

Chapter Three

1950–1966

Headmasters Basil Wakelin (1950) and John Conolly (1951–1966) and Board chair Rowland Towle (1948–1966)

Introduction

- 3.1 From 1950 to 1966, 566 students attended Dilworth School.⁸¹ Seventeen former students who attended school during the era of Mr John Conolly, 1951–1966, provided an account of their experiences to the Inquiry. Of these, two registered in other capacities, subsequent headmaster Dr Murray Wilton and the Dilworth Trust Board chair, Mr Derek Firth, but attended in this era and spoke to us of their time as students. A further individual spoke to the Inquiry in another capacity and gave information about his time as a student during this era but did not register. Three staff members were spoken to from this era.
- 3.2 All former students reported a school environment characterised by fear and intimidation, severe bullying, persistent caning and a militaristic culture. Four reported being sexually abused while students at the school. All of these reported abuse by other older students and one reported, in addition, abuse by a teacher and husband of a school visitor. Nine reported serious physical abuse and three reported both sexual abuse and serious physical abuse.

Basil Wakelin, 1950

- 3.3 No former students who gave statements to the Inquiry were at Dilworth in 1950. The headmaster for that year was Mr Basil Wakelin, who had held the position since 1946. This was his last year in the role. The lack of registration is unsurprising given the youngest student would now be 78 and the oldest in his mid-80s. Therefore, we cannot conclude whether sexual abuse or serious physical abuse occurred in this year.

81 Dilworth provided the Inquiry with school roll data. The Inquiry has not independently verified this data.

- 3.4 Nonetheless, we note that *The Dilworth Legacy* records Mr Wakelin as maintaining “rigid disciplinary control” and being a “powerful flagellator”.⁸² He “did not shrink from using the cane for most offences, from talking during prep or ‘clearaway’ to gross insolence or dishonesty”.⁸³ It says instances of caning were recorded conscientiously by staff who administered it.⁸⁴ It also records that it was normal for caning to be done with the student’s pants on but a few instances were recorded of the cane being applied to bare buttocks.⁸⁵
- 3.5 *The Dilworth Legacy* gives an example of Mr Wakelin’s caning in 1950.⁸⁶ All 22 boys from MacMurray House, where students aged 9 to 12 were typically housed, were summoned to the headmaster’s office and each received two strokes of the cane. They were given no explanation as to why this happened, before or after. That there was no fair reason for caning remained a grievance in the early 2000s when one of those caned spoke with the author of *The Dilworth Legacy* about the incident.⁸⁷

John Conolly, 1951–1966

- 3.6 Mr Conolly was appointed at age 43 with a degree in mathematics and a postgraduate degree from the University of Oxford. He had been headmaster of John McGlashan College in Dunedin (1945–1951). He had an extensive military background, serving in the army during the Second World War, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel, and was responsible for strategic planning in battle. He received the Distinguished Service Order.
- 3.7 While Mr Conolly was headmaster of John McGlashan College, he continued his post-war military career on a part-time basis in the army reserve force (the ‘Territorials’). After he took up his position at Dilworth, he rose to the senior rank of brigadier in Auckland and for a brief period was the senior military officer in the country. Hence, he remained actively engaged in the military while heading Dilworth.
- 3.8 It is evident the students at Dilworth were well used to rigid disciplinary control under Mr Wakelin and this continued unabated under Mr Conolly. In addition, Mr Conolly introduced a military flavour to the school’s management.
- 3.9 The school roll for most of Mr Conolly’s time was around 180. In terms of his leadership of staff, he was described as a “one man band”.⁸⁸

82 M Wilton, *The Dilworth Legacy: The first one hundred years of Dilworth School 1966–2006*, Dilworth Trust Board, 2007, p 349.

83 Wilton, *The Dilworth Legacy*, p 348.

84 Wilton, *The Dilworth Legacy*, p 348.

85 Wilton, *The Dilworth Legacy*, p 349.

86 Wilton, *The Dilworth Legacy*, p 350.

87 Wilton, *The Dilworth Legacy*, p 350.

88 Wilton, *The Dilworth Legacy*, p 540.

In the former students' words

3.10 Fourteen men who began school in Mr Conolly's era provided information to the Inquiry as former students,⁸⁹ three others, who held other roles subsequently and were students in this era, also spoke with the Inquiry about their student experiences. The 14 former students accounts had common themes, which were largely corroborated by Mr Firth and Dr Wilton:

- a school atmosphere of fear, terror and militarism
- extreme bullying, violence, and no narking or pimping rules
- the inability to stop bullying and punishment for complaining of it.

3.11 Nine reported being seriously physically abused. Four reported sexual abuse and three reported both serious physical abuse and sexual abuse.

School environment

3.12 The former students described Mr Conolly running the school as though it were a military unit. It was a terrifying and intimidating place. The culture was aggressive and bound by a rigid structure. The students marched everywhere and lined up for everything: food, church and work parades. Whistleblowing and standing to attention were a constant. From age 10, students were given a seniority ranking and their numbers called out in order of seniority, starting with the head prefect who was number 1. Student CT described his number as being attached to his school life like a tattoo.

3.13 The punishments for new entrants (aged 8–9) included being made to miss meals, not being allowed to go home in the weekend, and being hit with a strap or ruler. From age 10, the cane was the predominant method of punishment. Corporal punishment was administered for minor issues such as losing a sock, having dirty shoes, being late to a meal, talking during the first half of mealtimes, not making a bed properly, breaking something accidentally or talking after lights out.⁹⁰

89 A further two individuals registered but did not provide information to the Inquiry.

90 For example, Student IR, Student HQ, Student EZ, Student CT and Student HA statements to the Inquiry; Student IB statement to external agency.

- 3.14 Student BU, who was not aware he was going to boarding school, was caned on his first day by a teacher because he was crying due to feeling homesick. Student HA was “strapped” when he was sick on his bed. Students also described being caned for failing to pass a test or not doing their schoolwork to a required standard.⁹¹ There were many rules, and students often did not know why they had been caned other than being told they had “misbehaved”,⁹² so it was almost impossible for the students to protect themselves from the cane. The staff, including the matrons, were said to be uncaring.⁹³
- 3.15 Student AD described his entire school years as a “hellhole” of violence and bullying. On his first day, he was told a skunk is a snitch and you are never allowed to snitch (that is, tell on anyone). Hence, you could not do anything about the bullying or violence inflicted on you. Student CT described the school as a “prison orphanage” and the prefects, who more or less ran the dormitories, keeping order and handing out punishments, as the “military police”. Student EZ described a senior teacher walking past students at an outdoor school assembly and hearing a comment made about him. He asked the student who said it to come forward. No one did, so he caned the 75 students standing in the area from where the comment came. Student HA described one of the first things he and other students were told by the housemaster was not to go crying to him if you got into a fight and lost, as you would be punished too, and not to tell tales. HA said he felt this just gave the bullies free rein.
- 3.16 The dismissive attitude towards the students and the way they were treated are well summed up in an incident described by one former student. On leaving day, the headmaster came up to Student AD and his mother, who were standing together, and said to her, “Mrs [name omitted] you’ve just produced the school’s greatest failure ... he will not succeed in anything in life”.⁹⁴ AD has remembered this comment with shame, anger and resentment ever since.

Leadership by John Conolly

- 3.17 Student AD described the headmaster as a vicious, sadistic, brutish bully who had no empathy. He was “diabolical, unapproachable and uncaring”. As an example of the latter, AD said that when he was in isolation in the sick bay with chicken pox, Mr Conolly came in and told him his father had died. Mr Conolly turned around and left immediately, offering no support or sympathy.

91 For example, Student IT and Student HA statements to the Inquiry.

92 For example, Student AD statement to external agency and Inquiry interview.

93 For example, Student EZ and Student AD statements to the Inquiry.

94 Student AD Inquiry interview.

- 3.18 Mr Conolly caned students for no apparent reason, sometimes until their backsides bled and carefully administered each blow directly underneath the previous blow so there was a square of the buttocks without skin.⁹⁵ As injuries were not accidental, the matron would not treat them. Student IB believed Mr Conolly wanted to inflict the maximum pain possible when he caned and regularly practised his caning technique on leather padding strapped to a chair in his office.

Serious physical abuse

- 3.19 Student AD said he was bullied more than most students, he was subjected to “sadistic relentless bullying”. He was a year younger than the other new entrants, puny and not a physical fighter. Recognising this, two students one year ahead of him began to bully him relentlessly, continuing until he left school in 1958, six years later. He was punched, deliberately tripped up, had things thrown at him, had his glasses smashed, clothes rumped and shoes scuffed up, all of which led to him being caned. He was badly beaten up on many occasions. Once a mouse was put in his food. He recalls being thrown into a waterhole while one of the students kept a foot on his head so he could not surface, and he nearly drowned. He was humiliated in front of other students and stories were fabricated so he would be ordered out of the dining room and miss his meal.
- 3.20 Another former Student, IV, referred to receiving constant physical and verbal abuse. One time he was hit on the back of the head and knocked out. He also described students coming into the dormitory at night and trying to suffocate him. To him, the staff encouraged bullying of him because he was “thick”. He described reporting bullying to housemasters but nothing was done.
- 3.21 Student EZ said he was not bullied by other students, but he was exceptionally talented in sports and very fit. When he was a senior student, Mr Peter Parr, the headmaster after Mr Conolly, asked him to beat up particular students the headmaster considered needed a beating and were not responding to the cane.

Sexual abuse

- 3.22 The next paragraphs contain examples of sexual abuse from the many the Inquiry heard. **These accounts are graphic and may be distressing.**

95 Student IB statement to external agency.

- 3.23 Four of the 14 former students who spoke to us were sexually abused while Mr Conolly was headmaster. The sexual abuse involved:
- Sexual predation by a staff member
 - Sexual predation by the husband of a school visitor
 - Coercion into group sexual activity with other boys
 - Sexual predation by an older student.
- 3.24 Given their ages, none had any experience or knowledge of sex when they arrived at the school. Student CT was abused by the husband of a school visitor, a school teacher, and then a prefect. Student AD was abused by the same prefect and coerced into group masturbation with other students. The remaining two were abused by older students. What they suffered, how they tried to deal with it and the impact on them is described next.
- 3.25 **Sexual abuse by husband of school visitor:** When Student CT was eight years old, the housemistress of the junior school held mahjong sessions for women friends in the sitting room of the boarding house. One woman took a particular interest in him. She got permission from the housemistress to take him to her home on Sundays. She and her husband were kind to him and took him on outings. However, several times she went out alone and the student stayed behind with her husband. On these occasions, the husband undressed the student and asked him to masturbate him, telling him it was their little love secret. The sexual abuse led twice to rape. Seventy years later, the student says he still vividly remembers the excruciating pain and fear.
- 3.26 **Sexual abuse by senior teacher:** Student CT was a talented student, and a senior teacher started taking a personal interest in him, taking him out on Sundays to meals, places such as the Parnell Baths, movies in the city, the beach and, even once, Motuihe Island. The senior teacher gave him money. To the young student, who craved affection and attention, this was a very happy time. After a few months, the teacher started taking him to places where he was on his own with the teacher, who would tell him how much he loved him and wanted to be with him. In retrospect, the student thinks the places he was taken were some sort of rented accommodation or motel-type places. The teacher kissed and hugged the student and held his hand. At first, the student was flattered and believed he and the teacher had a special relationship. However, soon the sexual abuse started. The student was required to masturbate the teacher, suck the teacher's penis until he ejaculated and was raped. The student started having anxiety and panic attacks, and his schoolwork and behaviour deteriorated dramatically.

- 3.27 **Sexual abuse by prefect:** In an effort to stop two older students bullying him and after futilely seeking help from a housemaster, Student AD spoke to a senior student, the older brother of one of the bullies, who seemed approachable. He promised to protect the student from his brother's bullying, but never did.
- 3.28 A few nights later, the senior student came to Student AD's dorm after lights out and shook him awake. Saying he needed to see him and to come quietly, he led the student to the prefect's cottage and told him to take his pyjamas off. The student was shivering with cold and fear. The senior student fondled his genitals and showed AD his genitals. He then sent him back to bed and indicated he would be in contact again. For the next two years, the young student was conditioned by the older student and required to watch every night to see if the prefects' cottage lights flicked on and off. If they did, then that was a signal to get out of bed quietly and go to the cottage to be sexually abused by the senior student. This abuse happened to AD at least twice a week when he was aged 11 to 13. The sex acts included being forced to suck the older student's penis, attempted anal rape, and attempted insertion of objects into his anus on multiple occasions, including a broom-handle. After two years, the older student suddenly left the student alone.⁹⁶
- 3.29 Student CT described the same senior student as a sexual predator who abused a lot of students. When he was aged 12 to 15, mainly in the evenings, the older student would corner him and drag him into places such as the wood pile, prefects' room or the place where rugby boots were kept. There, he would force the younger student to masturbate him and perform oral sex on him. The student was in a state of sheer terror over a long period because of this predation. He was continually on alert not knowing when it would happen and trying to avoid the prefect.
- 3.30 **Being forced into group masturbation:** Sometimes Student AD's job involved chopping wood next to the woodshed. While doing that, when he was aged 14 to 15, he was sometimes pressured to participate in masturbating other students in the woodshed.
- 3.31 **Sexual abuse by older students:** The same two students who relentlessly bullied Student AD would also sometimes put their fingers into his anus after they had grabbed him by the testicles and squeezed them. Student AX was also abused by an older student who made him engage in sexual activity in the dormitory.

96 It is understood he moved his attention to another student.

- 3.32 Student BF was nine years old when an older student, aged 15 or 16, befriended him. One night, the older student asked the younger student to come with him to the drying room where he got BF to touch the older student's penis. The older student asked BF to come to the drying room twice more. The second occasion involved more touching, but on the third, when the younger student started strongly resisting the touching, the older student tried to rape him.

School response to complaints made

- 3.33 **Complaining to housemaster of severe bullying:** When he was 11, after two years of bullying, Student AD told his housemaster he was being bullied and that all the harassment was interfering with his learning. This was his attempt to get around the 'no snitching' rule. The housemaster did nothing other than reply, "Well you are supposed to grow a backbone here". As described above, AD's next attempt to stop the bullying, by approaching the older brother of one of the bullies, resulted in his sustained sexual abuse by the older brother.
- 3.34 **Complaining to housemistress of sexual abuse by husband of her friend:** When Student CT became concerned about the bleeding from his bottom after he had been raped by the husband of the friend of the housemistress, he told the housemistress what was happening to him. She became angry and told him he was a liar, troublemaker and bad influence on the other students and the school, and told him to stop playing with himself. She then reported what he had told her to Mr Conolly.
- 3.35 **Punishment by John Conolly for complaint to housemistress of sexual abuse:** Student CT was called to Mr Conolly's office. Mr Conolly also refused to believe his story and said he was making things up, trying to create attention for himself and causing problems for everyone. Throughout the conversation, the student was crying and "feeling wretched". Mr Conolly said he could not and would not allow the student to cause such problems. He caned him with "6 of the best" causing large red welts. Eventually, they were treated by the matron with cream, though nothing was done about his bleeding anus. The woman never reappeared in the mahjong group, and the student never went to her home again.
- 3.36 **Talking to housemaster about sex with senior teacher:** As his schoolwork and behaviour progressively deteriorated following being sexually abused by a teacher, Student CT, in desperation, approached his housemaster, explaining the trouble he was having with friendships, study, sleeping and getting out of bed. He told the housemaster the senior teacher and he "were having sex". The housemaster became distant and said words along the lines that this sort of thing didn't happen at this school, and they had never had any incidents like it before. The housemaster reported the matter to Mr Conolly.

- 3.37 **Punishment by headmaster for reporting being sexually abused by senior teacher:** Conolly told Student CT he did not believe him, that the teacher was a well-respected member of the staff and that there had never been complaints about him. He called the student a coward and liar and accused him of trying to ruin the school's name.
- 3.38 This time, rather than caning him, Mr Conolly sent Student CT to coventry for an entire term. He was not allowed to talk to anyone, play sports or do chores. The student had to stay in the classroom until dinner time and only then allowed to go to the toilet or bed. He was not allowed to leave the school or return home on Sundays. He felt so alone, and there was no one he could talk to.
- 3.39 **Complaining to parents about being abused:** Student CT constantly complained to his parents without giving specific details. He told them he was having a really bad time and being assaulted. They kept insisting he had a wonderful opportunity with his Dilworth scholarship and it was a gift from God that he had a place there. He recalls that he complained so much that eventually they did complain to either the Board or the headmaster. They never told him what happened, and nothing changed for him. He believes his parents were simply overwhelmed by the school.
- 3.40 **Complaining to the housemaster:** Student BF said he tried to stop sexual abuse on him by an older student. Unable to sleep, and still in pain from abuse carried out that day, he went to the housemaster to report what had happened to him. The housemaster closed him down, telling him he was lying and to go back to his bed and that if he mentioned it again, he would be caned to within an inch of his life.
- 3.41 **Complaint to a tutor:** A complaint about a tutor's behaviour towards younger students was raised by a senior student with another house tutor, Staff Member TC. TC consulted the deputy headmaster and together they went to see Mr Conolly.
- 3.42 During their conversation, Mr Conolly confirmed he had previously stood down the tutor complained about for sexual misconduct when he was a school prefect, and he had been asked to leave the school. As a result of the complaint to TC, Mr Conolly then dismissed the tutor. The dismissed tutor was discussed at a staff meeting later that day and Staff Member TC recalled the staff being angry that Mr Conolly had employed this tutor knowing about his prior behaviour. There is no school record of this incident or any evidence that the tutor was referred to the police. The Board is advised in Mr Conolly's annual headmaster's report that the tutor had been replaced.

- 3.43 **Complaint records:** No records of any of the complaints the students said they made are on their files. Nor is there any record of the Board being told about the complaints made by students.

Policies and procedures, 1950–1966

- 3.44 Having set out the nature and scope of the abuse during this period, we now consider the policies available at the school at the time, and the extent to which they shed light on the culture and environment at the school that allowed for such abuse to occur.

Few policies and procedures identified and none covering abuse complaints

- 3.45 Documented policies and procedures from 1950 to 1966 identified by the school are minimal. This was confirmed by the school in its response to the Abuse in Care Royal Commission notice to produce information under the Inquiries Act 2019.⁹⁷
- 3.46 In the documents we reviewed for this period, no specific policy related to the handling of complaints of abuse. However, other policy documents provide an insight into aspects of the school relevant to our Inquiry. We summarise them below.

General policies

- 3.47 Two of the earliest, but undated, written policies are said, by the school, to have been produced between 1960 and 1965. They are entitled:
- Visitors to the School⁹⁸
 - Dilworth School: Some Information for Staff.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Dilworth School: Response to Notice to Produce No 2, Schedule A(1), 25 May 2020.

⁹⁸ According to the school, this policy was written in about 1960.

⁹⁹ According to the school, this policy was written in about 1965.

- 3.48 In addition, we reviewed a document from 1962, Prep House Notes on Masters' Duties and Routine, which sheds light on the heavily regimented school environment in place for the 8- and 9-year-olds it applied to. For example, there is an instruction that tasks such as bed making should be carried out in silence.¹⁰⁰
- 3.49 Another reference relates to showering requirements. It directs that the house master is to watch showering as much as possible, but that the matron is to be present to attend to cleanliness. Further, it directs that the house master is never to touch a student in the bathroom – if a student needed scrubbing, he was to be handed to the matron.¹⁰¹
- 3.50 In a list of “do’s” and “don’ts” house masters are directed to set a good standard in their mode of speech by avoiding slang and over-familiar language.¹⁰² Importantly, house masters are directed never to let a student into their own room and to interview students only in the duty room or a place other than their own quarters.¹⁰³ This is of particular relevance in the light of abuse carried out by Mr Peter Taylor, Mr Ian Wilson and Mr Rex McIntosh in later years.
- 3.51 The following excerpts from the document entitled Dilworth School: Some Information for Staff are relevant:

It is taken for granted that all members of staff at all times are to consider themselves guardians of discipline and the good name of the school ...

No master must ever allow himself to be closeted for any length of time with any one boy in any room or place where the master could be compromised in any way. Trumped up charges may occur and in fact have occurred. “and very recently 1970’s!”¹⁰⁴ ...

Staff should endeavour to be mindful of the prestige of prefects ...

It is pointed out that the parents of boys at Dilworth are at greater disadvantage (e.g. complaints) than the parents of boys at any other school in New Zealand. It is therefore a matter of honour that all staff members remember this at all times and be particularly careful not to take advantage of the position or to do anything which may appear to take advantage of the position.

100 Dilworth School, Prep house notes on masters' duties and routine, September 1962.

101 Dilworth School, Prep house notes.

102 Dilworth School, Prep house notes.

103 Dilworth School, Prep house notes.

104 According to Mr Bruce Owen, the words “and very recently 1970’s!” were handwritten on the document in the 1980s.

- 3.52 Whilst the policy documentation for this period was minimal, aspects illustrate an awareness by the school that students were potentially at more risk due to the lower possibility of parental involvement than in other schools. The strict guidance on showering and the warning to avoid a student being in a one-on-one situation alone with a staff member, indicate an awareness of the risk of sexual impropriety.

Inquiry assessment of the nature and extent of abuse and school response to complaints

Former students' statements

- 3.53 We find the statements of the former students compelling and credible. These men did not know each other, registered with the Inquiry independently and had not been in contact with each other. They confirmed each other's evidence concerning the school environment. The three who complained to someone at the school of sexual abuse from this era said the same, namely, that they were not believed when they reported sexual abuse and were either punished or threatened with punishment.
- 3.54 Those men who had been physically and sexually abused from this era, remain deeply hurt, angry and alienated from the school. The impact on all aspects of their lives has been severe, life changing and lifelong. One described how the dam finally burst in his late 70s when he read in the media about Operation Beverly. He made a statement to police and spoke for the first time about the abuse he had endured. One disclosed his full story only once before coming to the Inquiry, to his counsellor in 1972. His wife still does not know the full horror of what happened to him.
- 3.55 The reported school environment of widespread severe violence was corroborated by accounts in *The Dilworth Legacy*¹⁰⁵ and in the statements of Dr Wilton,¹⁰⁶ who attended the school from 1944 to 1954 (and was headmaster from 1979 to 1997). Dr Wilton confirmed that the environment was one of "endemic" bullying. He said at first he hated the school for the same reasons.¹⁰⁷ Dr Wilton said he had not seen any hint of sexual abuse when he was a student, although he had seen consensual sexual activity between students.

105 M Wilton, *The Dilworth Legacy: The first one hundred years of Dilworth School 1966–2006*, Dilworth Trust Board, 2007.

106 See the list of Dr Wilton's statements in Chapter 5.

107 M Wilton statement for the faith-based institutions response, Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry.

- 3.56 Dr Wilton's failure to observe any hint of sexual abuse is consistent with the evidence of the four former students who each thought they were the only ones who were being sexually abused. They never witnessed it or heard of it outside their own experience. Mr Firth, who was a student in Mr Conolly's era, also said he had never been aware of sexual abuse.

Serious physical abuse

- 3.57 We find that the school environment was characterised by widespread, extreme violence, including caning, and reported instances of bullying by senior students and caning by staff constituted serious physical abuse.
- 3.58 We have no doubt the environment was inappropriate and unacceptable, even in the 1950s, particularly in relation to the imposition of the harsh military culture on primary school aged students as young as 8 and 9.

Caning

- 3.59 In chapter 2, we outlined the approach the Inquiry took to assessing whether the accounts of caning it received from each era were justified examples of reasonable force for correction.
- 3.60 Former students described the caning policy as allowing caning for anything and everything. Caning for trivial misdemeanours, or for no apparent reason, was outside the bylaws and guidelines and difficult to justify as a reasonable use of force for correction as discussed in paragraphs 2.30 to 2.36. While not specifically covered in the bylaws and guidelines, we consider that caning 75 students because one student who had made an objectionable comment was not identified, also constitutes serious physical abuse.

Bullying

- 3.61 We find that widespread bullying was encouraged by the harsh environment, with its emphasis on physical punishment, weakening students' ability to resist bullying or complain of it and allowing brutal assaults to occur. Similarly, it undermined students' ability to resist sexual abuse effectively and seek protection from it.

Nature and extent of sexual abuse

- 3.62 We find the incidents of reported sexual abuse in this period likely to be indicative of a wider school problem of sexual abuse. Notably four of the 17 men spoken to from this era reported having been sexually abused. The numbers who spoke with the Inquiry from this era are comparatively lower than from other eras but we do not think this is indicative of less physical or sexual abuse than in other eras. Former students who started under Mr Conolly would now be in their late 70s or 80s. We can safely assume many will have died or been too frail to participate in the police investigation or this Inquiry.
- 3.63 The brazen way in which sexual incidents occurred and the ready dismissal of complaints show the environment enabled sexual abuse to flourish.

School response to complaints of abuse

- 3.64 The school's handling of complaints was uniformly ineffective and indifferent to the welfare of their charges. Boys who were being bullied to the point of serious physical abuse had no comeback and no one to whom they could turn for support.
- 3.65 While there may have been a widespread misbelief at the time that children were prone to lie, the school response to complaints of sexual abuse was unacceptable. It was known that adults did sexually abuse children and that it was a criminal offence. To some extent the school policies demonstrate an understanding of this risk.
- 3.66 To his credit, Mr Conolly may have taken action on some complaints. For example, the wife of Student CT's abuser stopped going to mahjong classes and no longer took CT to her home. CT was nonetheless called a liar, instead of being told he would be protected from his abuser, and he was not supported in any other way. Mr Conolly also excluded the senior student known to sexually abuse younger students, but inexplicably reintroduced him to the school as a tutor.
- 3.67 Whether the headmaster told the Board of the complaints is unknown. None are recorded in Board records.