

2019 Episcopal Visitor's Report to The Dilworth Trust Board

I am pleased to present my report to Trustees following my annual visit to the School on 23-24 September 2019.

Outline of the Visit

I was able to visit all three campuses over the two days of my visit, and to have time with each of the Heads of Campus, as well as with the Principal.

On Monday afternoon I was at Te Haerenga. I joined the school community for lunch and spent the afternoon moving around classes where I was able to speak with both students and teachers.

On Tuesday I began my day at Senior Campus with chapel, led by the Chaplain with a talk from a Year 12 student. I went across to Junior Campus and participated in a Year 6 RE class. I was able to visit the new sports centre, and to chat with staff over morning tea. I attended their chapel service where the Year 12 student spoke again.

I returned to Senior Campus and participated in a Year 11 RE class. I had lunch with some of the prefect group and finished the day speaking with the Chaplain.

Beyond getting the usual "feel" for the School from my visit, a focus was wellbeing and the opportunity to discover what practices and policies exist to ensure the wellbeing and safety of students in the School. I addressed this explicitly with each of the Heads of Campus and with the Principal.

The Royal Commission

Part of the motivation for considering wellbeing is the work of the Royal Commission on Abuse in Care. I have had numerous discussions with the Dilworth Chair about the impact of the Commission's work on the School, especially in relation to historical events. There is an expectation that former students may make submissions to the Commission in relation to their experiences while boarders here. It is important to note that these relate to periods from the 1990s and before.

I am very pleased with the proactive approach which the Board has taken to this through the appointment of professional trained people able to offer a listening service, the commitment to provide for counselling and other support as appropriate, and the transparency of communication with Old Boys about this.

I realise that it is the School's intention to cooperate fully with the Commission as and when requests are made to the School. You will be aware that the Anglican Church as a whole is seeking to make a consistent

and coordinated response to the Commission and is inviting each of its related organisations (e.g. schools and social service providers) to be part of that through legal representation. It will be up to each of those organisations as to whether they participate in that way. Nevertheless, if Dilworth School chooses to represent itself separately at any hearings, it will be important that there is close liaison with the Church as a whole to ensure that consistency.

Wellbeing in the School

Wellbeing is a theme across workplaces and organisations at present. It recognises that while the physical environments we work in or to which people come as visitors must be safe, the emotional and psychological wellbeing of people is of equal importance. This is true for everyone, but most especially for those who are more vulnerable either through age or health or other cause.

Schools which provide boarding facilities have a much greater risk profile in this respect. Policies and practices which guard against bullying or abuse in these environments are essential, whether the source of the behaviour is from other students (harder to detect!) or from staff. These are issues which I discussed with each of the Heads of Campus.

In relation to physical safety, I note the introduction of glass viewing panes in offices and meeting rooms on each campus. Policies are either in place or being developed so that staff are aware of the risks of meeting with students one-on-one and to ensure that they do not do so in an isolated environment where they could be exposed to accusation.

In relation to student development to greater wellbeing, each campus has a different approach to respond to the age group for which they are responsible. At Te Haerenga a unique opportunity exists to focus on this with the three strands of outdoor, academic, and personal/social growth. The third strand is seen as essential for the other two strands to be effective. The cabin coach structure is the key platform for this with the cabin coach relating to a small number of boys to proactively work on skills that promote well-being and to respond to issues that arise in the cabin community. The focus is on restoration and growth among the students as they are helped to face difficulties. Ongoing professional development is provided to resource staff for this responsibility.

The Junior Campus is where many boys gain their introduction to the culture and ethos of Dilworth School. There is much emphasis in the first term on establishing that sense of identity as students are integrated into the School. There is ongoing focus on values, with kindness being an early one to receive emphasis, based on the kindness which sits at the heart of the gift of James and Isabella Dilworth. This is spoken of in assemblies and chapel services, and importantly is modelled by the staff. Life and health education programmes are in place to give students the skills to interact in a resilient way with their world.

I was able to visit the new sports centre which had been my first opportunity to see through it as I was overseas at the time of the opening. This has been an important factor in responding to winter "cabin fever", and in encouraging physical activity. I understand there are plans to undertake some refurbishment of the junior boarding houses.

At the Senior Campus there is an emotional literacy programme for Year 10 students which offers skills in self-awareness, emotional development, values, etc. Ongoing staff education is in place to ensure a safe physical and emotional environment is being built. There has been staff development on suicide awareness

which is sadly a growing risk in adolescents across society. There is discussion about introducing a staff/student mentoring system, which I believe could be of considerable value.

I note that the School participates in the national wellbeing survey. Isabella Dilworth Lodge continues to provide a “time out” safe place for a variety of needs. There is a strong team across chaplains and counsellors able to respond to students’ needs.

Across the campuses the importance of good food and good sleep was mentioned. At each of the campuses there was mention of encouraging a talking/telling community, especially to respond to bullying or bad behaviour between students.

I was left with two matters which I would like to mention to Trustees. The first was that I did not see written policies about staff/student interactions, eg where and how to meet with students in one-on-one settings, the importance of referrals where issues arise beyond a staff member’s training or skills, etc. These policies may exist or may simply be understood, but I would encourage Trustees to have seen these and approved them.

The second was that I did not get the opportunity to explore how the wellbeing of staff is ensured. As we all know, Dilworth is a demanding place to work, and in many cases that involves living on site. Staff seem committed and engaged and happy in their work. Trustees may wish to consider how it reassures itself that there is a good level of wellbeing among its staff, both in its responsibilities as a good employer and because of the positive flow-on to students which will result.

Spiritual Life

Once again I was pleased by my participation in chapel services which offer a meaningful witness to the Christian faith. It was good to listen to a student speak and for students to see how faith can be real within their peer group. The opportunity for the chaplaincy team to be more effective with the appointment of James Hannah as an assistant chaplain is a welcome development, and I thank Trustees for supporting this. Let’s pray that a good religious studies teacher can be found to release James properly into his new role.

I was glad to have an hour with Mr Reddiex and to establish my relationship with him. The School is blessed to have a person of strong Christian faith in the position as Principal.

Conclusion

The level of wellbeing at the School appears to be good, and there is a strong commitment to attending to matters which have impacted on students in the past. I appreciated my visit, and I look forward to a period of further positive growth at Dilworth.

The Right Reverend Ross Bay
Bishop of Auckland and Episcopal Visitor to Dilworth School