

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

**WITNESS STATEMENT OF CLARE MARY COUCH
CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF PROPRIETORS**

**FILED ON BEHALF OF
THE BISHOPS AND CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND**

Notice to Produce No. 517: Paragraphs [32] to [43]

I, Clare Mary Couch, will say as follows—

Introduction

1. My full name is Dr Clare Mary Couch, clinical psychologist, from Wellington.
2. I am the Chairperson of the Board of Proprietors at St Patrick's College, Silverstream (the **College**). This is a voluntarily and unpaid position. I have been in that role since March 2020.
3. I was appointed to the Board of Proprietors in 2019 and was Deputy Chairperson of the Board of Proprietors from 2019. I also hold the role within the School of being one of three Proprietor's Appointees on School Board / Board of Trustees (**School Board**) since November 2012.
4. I have GRO-B When I was asked to join the Board of Proprietors, I wanted to contribute to the College, especially to the Catholic character and to ensuring the education and formation of young men was paramount.
5. I am Catholic and have never been a member of a religious institute or of a congregation. I have been employed before in a role in a Church entity. From 1990 to 1991, I was employed as a lay chaplain in the tertiary chaplaincy team within the Archdiocese of Wellington.

General Statement

6. To begin my statement I would like to express my deep sadness at the abuse that has occurred at the College. It is shocking and shameful the way some young boys in our College have been treated as well as at so many other organisations in Aotearoa.
7. Sadly, this is part of our accepted history; we do not doubt the pain that it has caused and continues to cause to those who are the survivors and their families. Our hope is that we can continue to learn what we can from the past to protect the vulnerable and prevent harm happening in the future.

What my evidence covers

8. This evidence responds to the Royal Commission's Notice to Produce 517 (**Notice**), issued by the Royal Commission on 31 August 2022, in relation to St Patrick's College Silverstream (the **College**).
9. My evidence provides a background on the Board of Proprietors' responsibilities within the College and answers the questions posed in paragraphs [32] to [43] of the Notice. I answer these questions later in my evidence, to the extent that I can, and have set out the questions asked, grouping similar questions together where possible.

Scope of the evidence

10. I am attempting to provide as much information as I can to the Inquiry, but I am answering the questions in the Notice to the best of my ability within my personal knowledge and expertise; that is being on the Board of Proprietors since 2019, and the chairperson since March 2020.
11. I cannot speak for my predecessors, including, how the Board of Proprietors has prevented and responded to reports of abuse over time. However, I would hope that they were committed to looking after the wellbeing and safety of the students, and preventing and responding to reports of abuse.
12. I am not providing this witness statement as a Proprietors Appointee to the School Board. I defer to evidence of Sean Mahony, chair of the School Board, in relation to the School Board's evidence.
13. The personal reflections I make in this witness statement are my own personal statements based on my experiences being in the Board of Proprietors since 2019.

Records held by the Board of Proprietors

14. The Board of Proprietors only holds records from 30 October 2005. We reviewed the minutes (including in-committee minutes of the Board of Proprietors from that date) and other relevant documentation. However, as set out in the briefing paper, due to the limited time available, we have been unable to consult a significant amount of information as well as the College holds minimal records.

Notwithstanding the limitations, I have sought to provide as much material requested by the Notice as possible.

15. In preparing information to Inquiry under Notices 517, 526 and 527, we have relied on previous Board of Proprietors minutes from Monday 2 April 2005 and in-committee minutes from 30 October 2005, and the current policies and procedures confirmed by the Board of Proprietors.
16. Specific incidents found in the documents outlined above as summarised in the Appendix to Sean Mahony's witness statement outlining the nature and extent of incidents and disciplinary matters in the College from 2005. I do not have personal knowledge of most of the incidents in the College in my role as chairperson of the Board of Proprietors.
17. Where primary sources have been relied upon in my evidence, these are cited using the corresponding Electronic Disclosure Technology (**EDT**) number.

Review of other evidence

18. In preparing this evidence, I have reviewed:
 - (a) The briefing paper on the College prepared by Te Rōpū Tautoko (**TRT**) (the **briefing paper**) and other evidence prepared in response to Notices to Produce No. 517, 526 and 527; and
 - (b) The witness statement from Dr Kevin Shore, Chief Executive of the New Zealand Catholic Education Office, dated 18 July 2022.
19. Where the subject matter of my response has been addressed in the evidence above, I have referenced these.

College's Board of Proprietors

20. The Board of Proprietors (known as the Trust Board at that time) was established on 12 December 1966. The history and background to the establishment of the Board of Proprietors is outlined in the briefing paper.

21. Our goal is for our young men in our College to be just, compassionate citizens. This involves being compassionate with each other, holding each other to account for things when we get it wrong, being merciful by giving each other another chance and the space to repair and restore relationships, and treating people with respect.
22. The Board of Proprietors is responsible for the special character of the College, the Boarding School, the grounds, and the buildings. We work collaboratively with the School Board and wider College community.
23. Given we are a state-integrated school, it is also important for us to consider tikanga Māori and te ao Māori when exercising our responsibilities. In this regard, the Board relies on expertise from within the School and also on our Board. The Board has considerable expertise of tikanga and te ao Māori within its current membership.

Special Character

24. As outlined in the briefing paper, the special character of the College is being both a Catholic and a Marist school. Firstly, the College is a Catholic school. The school lives by the values of being a Catholic. The goal is that in everything the College does, such as in all daily interactions between staff, students, at the board, is in accordance with Catholic values. Secondly, the school has a Marist charism, as determined by the Society of Mary. Within the Catholic Church, there are many charisms. A charism is a different lens of embodying the Catholic character. The Marist way is a particular charism and this has underpinned the way the school was set up for the education of the young men.
25. As the Board of Proprietors, we have a responsibility to see that our special character is part of what the school is. If we lose our special character, then we lose our core values. We pride ourselves on creating good Marist Men ready to take their place in the world. We support our students to live their values every day and seek always to be the best versions of the person God created them to be across all areas, spiritual, academic, cultural and sports.¹

¹ <https://www.stream.school.nz/our-school/>.

26. In 2016, we undertook a project to work on our core values as a College community. The project was trying to identify what the Marist values mean in everyday life of the College and these were identified as:
- (a) Whakapono / Faith / Fa'atuatua: We believe in a God who loves and cares for us and as a community we are guided by gospel values to live an authentic Christian life.
 - (b) Kotahitanga / Unity / Tutu Fa'atasi: We support everyone in our community to belong and we come together in the good times and the tough times.
 - (c) Manaakitanga / Support / Lagolago: We are respectful, tolerant, compassionate and encouraging to all, and we walk alongside others – particularly those in need.
 - (d) Hautoa / Courage / Loto tele: We have the courage to strive for success, to be honest, to be ourselves and to stand up for what is right and good.
 - (e) Ngākau pāpaku / Humility / Loto maualalo: We are kind, patient, forgiving, and treat others as we would like to be treated. We honestly accept who we are – our gifts, our strengths and our weaknesses.²
27. We encourage these within the community and look for examples to live by those values.
28. We as a College community do certain things to reflect our values and special character.³ For example, the Board of Proprietors purposefully do not fill the boarding hostel to capacity so we have space for students if we need it. From time to time, circumstances change for students where they may need to board for a short breadth of time, sometimes longer. When this happens, we offer the support to that student and the wider family, at no extra cost to the family, in line with our values of manaakitanga, support, and compassion.
29. As a Board of Proprietors, we conduct annual internal reviews on special character in our school. This process may involve surveying the students, staff, and boards. We are currently completing a review around faith leadership. The review looks at

² <https://www.stream.school.nz/our-school/>.

³ See, for example, SLS.0001.0046.

opportunities for faith leadership, what are we doing well, and in what ways we can improve the opportunities for faith leadership.

30. We also are reviewed externally on special character every three years. The review is College-wide and looks at how we demonstrate special character within the school, including the boarding hostel. While we are not an Archdiocese school, we ask that the Archdiocese of Wellington's education support staff complete this review as they have the skills, expertise and capabilities to undertake it. The report is provided to the chairperson of the Board of Proprietors for our consideration. We also send a copy of the review to the Society of Mary and to the Archbishop as a matter of courtesy.⁴

Redwood House

31. As outlined in the briefing paper, Redwood House is the Boarding House for the College. The Boarding House aims to provide a secure and caring environment to encourage students to realise their unique and personal potential.
32. Redwood Hostel has policies in place to create a supportive boarding house environment and the swift controlling and elimination of harassment or abuse.⁵
33. The Board of Proprietors must operate the hostel in accordance with the Education (Hostels) Regulations 2005.⁶ As of 17 June 2022, we have renewed our hostel licence and the current licence will expire on 18 June 2025.⁷ The licence is administered by the Ministry of Education.⁸ The licence application process involves a declaration of fit and proper status and other requirements looking after students' wellbeing, and safety.⁹ We did not receive any feedback or comments back from the Ministry of Education through the licencing process this year, other than the fact that we had met the requirements of the licence.

4 See paragraphs 36 to 43 of the evidence from Dr Kevin Shore in response to Notice 497 for further information.

5 SLS.0001.0001; SLS.0001.0004; SLS.0001.0007; SLS.0001.0008; SLS.0001.0011; SLS.0001.0012; SLS.0001.0014; SLS.0001.0015; SLS.0001.0016; SLS.0001.0017; SLS.0001.0018; SLS.0001.0019; SLS.0001.0020; SLS.0001.0021; SLS.0001.0023; SLS.0001.0024; SLS.0001.0025; SLS.0001.0026; SLS.0001.0027; SLS.0001.0029; SLS.0001.0030; SLS.0001.0031.

6 SLS.001.0100.

7 SLS.001.0099.

8 See <https://www.education.govt.nz/school/property-and-transport/school-facilities/running-a-hostel/> for more information.

9 SLS.0001.0098.

Staff

34. To help the Board of Proprietors carry out its functions with the College, the Board employs some staff. Currently, 16 staff are fully employed by the Board of Proprietors. However, where their roles require, some staff may be employed by the School Board and have split accountability between the School Board and Board of Proprietors. For example, the Director of Property and Finance is employed by the School Board but is accountable to both the School Board and Board of Proprietors. The College also has staff members who are employed by the School Board and do significant work for the Board of Proprietors but are not funded or employed by the Board of Proprietors, for example, groundsman. The School Board have full responsibility for those employees.
35. All members of staff and Boards at the College must follow the Code of Ethics for Staff and Boards of New Zealand Catholic Schools. The Code of Ethics require a commitment to students, parents and caregivers, the community and education itself. In order to serve effectively those subject to the Code of Ethics are also committed to their own growth and well-being and are committed to professional standards of conduct in all they do.¹⁰

Prevention of and response to reports of abuse

32: Describe how the Silverstream College Board of Proprietors (previously named the Silverstream College Trust Board) has understood its role in relation to the prevention of abuse and responding to reports of abuse at St Patrick's College and its boarding facility in the period 1950 to the present day, including:

- a. Legal obligations (statutory requirements) including those relating to safeguarding and what they required you to do (including under canon law).*
- b. Obligations under policies or procedures in place at St Patrick's College and what they required you to do (including reporting to any church authority or state agency).*
- c. Obligations under any relevant Catholic Church protocols.*

¹⁰ SLS.0001.0182.

34. *Outline what steps, if any, have been taken by the Silverstream College Board of Proprietors (previously named the Silverstream College Trust Board) over time to prevent abuse at St Patrick's College.*

36. The students' welfare is the paramount focus for the Board of Proprietors and the wider College in relation to the prevention of and response to reports of abuse. We aim to do this in a well-formed and balanced manner. As a proprietor, we want to ensure that the College provides an environment that is safe from abuse for its students, staff and wider community. This is to ensure our young men are in a safe environment and can thrive to become just, compassionate citizens.

Current policies and procedures

Obligations in relation to the prevention of abuse

37. The Board of Proprietors are responsible for the policies and procedures within their area of responsibility, including Redwood Boarding House. The Board of Proprietors' policies are to provide the Rector/Tumuaki with direction and authority for the management of the Boarding House and other areas the Board is responsible for.¹¹

38. The Board has the following oversight over their policies and procedures:

- (a) The management team assists in the drafting and development of the policies and procedures. These will be approved by the Board.
- (b) The Board will review the policies and procedures every three years (and may consult with the School Board to ensure consistency across the School).¹²
- (c) The management team is required to follow the policies through implementing the procedures and assuring the Board through the provision of evidence demonstrating compliance.

¹¹ SLS.0001.0004.

¹² See, for example, SLS.0001.0028.

- (d) The Board is responsible for regularly monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of its policies and its implementation by management.¹³
39. We have a number of Redwood boarding house policies, including the following which relate to the prevention of, and responding to abuse:¹⁴
- (a) Policy 2: Complaints
 - (b) Policy 14: Welfare.
 - (c) Policy 18: Sexual Harassment.
 - (d) Policy 19: Physical and Verbal Abuse.
 - (e) Policy 22: Strategic and Annual Planning
 - (f) Boarding Process 6: Restorative Process.

Community input

40. When reviewing the policies, the College community, including parents and students, is also able to provide input into policy formulation and review.¹⁵ For example, in the last review of the Redwood Boarding House policies in May 2022, the students commented that they “are very happy living in Redwood House and the general tone within the house is very positive”. They “feel safe and well cared for”.¹⁶
41. The School Board also run surveys of satisfaction of the College. The surveys cover areas that the Board of Proprietors are responsible for, including the Boarding House surveys, wellbeing of students, facilities, and academic achievement. The School Board have led community consultations (and the BOP have been involved in the feedback) in 2013 and 2018.
42. We have not had any recent incidences where the policies and procedure followed during a complaints process has raised issues. However, if issues were raised with

¹³ SLS.0001.0004.

¹⁴ SLS.0001.0008; SLS.0001.0023; SLS.0001.0029; SLS.0001.0026; SLS.0001.0030; SLS.0001.0013.

¹⁵ SLS.0001.0004; See, for example, SLS.0001.0009.

¹⁶ SLS.0001.0009.

a policy or procedure while an allegation or complaint was being dealt with, I would expect the Board of Proprietors, with the management team, to review the policy and procedure to ensure that it is best practice.

43. As outlined in paragraphs [49] to [63] below, we are also involved in a number of organisations that provide us support to ensure we are following best practice and relevant legislation, including, policies and practices for the prevention and reporting of abuse. For example, the New Zealand Boarding Schools Association provided support during the 2020 lockdown to ensure we were doing best practice in providing pastoral support to our students during that time, and what was required of us in terms of running the Boarding House during a global pandemic.

Accessibility to policies

44. Once the policies are updated, the Rector/Tumuaki is required to distribute the policies for incorporation in the policy manuals held by the College and the Board of Proprietors. It is available to the parent community on request.¹⁷
45. In the review of Redwood House policies in 2022, the students provided feedback that the complaints process could be more readily available on the College's website so that anyone who wants to see it can.¹⁸ The management team and Board took this into consideration and all the boarding hostel policies are now available on the College's website under the tab "Boarding". These can be accessed by anyone.¹⁹
46. All Redwood House policies are in the process of being uploaded to the College's "SchoolDocs" website.²⁰ Currently only the policies and practices made by the School Board are on that website. We are uploading our policies to the website to ensure there is a centralised place for all policies relating to the College.

Relevant legislation

47. The Board of Proprietors have legal obligations for the prevention and response to abuse under the following legislation:

¹⁷ SLS.0001.0004.

¹⁸ SLS.0001.0009.

¹⁹ See <https://www.stream.school.nz/boarding/boarding-policy/>.

²⁰ See Sean Mahony's evidence for a description of "SchoolDocs" website.

- (a) Education and Training Act 2020;
- (b) Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975;
- (c) Children's Act 2014;
- (d) Oranga Tamariki Act 1989;
- (e) Employment Relations Act 2000; and
- (f) Health and Safety at Work Act 2015.

48. We update our policies and procedures where necessary to ensure we are compliant with our legal obligations. As outlined below in paragraphs [4962] to [63], our relationship with the other organisations helps us keep up to date with our legal obligations.

Relationships with other governance entities

33. Describe the Silverstream College Board of Proprietor's understanding of the roles and obligations of the Archbishop, the Society of Mary, the Board of Governors, the Board of Trustees and the principal in relation to the prevention of abuse and responding to reports of abuse at St Patrick's College. Please include in your response how this has changed over time, and any distinctions between the school and the boarding facilities.

Society of Mary

- 49. The College land and buildings are owned by the Society of Mary. The Board of Proprietors are appointed by the Society of Mary by the process set out in Tim Duckworth's evidence.
- 50. The proprietorship of the College lies with the Board of Proprietors, and the Society of Mary provide guidance and support to us. We keep the Society of Mary informed as to what is happening within the College, for example, we send minutes from our meetings to the Society of Mary so that they are aware, or inform them if a serious incident occurred at school.
- 51. As described in both the briefing paper and Father Tim Duckworth's evidence, we are involved with the Society of Mary Education Senate. The Senate was set up by the Society of Mary, as a body of oversight over the three colleges that the Society

of Mary own in New Zealand. The three chairpersons of the respective Board of Proprietors meet with the Senate periodically, on average twice a year.

52. The Senate provides support to us in the special character of the school, finances and property. The Senate also tries to develop systems and efficiencies across the three schools, particularly in finance and property. We let the Senate know what the College's Board of Proprietors is doing, the Senate gives information to assist, potential frameworks to consider, and goals to work towards.

Archdiocese of Wellington

53. We do not have much involvement with the Archdiocese administration. As a Society of Mary school, as chairperson of the Board of Proprietors, I would more often go to the Society of Mary or the Senate for support.
54. The Archdiocese provides trainings and services that I have attended in the past in my roles at the College, such as education around what it means to be a proprietor's appointee on the School Board of a Catholic school (in my role on the School Board).
55. The Archdiocese also runs a quarterly meeting with the Board of Proprietors from the proprietor trust board schools (five colleges) within the Archdiocese. That meeting is to exchange information/update. The only decisions that group makes is to confirm the Attendance Dues rate for the whole diocese for the next year; however this will not be relevant to the College going forward as we will set our own dues.

School Board / Board of Trustees

56. The Board of Proprietors appoints their representatives on the School Board (this name was recently changed by legislation from 'Board of Trustees'). It is usual that the Proprietor's Appointees to the School Board are not members of the Board of Proprietors. Proprietor's Appointees on the School Board can attend the Board of Proprietors meetings but do not have a vote.
57. We work together with the School Board, while recognising that each Board has different responsibilities. We try to maintain a good working relationship between the Boards. For example, we hold joint board meetings and we have some joint

subcommittees where there are shared interests and to keep the communication strong. For the past couple of years, both boards would meet together at the beginning each year to share the strategic direction of each Board for the College. In the middle of the year, the boards have attended a joint retreat where there is a prayer, reflection and learning about the Marist charism and our roles as Boards. At the end of the year, the boards have a joint event celebrating the year and acknowledging those who have left the Boards and key staff.

58. We both work together to look after the safety and wellbeing of the students. Both Boards and their staff must follow the schools policies and must do absolutely everything they can to prevent abuse and to correctly respond to it.

Rector/Tumuaki

59. The Rector/Tumuaki is employed by the School Board in his role as principal of the College. The Board of Proprietors also appoint the Rector/Tumuaki to the position of Chief Executive of the Board of Proprietors. The Board of Proprietors has an employment agreement with the Rector/Tumuaki to ensure he is responsible around the special character of the College, for looking after the property, and for the boarding hostel. The Rector/Tumuaki is required to have a working relationship with both Boards.

National Office for Professional Standards

60. I understand that there is a response team around safeguarding within the wider Catholic Church which is the National Office for Professional Standards (**NOPS**). While I have never had any interactions with NOPS, I understand that it is a specialist team that can help with safeguarding responses. I understand that this means that for those in Redwood House, there is the opportunity to make any complaint directly to NOPS.
61. However, NOPS manage the full process under the Church's A Path to Healing Protocol which is limited to sexual abuse allegations against priests and religious. Therefore, their role would be finding the appropriate entity or entities to follow through on the notification or disclosure made to them and support the person making the notification or disclosure.

Other organisations

62. We are a member of the New Zealand Boarding Schools Association, an organisation that supports boarding hostels in schools across Aotearoa, both private and state schools. The Association provides professional development and best practice for boarding hostels. The Dean of Boarding attends on our behalf. Our involvement in that organisation helps us keep in line with other boarding schools and ensure that we are keeping up with recent legislative developments and implementing best practice.
63. We are also a member of Association of Proprietors for Integrated Schools, as described in paragraphs [48] of Dr Kevin Shore's evidence dated 18 July 2022. The Association serves the proprietors of all integrated schools in Aotearoa and are the interface between state integrated school proprietors and government.

Nature and extent of abuse

36. Outline your understanding of the nature and extent of abuse at St Patrick's College and its boarding houses, and your position on the reasons for that.

64. For the period from 1950 to 1984, I now understand (as a result of this process) that there were reports of abuse against individuals as set out in the Appendix to the briefing paper. I have no personal knowledge of the events alleged, the complaints process or the response to the complaints. I refer to the evidence of Father Tim Duckworth from the Society of Mary for information on those reports for alleged abuse at the College.
65. Prior to preparing this evidence, I was generally aware that there have been past priests in the College who have been complained against for abuse of boys who were in the College's care. I also became aware in 2019 of one former rector in particular who was accused of sexual offences against students, when we were considering taking down the portraits of alleged abusers (see paragraphs [80] to [84] below for further information).
66. My understanding is that the Society of Mary has been responsible for responding to those historical allegations, as they relate to their members. I understand that in some cases there have been criminal investigations as well and one previous member of the Society of Mary has been convicted. I am also aware that there

have been allegations of abuse by past members of the Society, where there was insufficient evidence for the Society to uphold the survivor's story or to approach the Police. I appreciate that for a survivor that must be a very distressing situation to be in.

67. For the period from 1984 (when the College integrated into the state system) to 2005, I am not aware of any records of abuse between adult to young person/student.
68. However, I am aware of more recent allegations of abuse of:
- (a) employees relating to other employees, which are dealt with through our employment processes;
 - (b) inappropriate behaviour by students towards teachers (including a high-profile case of students inappropriately filming teacher),²¹ which are dealt with through student disciplinary processes; and
 - (c) students' misbehaviour towards other students which are dealt with through student disciplinary processes.
69. However, I acknowledge that that does not mean all abuse is disclosed or reported. We have not seen any evidence of abuse in the search of our records that we have conducted, but it is difficult to search records from this time period for reasons set out above in paragraph [14] to [16]. We have not checked every student's file (which we have not had time to do) and we do not know how any allegations made would have been recorded there in any event.
70. In the time I have been in the Board of Proprietors, I am not aware of any contemporary complaints or allegations of abuse by a child/student against an adult/employee under the responsibility of the Board of Proprietors. However, I am aware of contemporary complaints in relation to disciplinary matters of College staff members through my role on the Board of Proprietors which have led to employment issues.

21 <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/90179350/cultural-shift-needed-to-put-an-end-to-attitudes-toward-sexual-violence-experts-say>

Responding to reports of abuse

37. Explain how the Silverstream College Board of Proprietors (previously named the Silverstream College Trust Board) responded to reports of abuse at St Patrick's College, and to the extent responses have changed over time, describe the changes and the reasons for such changes.

40. With the benefit of hindsight, what do you think were the biggest mistakes made by the Church, the Society of Mary, any school governance entity or any relevant State agency in responding to disclosures of abuse at St Patrick's College?

41. In hindsight, do you consider that the Society of Mary and the Church adequately responded to disclosures of abuse, and what are the reasons for your view?

71. I cannot speak to how the Board of Proprietors or any other governance entity (such as the Church, Society of Mary) has responded to reports of abuse at the College prior to my appointment to the Board of Proprietors in 2019.

72. While I have been in the Board of Proprietors, I am not aware of any contemporary complaints or allegations of abuse against an adult/employee under the responsibility of the Board of Proprietors relating to a child/ student. However, I can speak to the process for responding to a report of abuse today, both contemporary and historical report of abuse.

Process for responding to contemporary report of abuse

73. If a complaint was raised today, the safety of the person making the disclosure is paramount. The complaint is most likely to be made to the Rector/Tumuaki in the first instance or passed to him by another staff member. As the Rector/Tumuaki is in charge of the day-to-day management of the College, it is his responsibility to follow the appropriate policy and procedures that the matter requires.

74. If an employee is alleged to have abused or harmed someone, and they are employed by the Board of Proprietors, the Rector/Tumuaki or Director of Boarding will alert me as the chairperson of the Board of Proprietors. We are responsible for making the final decision on the outcome of the complaint, and may do so in consultation with the chairperson of the School Board. Depending on the nature of the incident, the policy and procedures we need to follow, and the risk to others, we

usually stand down the staff member while we go through an employment process. We follow relevant policies and procedures and comply with relevant legislation.

75. Depending on the nature and/or seriousness of the complaint against a Board of Proprietors employee, I may also report the allegation to the Society of Mary, for their information. There is no expectation that they will do anything or direct us to do anything. It is for the Board of Proprietors to make the decision as to the outcome of the process.
76. Where the safety of a child is of concern, I will report the allegation to Oranga Tamariki and/or Police under a report of concern that the child has been abused. My understanding and expectation is that they would then investigate further. I may also encourage the complainant to go to the Police with their allegations.
77. If an employee is alleged to have abused or harmed someone, and they are employed by the School Board, I may be notified by the chairperson of the School Board and involved in the process, particularly if it is someone who jointly is accountable to the School Board and Board of Proprietors. It would be for the School Board to make the final decision on the outcome of the complaint.

Process for responding to historical allegations of abuse

78. If a historical allegation of abuse is made in relation to a member of the Society of Mary, we will refer that complaint to the Society of Mary. We leave it to the Society to respond to the allegation of abuse but are told of the outcome of the process.
79. If there was an allegation relating to a former boarding hostel staff, I would encourage the complainant to go to the Police with their allegations. As part of a Police investigation, we would supply any staff records that we had to aid the investigation. If appropriate, we would offer to meet with the person making the allegation to hear their story (but I think this would need to be in the context of the wider investigation by Police). I would also inform the Society of Mary as a matter of courtesy and ask if they were able to assist in any way.

Portraits of former Rectors

80. While discussing responding to historical allegations of abuse, I am aware that the School Board (when it was known as the Board of Trustees) received a request for two portraits to be removed from the College in 2019. I was a Proprietor's Appointee on the Board of Trustees at this time.
81. One portrait was of a former Rector who was a member of the Society of Mary and a priest and had had allegations of abuse acknowledged and upheld by the Society of Mary. The School Board and the Board of Proprietors unanimously agreed to remove that portrait and it was removed immediately²²
82. The other portrait was in relation to another former Rector who was also member of the Society of Mary and a priest. An allegation had been made about this priest in the Royal Commission. The Board of Proprietors received advice from the Society of Mary that there was insufficient evidence of the allegations against that priest. It was decided not to remove the portrait as the allegations had not been substantiated.
83. It is an awful position to be in when deciding what to do. We were aware that there was a survivor of abuse who had shared their experience, and in this case, after their death through their family in a public hearing of the Commission. When making our decision, the Boards had to balance the needs for the survivor to respect the harm that has been done to them but also natural justice. In this instance, the allegations had not been upheld against the priest and both the priest and his accuser were deceased. Therefore this portrait was not removed at the time. Any decision to remove the portrait would be a joint Board decision.
84. On 12 September 2022, the Rector/Tumuaki received another request to remove two portraits. One portrait is of the priest the Board had decided not to remove and the other is another Rector, a member of the Society of Mary and a priest, about which the College had no previous knowledge of allegations. The Rector/Tumuaki has passed the request on to the School Board and Board of Proprietors to consider. To start the process, I have informed the Society of Mary of the request and asked for any information they hold on the allegations against these two men. We require the information about the men from the Society of Mary before making a decision.

²² SLS.0001.0180.

35. What more could, or should be, done by St Patrick's College to prevent further abuse at the College and boarding houses, and to improve the response to reports of abuse?

85. No immediate changes come to mind for our processes to prevent abuse and respond to contemporary allegations of abuse. As described above in paragraphs [36] to [48] above, the students' welfare is paramount within the College while balancing a just and compassionate response to allegations. We intend to implement policies and procedures with best practice and complying with the relevant legislation. We do that by providing training for the boards and the staff, reviewing our policies and practices on a review cycle, being involved with external organisations, consulting and seeking advice from the School Board, and implementing policies that align with templates and guidelines provided by the New Zealand School Trustees Association (though we are not a member of that organisation).
86. I acknowledge a current issue for the Board is our response to historical allegations of abuse, especially in relation to aspects of the College's history e.g. portraits of past Rectors. This is ongoing and we are committed to implement best practice.

Barriers to disclosing abuse

38. Describe your understanding of the barriers to disclosing abuse at St Patrick's College.

87. I am not aware of any specific barriers to disclosing abuse at the College. However, I appreciate that it can be very challenging for someone to disclose abuse and it is not something that would be done lightly. When someone (and especially a teenager does this) they may have doubts that someone will believe them, especially when there is a power imbalance between a young person and an adult. It is important that we take a disclosure seriously, believe them and support them to get this appropriately investigated. I draw attention to the evidence by Rob Ferreira about a culture that builds positive relationships with the boys so they could feel more comfortable to report abuse, if it were to happen.
88. I would hope that any young man and all staff members in the College know that we keep the safety of the young person in the front of all our decisions in relation to the prevention and response to abuse. Our policies and procedures are aimed at creating that safety.

39. *Comment on whether you consider that there was a culture or practice within the Church, the Society of Mary, school governance entities or lay members of staff of ignoring, tolerating or normalising abuse at St Patrick's College. Please include in your answer the reasons for your view, and any changes over time.*

89. I cannot comment on the culture or practice within the College and wider College governance entities before my time.

90. I do not consider that there is a culture or practice today for ignoring, tolerating or normalising abuse at the College. We, as a community, are working towards our young men being just, compassionate citizens. There is no tolerance for abuse or harm, of them or by them.

91. I also consider that the Board of Proprietors has a higher duty of care because some College students live with us as boarders. Their parents have entrusted their children to us. Both the Board and staff work hard to provide a safe environment for these young men. If any concerns are raised, they are escalated and dealt with appropriately. I've responded to the steps we take to ensure that we do not normalise any form of abuse or harm in the College above in paragraphs [36] to [48] and [85].

Changes required

42. *What do you think are the most important changes that need to be made by the Church, the Society of Mary, or any school governance entity or any relevant State agency to protect children attending schools like St Patrick's College?*

43. *What do you think are the most important changes that need to be made by relevant State agencies to protect children attending schools like St Patrick's College from abuse, and to improve the response to reports of abuse?*

92. I cannot speak to the systematic changes needed by governance entities and state agencies on what important changes are needed to be made to protect children attending schools like the College.

93. I can only speak to my experience within the College.

94. As I have said above, I cannot think of any immediate changes for our contemporary processes that need to be made to further protect children attending the College. The key is to put the safety and wellbeing of the young person/student at the centre of any prevention and response to abuse while balancing a just and compassionate response to allegations, to have policies and procedures in place and ensure that those policies are being implemented across the College.
95. I consider that we are working well as a College community to provide a good college for our students. As we have recently received our boarding house licence with no recommendations, I am confident that we are on the right track to providing a safe environment for the young men in Redwood House.
96. We are also taking steps to review our policies in relation to prevention of, and response to, abuse and receive feedback from the wider community on those policies. While the policies are accessible, we are working towards making sure they are easy to find for the wider community.
97. I am eager to learn from the experience of participating in this Inquiry and open to receiving any recommendations from the Inquiry. There is always room for improvement to protect children attending schools like the College and improve responses to reports of abuse.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

This statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and was made by me knowing that it may be used as evidence by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

GRO-C

Signed:

Clare Mary Couch

Dated:

5 October 2022