

## Statement of Monique Carter

### RFS-TAS-019

Name	Monique Kirsty Carter
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Occupation	Principal, Lansdowne Crescent Primary School

### **Background**

1. This statement is made by me in response to RFS-TAS-019, issued on 11 April 2022 by the President of the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings (the Commission), the Honourable Marcia Neave AO.
2. My name is Monique Kirsty Carter and I currently employed by the Department of Education (Department) as Principal of Lansdowne Crescent Primary School.
3. I graduated from the University of Tasmania in 1989 with a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood.
4. I commenced teaching in 1990 with the Department. I have taught in both the north and the south of the State in departmental schools only.
5. I have taught in Rocherlea Primary School, South George Town Primary School and Mayfield Primary School in the north of the State. I also held an out-of-school role from 1993 to 1995, inclusive, as Education Support Teacher in the Forester District also in the north of the State. In this role, I supported teachers to provide inclusive education to students with high and additional learning needs.
6. I became a senior leader upon winning a position at North Chigwell Primary School in 1998 and moved to the south of the state in October of that year. I did not take up this role until 2000 due to maternity leave. When I took up the position in 2000, North Chigwell Primary School had amalgamated with Chigwell Primary School, becoming Mount Faulkner Primary School. I subsequently undertook the positions of Advanced Skills Teacher, Co-Principal and Acting Principal at Princes Street Primary School between 2004 and 2008. Between Term 2 2008 and 2011, I was the Principal at Campbell Street Primary School. I have been the Principal at Lansdowne Crescent Primary School since 2012.
7. I have been a substantive Principal for 15 years. I have been engaged as the Principal at Lansdowne Crescent Primary School since 2012.

### **Allegations of harmful sexual behaviour in a school setting**

**Item 2 - Identify any Department policies, procedures or other guidance material regarding the steps to be taken by a school in relation to allegations or incidents of harmful sexual behaviour, including allegations of harmful sexual behaviour made by or on behalf of a student.**

8. As a Principal, if an allegation or incident of child sexual abuse occurs, I respond with reference to the documents contained in the Department's *Accountabilities Toolkit*. The *Accountabilities Toolkit* is an over-arching document containing a suite of policies for schools. The specific policies that underpin my response to allegations or incidents of child sexual abuse, include:
- (a) Mandatory Reporting Procedure;
  - (b) Conduct and Behaviour Standards;
  - (c) Professional Standards for Staff Policy and Guidelines;
  - (d) Duty of Care for Students on Departmental Educational Sites; and
  - (e) Respectful Student Behaviour Policy.
9. The *Accountabilities Toolkit* and these policies are updated annually. As a Principal, I receive a reminder of the importance of the policies and their presence at the beginning of each school year. I forward the *Accountabilities Toolkit* to each member of my staff highlighting the essential key policies that must be read. At Lansdowne Crescent Primary, the link to the document is saved on our internal Canvas page (a Lansdowne portal) so that it can be readily accessed. The link is updated each year.
10. Recently with the development of the Office of Safeguarding Children and Young People, I refer to the statement, links and resources on this site held on the Department's Intranet. There is also a public site held on the Department of Education public site [Safeguarding Children and Young People - The Department of Education Tasmania](#).
11. As a Principal, I have been made aware of the Office of Safeguarding Children and Young People through a number of communications from the Secretary Tim Bullard. This includes a TEAMS meeting with all Department of Education Senior leaders on 9 November 2021, which was followed with an email to all staff on that same day and a further email to leaders regarding the Office of Safeguarding Children and Young People sent on 10 November 2021. It is my understanding that this office was a recommendation from the *Independent Inquiry into the Tasmanian Department of Education's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*. I understand the role of the Office of Safeguarding Children and Young People is to implement the full set of recommendations from that Inquiry and to also advise all people working with children and young people how to respond to allegations and incidents.

**Item 3 - [REDACTED], have you had to deal with allegations or incidents of harmful sexual behaviour, including allegations of harmful sexual behaviour made by or on behalf of a student, in the Relevant Period? If yes, summarise:**

12. During my time at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I [REDACTED] had such an allegation raised with me. It was raised in [REDACTED]

**Item 3(a) - the nature of the allegations or incidents.**

13. A small group of year [redacted] students reported concerns they had for the wellbeing of a class mate. They stated that this classmate (Student A) had disclosed that they had been the possible victim of a sexual offence, possibly [redacted] years prior. Student A stated that the alleged was a previous student of the same age and same grade (Student B).

**Item 3(b) - the steps taken to investigate and respond to those allegations or incidents, including to ensure student safety and to provide support to affected students, families and Officials, and**

14. To clarify the details of the allegation, I spoke individually with Student A. The outcome of this discussion was that Student A denied making the disclosure to the other students and further stated that the other students were spreading rumours because they did not like Student A. I had a good relationship with Student A and formed the view that Student A was being truthful.
15. I was unable to speak with Student B as they had left the State the previous year [redacted] before I had become aware of the allegation [redacted] Student A and Student B had been in the same Grade in [redacted] but not in the same class.
16. As I was left with a great deal of uncertainty around the facts, I conferred with the School Social Worker (Social Worker) for guidance. The Social Worker recommended that I make a mandatory report to child services even though Student A had denied making the allegation. The Social Worker viewed this as important as it could form a 'piece of a puzzle' of information around both students.
17. The Social Worker also recommended that I inform the parent of Student A as to the allegations raised and the subsequent discussion and its outcome. The Social Worker also recommended the School Psychologist, who was already counselling Student A, specifically addressing this issue during a counselling session which took place.
18. [redacted], I called Student A's [redacted] who was main care giver at this stage to inform [redacted] of the allegations and the processes that had been followed: the interviewing of each student, a summary of the resulting responses, the advice sought from the Social Worker and the advice to report to the matter [redacted]. I also sought permission from the [redacted] for the specific school psychologist counselling session to take place and [redacted] granted that permission.
19. I phoned [redacted] reporting the names of Student A and Student B. The intake officer on the phone recorded all of the information and expressed that they would take this matter further with their senior to determine if this should be progressed or if further investigation needed. They also said they would contact Student A's [redacted] if they had further steps to take or further concerns.

**Item 3(c) - any challenges or barriers you faced in responding to those allegations or incidents.**

20. In this situation the main challenge was the complexity of determining the validity of the group of student's claim. When spoken to individually, none of the students could identify having heard the allegation directly, they each stated someone else had heard it and told them.
21. Student A strongly denied having made the statement and alleged the other students were misquoting Student A because they did not like Student A. Student B had left the State [redacted] [redacted] so was not available for any consultation.

22. Due to this lack of clarity, I was quite uncertain about the procedure to follow and I was uncertain of the support contacts that may be available.
23. [REDACTED]. The School Resource Package (SRP) is a budget given to schools to fund a raft of specific school expenses including maintenance and IT hardware. It includes funds allocated for students who qualify for support for educational adjustments, as well as some Department initiatives including a Literacy Coach for example. Each schools SRP is different with the formula reflecting a range of criteria including socio economic need. Further clarity on SRP's should be sought from Finance.
24. Each school is allocated Professional Support staff from Learning Services, including a School Psychologist, access to a Social Worker and most Primary schools have an allocated Speech Pathologist. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
25. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

***Item 4 - To the extent that you faced challenges and barriers in responding to allegations or incidents of harmful sexual behaviour, describe the resources and support that were available to assist you, whether through the Department or external providers.***

26. At the time of addressing this allegation, our main support was from the school-based Social Worker and the School Psychologist. I also utilised the services of the team at [REDACTED] which is part of the Department of Communities Tasmania.
27. At the time of the incident, our school had access to a person in a role known as a Respectful School Support team member (RSST). This person could support the school in a 'on call' capacity. I didn't call this person at the time of this incident as I was unsure if it was within their brief.
28. On reflection now, I would also contact the Student Support Leader and/or Director of Operations given my increased current understanding about process from the guidance now in place on the Department's intranet and the Office of Safeguarding Children and Young People. The Student Support Leader and/or Director of Operations are Learning Service positions. There is also a new position now within the Department, the Inclusive Practice Coach, this has replaced The Respectful School Support team member (RSST), and this is a resource I might access in this situation.

***Item 5 - Identify or describe any additional resources or supports that would assist you to respond to allegations or incidents of harmful sexual behaviour in future.***

29. One of the challenges in my experience is that I have been fortunate to not have had to manage allegations and incidents of child sexual abuse. This means, however, I am not automatically versed in the ways in which to respond and in particular who to reach out to for the best and most accurate advice. In my view, role clarity about the Student Support Leader, Inclusive Practice Coach, and Director of Operations would be helpful.

30. I also feel like it would be great to have an online reporting system to enter all details of an allegation into that could then be triaged by someone in the Department with the most appropriate person responding to schools and supporting them.
31. Currently, there is also nowhere to track adult information. I can detail accounts around student in the current Student Support System, but there is not a place to enter accounts in relation to staff. I have not needed to address allegations of child sexual assault with staff, but I have had to address other unrelated matters that could breach code of conduct with staff and there is no system-wide way of recording this and currently the information stays with the Principal.
32. I feel it would be great to have some really clear information around how to respond to an allegation or incident on the internal website. This could include a flow chart for example with direct numbers of the most appropriate people to call. There is definitely better information available now with the Office of Safeguarding Children and Young People site on the intranet.
33. I also think it would be really useful to have a brief webinar that could be updated each year for all staff to view around the policies and procedures in the Accountability Toolkit, and also how to respond if an allegation or incident of child sexual assault is raised.
34. A really important additional resource that we certainly need at Lansdowne Crescent Primary School is more professional support staff. Specifically we need consistent and well-resourced staffing for school social work and a school psychologist. Lansdowne currently has the provision of a school psychologist one day per week and only 'on call' access to social work as our allocation from the Department. 'On call' means that you would only call the social worker if there was an emergency.
35. To support our students' needs, we have to purchase our own social worker from our School Resource Package. To have a social worker for 1 day per fortnight we have to allocate \$10 000 each year from our school budget. Even when doing this, we have missed 5 weeks this year due to the lack of social workers available to fill positions in our department and our social worker has changed 4 times over the past 3 years which impacts relationships and continuity.

***Item 6 - Have you observed any change(s) in the Department's approach to allegations or incidents of harmful sexual behaviour in the Relevant Period? If yes, describe the change(s).***

36. In recent years the biggest change is the establishment of the Office of Safeguarding Children and Young People. The accompanying intranet site has more specific information than in previous years and is a spot I would go to now if an allegation or incident was reported to me.

**Allegations of child sexual abuse in an Institutional Context**

***Item 7 – Identify any Department policies, procedures or other guidance material regarding the steps to be taken by a school in relation to allegations or incidents of child sexual abuse in an Institutional Context, including allegations made by or on behalf of a student.***

37. I have been very fortunate in my years as a Principal to not have any allegations or incidents of child sexual assault in an institutional setting raised with me. In saying that, the policies and procedures outlined in the *Accountabilities Toolkit* would again be the ones that I would reference in managing an allegation or incident, specifically:

- (a) Mandatory Reporting Procedure;

- (b) Conduct and Behaviour Standards;
- (c) Professional Standards for Staff Policy and Guidelines;
- (d) Duty of Care for Students on Departmental Educational Sites; and
- (e) Respectful Student Behaviour Policy.

38. I would also go to the Office of Safeguarding Children and Young People intranet site for further direction and directly report to the Director of Operations as well as make a mandatory report through Child Safety Services.

**Items 8, 9, 10 and 11**

39. I have not had to deal with allegations or incidents of child sexual abuse in an institutional context.

**LGBTIQ+ students**

**Item 12 – Identify any Department policies, procedures or other guidance material in relation to how schools can support LGBTIQ+ students.**

40. The first main document that guides how we work at Lansdowne Crescent Primary School with all students is the Department of Education’s Strategic Plan. In this plan the focus is on ‘Learners First’, the key values especially of respect for all really frame the work of our school and the 2021-2024 plan explicitly references the ‘Rights of the Child’ and our role in safeguarding them from harm. These key elements guide how we regard all children at our school, our role is to include all and make sure all children are well, safe and able to learn.
41. There is also a really specific departmental policy that we refer to at Lansdowne Crescent Primary School, being the Respectful Schools, Respectful Behaviour policy. This policy guides how we build an inclusive culture at our school for every student. It has a specific section on students who identify as LGBTIQ+. I note that it needs updating to fully reflect LGBTIQ+. This document explicitly outlines the role of the leadership and teachers in supporting students who identify as LGBTIQ+ and also references useful resources.

**Item 13 - Describe any measures in place at Lansdowne Crescent Primary School that seek to provide a safe and inclusive space for all students (for example, policies, inclusive curriculum and pride groups).**

42. At Lansdowne Crescent Primary School, whilst we do not have a specific policy that clearly names LGBTIQ+ students we do have a set of policies and practices that aims to support all students. I have outlined these policies and practices in the paragraphs below.
43. An annual financial commitment - purchasing of Social Worker each year to support all students with wellbeing needs, is a major strategy. As I have stated previously, Lansdowne Crescent Primary School has an ‘on call’ only provision of social work. Our data that we collect through a number of sources informs us that we have a large percentage, which is growing, of students with wellbeing needs. We have made a commitment to support them with someone specifically skilled in support, and therefore fund the social worker for 1 day a fortnight each year.

44. We have prioritised wellbeing and inclusion in our leadership structure. Our Assistant Principal leads support ensuring all students with identified learning, cognitive, wellbeing needs have the enabling resources and plans developed to ensure they can learn at school. The Assistant Principal works with the School Psychologist and the Social Worker in their response to students with needs at Lansdowne. We have an Advanced Skills Teacher (senior leader) identified as the Wellbeing Lead.
45. The Advanced Skills teacher's role is to develop practices and policies to support all children and support teachers with resources and information as well as working with the school nurse to support wellbeing of all children.
46. Lansdowne Crescent Primary School has an explicit School Improvement goal on Wellbeing. This has been derived from the Lansdowne data from Department's Student Wellbeing Survey. This survey is conducted each year across the state for students in grade 4-10. A breakdown of responses is provided to schools at the end of the year to help inform the schools processes and practices. Our Wellbeing goal for 2021/22 focuses on a decrease in verbal and social bullying which the children have identified as a concern to them.
47. Lansdowne Crescent Primary School has a thriving School Community Association who works hard to support the school. Each year they contribute funding to support our engagement with Family Planning Tasmania to conduct the Growing Up program for all children from Kinder to Grade 6. This program teaches children about healthy relationships, sexuality and protective behaviours. As this is led by researchers in these fields, our teachers – who sit in on all the lessons – are able to update and further develop their knowledge about supporting students in each of these areas.
48. At Lansdowne Crescent Primary school we have a very proactive Social Skills program known as the 'Assets of a Lansdowne Learner' and our 'Lansdowne Values'. This is a set of 24 dispositions amongst which Respect, Perspective, Fairness and Open Mindedness are key traits that we actively teach across the school. We have found that our Assets and Values determines the culture of our school and guides the way all children interact with each other and also the tone and culture set by staff in interacting with children and families.
49. Our Assets and Values has ensured we have a culturally inclusive learning environment. Over the past 3 years, we have had a number of students choosing to identify in different ways. All staff promote acceptance of this and work with the student and family to ascertain preferred pronouns, name, for example and clarify how we can ensure they feel comfortable with uniform, sporting activities, and bathroom use.
50. At Lansdowne Crescent Primary School, we follow the Australian Curriculum and implement it in such a way that it is a fully inclusive curriculum that responds to the needs of all students. We use what we call an 'Inquiry approach' that values wonder, thinking and expression of ideas so that all students' voices are heard and valued.

***Item 14 - Discuss any challenges or barriers you have faced in putting the measures described in your response to paragraph 13 in place.***

51. I think the biggest challenge so far has been the volume of information that teachers could access in such a rapidly changing space. Ensuring we have access to the best and most accurate learning resources and materials for staff is a challenge.

52. Lack of access to professional support staff is a real challenge. Wellbeing needs, student concerns are often managed by our senior team who do not necessarily have the required knowledge to give the same support a Social Worker would.

**Item 15 - Identify or describe any additional resources or supports that would assist you to overcome any barriers described in your response to paragraph 14.**

53. Once again I feel strong that the provision of professional support staff (always need an increase here) is a crucial additional resource and support. As stated previously, Lansdowne Crescent Primary School has to fund own social work provision from our School Resource Package. Some of our students who are changing identity have many issues to grapple with and access to well trained, confidential support at school is crucial for them and for us as leaders.
54. Clear 'points of truth' through resources on the Inclusion and Diversity intranet site for staff would also be really helpful.
55. We are also reaching out to external providers of information to assist student with Wellbeing needs. For example, our senior students are watching webinars from a commercial resource that our Wellbeing lead has found. This is a terrific resource and is having an amazing impact with students. But my concern is, it is not 'verified' by our Department's experts, and there is great variability in what schools can use to support students. It would be great to have 'verified' resources available to use in our wellbeing programs.

**Item 16(a) - Lansdowne Crescent Primary School has a unisex toilet block. Describe: when the unisex toilet block was built**

56. In 2017 we were granted a redevelopment from the Tasmanian Government to update and create new learning spaces and facilities. As part of this redevelopment, a previously old toilet block with segregated bathrooms was redeveloped into a unisex facility. As well as this redevelopment, 4 new unisex toilets were built across the school.

**Item 16(b) – the reason(s) why a unisex toilet block was built**

57. At the beginning of the building process, the Department employed an architectural firm – Luttrell Pyefinch. Jonathan Pyefinch was the lead architect on our project. Mr Pyefinch and the then chair of our School Association, Mathew Healey undertook a period of consultation with the school community to determine the essential elements that should be included in the redevelopment. It was determined that upgraded toilet facilities should be included in the project alongside the 4 new classrooms and updated staff facilities.
58. I understand that as part of current building practice codes, new toilets in schools have to be unisex.

**Item 16(c) - the reaction of the school community to the introduction of the unisex toilet block, and**

59. I was interested in how the community and the students would respond to the upgraded and new toilets. To mitigate concerns, the architect included 2 discreet toilets in the communal block – one labelled female, and other labelled male. We also have an "all ability" toilet included in the communal block. All other new toilets across the campus are unisex including upgraded staff toilets.



60. There has not been one single concern raised regarding the toilets.
61. The architect ensured there is clear visibility and line of site into the communal block through installation of a large window - privacy is maintained in the toilets themselves, but you can see into the wash area and space in front of the bathrooms. All other new toilets include their own hand basin and open straight into playground or building corridors.

***Item 16(d) - any impact you consider the introduction of the unisex toilet block has had on Lansdowne Crescent Primary School.***

62. The new toilets have had a very positive impact on wellbeing. The fact that all toilets are new and clean and that there are more of them has made the most difference with students feeling comfortable to go to the toilet now rather than not. School leaders feel we are now able to better provide for students who are identifying in different ways as they have choice over which facility they prefer to use.