

MEDIA RELEASE – Friday July 20 2018

RESPONSE TO SBS NEWS REPORT



Further information:
Jenny Brinkworth
M: 0438 727 677
T: 08 8210 8117

In 1995, when the then Fr O’Kelly was Headmaster of St Ignatius College (he became a Bishop in 2009), he was informed about this specific allegation against Mr Steve Hamra. He responded to the matter immediately and appropriately. The matter was reported to both the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) and the Police who investigated the matter. An open and transparent meeting was held with the former student and his parents and a copy of the meeting notes were sent to the family.

The teacher was stood down while the authorities investigated the matter. When they decided that no charges were to be laid, he was reinstated. No further complaints were made against the teacher while Bishop O’Kelly was headmaster.

When Bishop O’Kelly dealt with this matter in 1995, the Church’s Towards Healing protocols had not yet been implemented. At that time, processes for handling such allegations were not what they are today and there was not the benefit of the lessons learned from the Royal Commission in more recent years.

With regard to questions about Mr Hamra’s role at Christian Brothers College (CBC), it should be stressed that he was not ‘transferred’ to CBC. Mr Hamra resigned from St Ignatius and later applied for, and was successful in winning, a counselling role at CBC. He was not employed to play a role in the development of the school’s child protection framework. He had a current police clearance.

When CBC learned of allegations concerning Mr Hamra relating to the 1970s, within hours SA Police was alerted and Mr Hamra was immediately stood down. The principal briefed staff on the matter and wrote to the college community and informed them of the situation as a matter of openness and transparency. **There was no allegation of any incident involving anyone at the school.** Mr Hamra did not return to duties at CBC or any school after this time.

Child protection processes, policies and screenings in Catholic schools continue to be evaluated, refined and improved. Through Catholic Education SA, all schools have access to a process which improves the flow of information, allegations and checks across schools and education sectors.

Bishop O’Kelly and the Director of Catholic Education and all Catholic school principals wish to take this opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to stamping out child abuse in all its forms. They encourage anyone with any concerns to make contact with Police or the Department for Child Protection and also the Church or their schools.

Footnote: Bishop O’Kelly is the Bishop of Port Pirie, an office he has held since his appointment in 2009. He has had a distinguished career in education over 40 years, including terms as chair of the Association of Heads of Independent Schools in Australia and chair of the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education. In 1994, his work in education was recognised when he was awarded the Order of Australia (AM) for services to education. He has been Apostolic Administrator of the Adelaide Archdiocese since June 2018.