

# Introduction

This Inquiry was established by the Dilworth Board of Trustees for particular and carefully defined purposes that are set out in its terms of reference.<sup>36</sup> The Inquirers are bound to report only on the listed issues. For example, we have no brief to comment on the school's academic, sporting or cultural achievements or standards. The terms relate almost entirely to matters that have adversely affected the students and staff of Dilworth School and its reputation.

We have undertaken our task to the best of our combined abilities, with the assistance of an able staff. This report to the Board contains our findings and recommendations under the terms of reference given to us.

The report includes an account of serious physical and sexual abuse at the school from the 1950s until the 21st century. Although we heard of many excellent, dedicated teachers and boarding house staff who cared about, supported and went the extra mile for the boys, we do not record their work and successes in this report. Nor do we discuss the high-achieving and successful students who passed through during that time, who flourished at the school and built strong, long-lasting careers, families and friendships as a result.

Regrettably, this report is a catalogue of what went wrong, the lifetime of damage it caused to abused students, how that damage might be fixed, and an expression of hope that the terrible events of the past will never be repeated.

We have reached one fundamental conclusion from the many interviews conducted and documentation read: ongoing silence about the sexual abuse recorded in this report is the primary reason for the damage caused to many former students of Dilworth.

Students were silenced by their isolation from family or the absence of trusted adults, by shame and confusion about what had happened to them, by their immaturity and lack of knowledge about adult sexual behaviour, by severe punishment or the threat of expulsion on reporting, or by dismissal of and inaction on their complaints of abuse. A cloak of silence was placed over the abuse, preventing the public from knowing of it, and forestalling criticism of the school. Until this century, the Board perpetuated the silence by failing to notify the Department of Education or future employers of the sexually abusing staff.

The Inquiry, therefore, has been concerned to ensure former students' voices are heard clearly throughout this report. Due to the extensive period covered and the numbers of abusers and types of abuse, the report contains a large number of quotes and descriptions of their experiences from survivors. These accounts will be confronting for many.

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<sup>36</sup> See appendix 1 to this report.



## Distressing content warning

We have chosen to include some of the former students experiences in their own words. We acknowledge the reality of their suffering. However, many of these accounts are graphic and may be distressing. Some contain explicit language. This may be difficult to read and could evoke strong emotions. **If you need support, please contact your GP or healthcare provider.**

We spoke to all former students whose accounts of abuse are included in this report and gained their informed permission to use these quotes.<sup>37</sup> Many expressed gratitude that their experiences are being recorded, usually in their own words. On occasion, a former student may think he has been quoted or his experience set out when in fact it is an experience shared by more than one former student. This is another part of the tragedy of Dilworth's history: abuse by an offender often happened more than once, to different students.

This Inquiry is a private inquiry commissioned by the Dilworth Trust Board. Although it has not been formally carried out under the provisions of the Inquiries Act 2013, we have followed the Act's guidelines. For example, we have observed the requirement in section 10 to act independently, impartially and fairly.

We have not had the power to compel people to give evidence. For the Inquiry's success, we have depended on former students and their families, former staff and others with relevant information voluntarily coming forward to speak with us. We have depended on the school and other organisations to provide us with the information we made numerous requests for.

We thank all those who gave their time to speak with us. Above all, we acknowledge the former students who came and met us and the family members who spoke for those who had died. Speaking to an Inquiry is a stressful and alien experience even for those who have not been damaged or whose education or standing in the community might prepare them for the ordeal. We are acutely conscious that the students and family members who met us are the ones who could cope with the experience and that many others were unable to, including those who died prematurely. We hope this report will go some way to acknowledging the suffering of all these people and form an enduring part of the history of Dilworth.

We wish also to thank current members of the Trust Board, present and former staff, as well as family members, whānau, current students and others such as Anglican Church personnel.

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<sup>37</sup> We also engaged a psychologist with specific expertise in working with sexual abuse survivors to provide advice and guidance on our approach to recounting accounts of sexual abuse in this report.

We want to acknowledge former headmasters, other senior staff and former Board members who spent many stressful hours helping us understand the school environment and the decisions they made or implemented when they were at the helm. Many are now elderly and have been obliged to face lengthy criticism of their actions or omissions after previously spending retirement satisfied they had done good work at Dilworth. They have felt deeply betrayed by the actions of the staff they had trusted.

We recognise that all have done valuable work in the school's service and are deeply distressed at the events outlined in this report. Some find it extremely difficult to accept the level and extent of the abuse we have outlined and are troubled by the impact the report will have on the school's reputation. All of these reactions are understandable, and we acknowledge that the report makes grim reading for the former students, staff and trustees. Some current staff also faced intense examination and now have to help the school recover from this account of failure, to support vulnerable students, and to thrive.

We also acknowledge the assistance of two convicted former staff who agreed to meet us in prison, another now in prison who met with an investigator and made a statement, and two others who communicated with us in writing.

We thank everyone for their willing participation in assisting us to understand what went wrong. None were under an obligation to speak with us. Nonetheless they almost always agreed to assist, motivated by a desire to help uncover what had occurred and prevent it from happening again. Their observations and concessions formed a valuable part of the Inquiry's work.

We set out in detail the school's failings over the decades to protect, nurture and educate all its students and the structural matters requiring immediate attention. We support those former students who told us they want a reformed and revitalised Dilworth school to survive. We do not support the views of the few who want the school demolished, but we understand why they say that.

Dilworth is worth preserving and fostering. The dream of its founders, James and Isabella Dilworth, was to help disadvantaged boys have a chance at a decent education and to be cared for in every possible way while at the school. It is a matter of shame and deep regret that their dream has not been realised for so many of its students, but every opportunity exists for those who govern and manage the school to continue to support its rehabilitation. The need remains as strong as it was at the end of the 19th century for economically disadvantaged children to have access to the educational opportunities the Dilworth Trust provides and to reach their potential as many have done before them. Dilworth must be encouraged to rise to the challenge of its founders.



**Dame Silvia Cartwright**



**Frances Joychild KC**