

Response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Issues Paper 11: Catholic Church Final Hearing

Prepared by the Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office

This document is prepared as a specific response to question 7 of Issues paper 11, namely:

To what extent has any Catholic Church authority in Australia taken action in response to the published reports of Royal Commission case studies?

The following is a summary of the key initiatives undertaken by the Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools with regard to student protection, noting in particular the systemic findings of the report into Case Study 6, as prepared by the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*:

“The systemic issues arising from this case study are as follows:

- 1. Reporting allegations of child sexual abuse to an external agency*
- 2. training and supervision of staff working with children, including dissemination of policies and their enforcement together with on-going evaluation of the effectiveness of the training.”*

Reporting allegations of child sexual abuse to an external agency:

The Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools has continued to develop and maintain effective working relationships with external agencies, such as Queensland Police and the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, in order to ensure that the best possible practice is achieved in the implementation of student protection reporting practices. This is achieved through active participation in key regional child protection initiatives, forums and groups, and regularly seeking feedback and input from key agencies. In addition, there have been a number of specific actions taken to ensure continuous improvement of reporting practices:

1. Review of student protection processes

In 2010, the student protection processes for the Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools were revised, involving consultation with external legal advice, Crown Law, and the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board, resulting in the development of the *Student Protection Policy and Procedure*.

Since 2010, the *Student Protection Policy and Procedure* has been regularly reviewed to ensure that it meets all current legislative requirements for reporting concerns about students to Queensland Police and/or the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.

2. Student Protection Officer positions

In 2010, the Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools appointed a full-time Student Protection Officer, whose role is to guide and support schools in the implementation of the *Student Protection Policy and Procedure* and to create and maintain safe school environments for students. In 2014, a second Student Protection Officer position was created in order to better support and resource

schools. The position requirements for these roles include appropriate tertiary qualifications and experience to ensure that high quality advice and support is provided to schools.

3. Student Protection Record Keeping

The Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools has implemented improved record keeping practices in order to ensure that all matters are correctly reported to external agencies. These include:

- The development of a secure student protection database that records all student protection reports
- A process of follow up for student protection reports in order to determine the action that may be taken by the relevant agency
- Detailed statistical information in order to provide oversight of the volume and types of reports submitted by each school in the Diocese of Toowoomba, which allows resources to be directed towards any emerging trends or issues.

4. Student Protection Reporting Processes

Developmental work is currently underway to implement online reporting processes within the Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools with aim to create efficiencies within schools around the completion of accurate, informative reports in a timely manner. These processes will further improve student protection record keeping, appropriate access to information and ensuring the prompt delivery of reports to the appropriate authorities.

5. Student Protection Accreditation processes

From 2014, as a component of school cyclical review processes for accreditation under the *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2001*, enhanced compliance checks are undertaken by the Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office with regard to key student protection requirements. These checks involve: analysis of reporting information and records held by the Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office around staff training and other compliance documentation; on-site engagement of staff, student and parent representatives to seek their views around the implementation of student protection processes within the school; and a process of follow up to ensure that any areas requiring improvement are addressed.

Training and supervision of staff working with children, including dissemination of policies and their enforcement together with on-going evaluation of the effectiveness of the training

1. Student Protection training processes

Student Protection in-services have continued to be conducted in the Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools on an annual basis. In 2014, online learning was developed, along with changes to training requirements for new staff members:

On their appointment, all staff members are required undertake induction training on the Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Education *Student Protection Policy and Procedure* and the *Code of Conduct*, using online learning material that has been developed by the Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office. This training is a combination of factual information, practical completion of reports and discussions based on case scenarios. Both the student protection and Code of Conduct training courses include competency based assessment, that involves answering all assessment questions correctly in order to successfully complete the courses.

Annually, all staff members undertake refresher training in both the *Student Protection Policy and Procedure* and the *Code of Conduct* that is facilitated using materials produced by the Catholic Education Office. This refresher training is also available online.

To supplement this, regular updates and scenario based discussions are distributed by the Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office and are available for inclusion in school staff meetings.

School Student Protection Contacts – those staff members nominated in all schools to whom a student can raise a concern of inappropriate behaviour by staff members, as required by accreditation legislation - must attend an additional student protection in-service on an annual basis. This in-service is designed to equip School Student Protection Contacts with the knowledge and resources required to undertake the role.

Student Protection training regularly involves the input of relevant external agencies, who have delivered content as part of broader staff in-services. In addition, a number of agencies assisted in the development of training videos that form part of the student protection and Code of Conduct online training courses.

2. Engagement of Relief Teachers

The process by which relief teachers are engaged to work in the Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools has been significantly changed and improved since 2008. Relief teachers must make written application and provide the information required before being approved for addition to the relief or supply teacher's list. This documentation includes a suitability declaration. They also must have three referees provide written reports which include responses to student protection questions.

Relief teachers must also complete the Student Protection and Code of Conduct online induction courses prior to being approved for addition to the relief teacher's list, and must meet the annual refresher training requirements to remain on the list.

3. Engagement of Volunteers

All school-based volunteers, including parent volunteers, now receive a *Volunteer Code of Conduct* and *Student Protection Information for volunteers pack* as part of their broader induction into the Diocese of Toowoomba. Volunteers are also required to submit a declaration that they have received these documents, and that:

- They have not been convicted of a serious offence; and
- They agree to disclose any change to their (criminal) history to the school/Catholic Education Office; and
- They know no legal or moral impediment to their suitability to work with children.

4. Visibility Processes

As a direct action from case study 6, the Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools has implemented visibility requirements for all system schools, that require a biannual audit of school sites to ensure that visibility is maintained into all areas that students can access. Continual systems improvement has been implemented, increasing the monitoring and oversight of these visibility processes.

These processes are intended to reinforce both the environmental safety of students within schools, and to establish a high level of accountability and transparency for school staff members.

5. External review and input processes

The Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools continues to review and implement key policies and procedures that ensure the safety of students. For example, the *Code of Conduct* affirms the standards of behaviour expected by employees of the Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools, and provides explicit detail around appropriate and inappropriate interactions with students.

As part of the ongoing review of these documents, input is sought from appropriate external agencies, both as a means of ensuring best practice in terms of the content, and as means of external accountability.