



BALLARAT GRAMMAR

26 February 2016

Dear Member of the Ballarat Grammar Community,

In November 2015, the Chairman, Board of Directors, Hon Rob Knowles and the then Headmaster, Mr Stephen Higgs, wrote to members of the community to offer a range of support, including facilitating reporting, to anyone who experienced abuse at the School. We write to update the community on matters that have arisen since this time.

Over the past three months, a small number of former students have contacted the School to report experiences of sexual abuse, while a further small group have notified the School of their distress at receiving corporal punishment. It is incredibly distressing to our school community, which prides itself on the great care offered, that any of our former students have been harmed in this way. On behalf of the School, we apologise unreservedly. We are deeply sorry for any failing of care that may have contributed to this situation. We particularly apologise to and offer our support to those former students affected by this abuse.

To our knowledge, from those past students who have contacted the School, instances of reported abuse occurred some thirty or more years ago. The School is working to ensure that each of these past students is receiving the support that they need. This includes guidance and counselling, actively encouraging and enabling a Police report or making a report to the Royal Commission, the opportunity to meet with and receive a personal apology from the current Headmaster on behalf of the School, and appropriate reparation. The School recognises that the support and response each person needs will vary, and we will do our utmost to accommodate their needs.

We recognise that there may be other past students who are yet to raise their particular situation or who have done so with either the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse or via a Police report. The School has written to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse stating our openness for the Commission to examine any and all processes at the School, based on any reports of abuse that may have been received. Wherever consent has been provided, the School has and will forward any and all complaints to the Commission.

We regret any misunderstanding in our previous correspondence. We encourage victims to report abuse or the School will report abuse on their behalf. The School wishes to support any former student who has experienced abuse in making a report. Anyone wishing to report an instance of abuse can do so by contacting:

- The Headmaster, Adam Heath (headmaster@bgs.vic.edu.au / (03) 5338 0816);
- Mrs Claire Sargent, the Anglican Director of Professional Standards (PO Box 329, Canterbury, VIC 3126/1800 135 246);
- The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (contact@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au / 1800 099 340);
- The Police (Detective Senior Constable Peita Measham 32300, Sano Taskforce, email: peita.measham@police.vic.gov.au / (03) 8690 4378).



Support for victims of abuse who may, at this time, not be able to come forward or make a report can be sought through the following 24-hour counselling services, recommended by the Commission:

- 1800 Respect (www.1800respect.org.au /1800 737 732);
- Lifeline (www.lifeline.org.au /131 114).

We reassure parents of our current students that the reported instances of abuse that have been brought to the School's attention relate to previous decades. All teaching staff are required to be registered, which includes a current Police criminal records check. Strengthened child protection laws, including the new 'Child Safe' standards, Mandatory Reporting and a robust 'Working with Children Check' (completed by all members of our community interacting with our students) reassure us that there are increasing mechanisms in place to keep children safe not just at Ballarat Grammar but across the wider community. However, as part of our efforts to further minimise risk to our students in this and all areas of the School, we will have our existing policies and processes externally reviewed.

We take this opportunity to thank the many members of our community for their messages of support, encouragement and advice as we do everything in our power to redress any wrongdoing. Once again, we unreservedly apologise to any past students who have suffered abuse at the School. We reiterate our commitment to our current students, and their families, to provide an environment at Ballarat Grammar where children are safe and are able to thrive.

Yours sincerely,



ADAM HEATH
Headmaster



THE HON ROB KNOWLES AO
Chairman, Board of Directors