protocols for dealing with allegations of sex abuse.

Questions to Ms Cain went to why the procedures of *Towards Healing* were not strictly applied for the former students of St Ann's, the reasons why the claims which were submitted were not progressed, and why the *Towards Healing* process did not proceed to an assessment of the claims. Issues raised included the effect of police investigations and criminal action on the process, and the interaction of *Towards Healing* and civil litigation.

The Counsel Assisting also sought an understanding of why the Church took a "group" based approach to the St Ann's case instead of dealing with each case individually, given the complainant was usually a parent or carer, rather than the former student, since many of them were 'non-verbal' or had 'limited verbal skills'.

Clarification was also sought about the \$2.3 million 'gift' payments made on behalf of the Church to students and families, including how the categories were determined, and why complainants were not consulted in developing the scheme or allocating individual students to categories. The 'gifts' did not affect students' rights to pursue civil action.

Later in the day, Archbishop Philip Wilson gave evidence. He began his ministry in the Archdiocese in February 2001 and became Archbishop in December 2001. Archbishop Wilson outlined the governance arrangements in place for St Ann's and the relationship between the Catholic Education Office and St Ann's.

Having become aware of the allegations against Perkins in late 2001, the Archbishop offered to contribute to the cost of Perkins' extradition from Queensland. Perkins was eventually extradited at the expense of the SA police in March 2002.

Questions went to what the Archbishop might have expected were appropriate processes at the time of the allegations. He spoke to the numerous changes that had been made to the procedures and protocols in the Catholic education system that aim to ensure that the events at St Ann's never happen again, and if they do, to ensure that the incident is brought to the relevant authorities quickly and clearly.

The Archbishop spoke to how the culture has changed in the Archdiocese in the last 10 years, including the heightened awareness of the importance of child protection, restructure of the Catholic Education Office, the introduction of the principal consultants, the establishment of a Child Protection Council, and a Police Check Unit.

The Archbishop acknowledged that some people may have felt excluded from the process because of the group approach, and agreed that some things could have been done better.

Under questioning from Commissioner Fitzgerald, the Archbishop also agreed that the Catholic Church should be able to be sued.

The Archbishop concluded his evidence by saying any of the points that have been made before the Royal Commission are important learning points for us to take into account as we deal with these issues.

The hearing concluded in Adelaide today.

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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