



Dilworth

2 December 2021

Video script from Dilworth Trust Board Chair Aaron Snodgrass following the sentencing of Ross Browne

Kia ora fellow Old Boys.

As many of you will now be aware, Ross Browne was sentenced by the High Court to 6.5 years of imprisonment, following his conviction on 16 charges relating to historical sexual abuse at our school and possession of child exploitation material.

Today's sentencing marks the conclusion of that judicial process and, hopefully, another step towards healing for his victim survivors and their families.

It also allows us to talk openly to you and our wider community about this case.

I want to acknowledge and commend the courage of the Old Boy survivors and their families who brought these complaints to the school and the police. I also want to acknowledge the pain and life-long and continuing impact of Ross Browne's offending on the lives of the Old Boy survivors and their families. The judge today acknowledged that no sentence of imprisonment will provide solice for the harm you have faced; with this we all whole heartedly agree.

Ross Browne, known to us as Father Browne, was our school's chaplain and head of pastoral care from 1980 to 2006.

His actions, and the hurt he caused that led to these convictions, were first and foremost a gross and complete breach of the trust placed in him by the students he was meant to protect, guide, mentor and teach.

They were also a betrayal of the trust placed in him by parents and caregivers, colleagues, school leadership, the Trust Board and the wider Anglican church.

The impact of Ross Browne's offending on our community has been far reaching and should never have happened.

When concerns regarding Ross Browne's teaching methods and over familiarity with students were initially raised by staff, students and parents; these weren't followed through, and our response was inadequate.

We did not listen to their voices in the same way as we do today.

Ross Browne was eventually stood down in late 2005 after complaints were made by former students regarding behaviours in his sexual education classes.

Following an investigation, he was asked to resign in early 2006 and the Anglican Diocese of Auckland and New Zealand Teachers' Council were notified.

We also petitioned the Teachers' Council for his teaching certificate to be withdrawn.

The school's decision at the time was to treat concerns and complaints regarding Ross Browne as employment matters, without involving the police.

What this process has made clear, is that our systems and procedures at that time for dealing with such complaints were insufficient and more stringent action should have been taken.

We failed to prevent abuse occurring in our school and, in doing so, we failed our students and their families.

We apologise to the survivors of Ross Browne's abuse, their families and all of our Old Boys for this.

We deeply regret what occurred in our past.

Since we announced it back in October, we have continued to make progress on the development of the redress programme through ongoing consultation, and we remain on track to launch it in the first half of 2022.

It will be comprehensive, covering four important elements: Acknowledgement, Apology, Counselling and Support, as well as Financial Compensation.

And it will operate independently of the School.

To better inform the work of the Redress Programme, and to understand what happened in the past, we intend to commission an independent inquiry. The inquiry's terms of reference are currently being drafted and will encompass the evolution of the school's policies and processes related to student safety and the school's response to complaints of sexual abuse.

It will include an opportunity for survivors and all members of the Dilworth community to participate and contribute.

We want to understand how, and why, the school failed in its duty to protect students from sexual abuse by members of staff.

Survivors will be consulted on the inquiry's terms of reference.

The HRC complainants' legal representatives have been informed of the school's intent to launch an independent inquiry and will also be consulted.

It is our intention that the independent inquiry will be launched in the first half of 2022 and run concurrently with the independent Redress Programme, while also informing that separate process with relevant findings.

We understand the Anglican Church will be commissioning its own inquiry into matters relating to Ross Browne and will support this.

We will keep our community up to date on progress, as consultation on the terms of reference for both the redress programme and independent investigation continues.

In closing, my thoughts are constantly with those in our community who suffered abuse during their time at Dilworth.

I encourage any Old Boy who needs support, to please use our confidential Listening Service which provides access to professional counselling services, or share it with anyone you think would benefit from using it.

Thank you for your ongoing support for our school, and for one another, during this difficult time.

ENDS