



**Board of Inquiry** into historical child  
sexual abuse in Beaumaris Primary School  
and certain other government schools

## WITNESS STATEMENT OF Bernard [REDACTED]

I, Bernard [REDACTED], say as follows:

- 1 I make this statement in my personal capacity.
- 2 I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, save where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.
- 3 I ask that the contents of my statement be treated as anonymous. If the Board of Inquiry wish to use any part of this statement as evidence or in the final report I ask that any identifying information not be included.

### Background

- 4 I was born and grew up in Beaumaris with my family, [REDACTED]. I thought the area was great to grow up in, especially having the beach so close by.
- 5 My siblings and I attended Beaumaris Primary School, then [REDACTED].
- 6 I attended Grade [REDACTED] at Beaumaris Primary School in [REDACTED], so I must have started there in or around [REDACTED].

### Experience of abuse

- 7 At the end of Grade [REDACTED], I found out I was going to be in Grahame Steele's class in Grade [REDACTED] the following year. The kids who liked sports hoped to be in Mr Steele's class since he was the sport teacher and it seemed like the best opportunity to get access to coaching and the school sports teams. I was really into sport so when I found out I was going to be in Mr Steele's class the next year I was happy with that outcome.
- 8 I was sexually abused by Mr Steele on three occasions during Grade [REDACTED] that I can recall.
- 9 The first time was during the cricket season, so I think was early in Grade [REDACTED]. I had strained a stomach muscle bowling during cricket practice and Mr Steele had told me to stop bowling. A few days later during class Mr Steele told me that he wanted to give me some treatment for my stomach injury. He took me out of class on my own and took me to a small room off the school hall. I think it may have been a treatment room because there was a massage bed in there.

- 10 Mr Steele had me lie on my back on the massage bed. He lifted up my shirt to expose my stomach muscles, but he also took down my pants and underpants. He rubbed my stomach with one hand while he touched my genitals with his other hand. That went on for some time before we returned to the classroom but I do not know exactly how long.
- 11 When we returned to the classroom, I remember one of the other boys asking, 'did he dack you?', meaning did Mr Steele pull down my pants. I said yes and I remember wondering how the other student knew, but I didn't ask. I cannot recall who it was that asked me that.
- 12 The second time Mr Steele abused me was when he and another teacher took a group of around eight boys to a holiday house in [REDACTED]. I cannot recall what time of year it was or who the other teacher was that came on the trip, but I remember there being another adult besides Mr Steele. I recall the house we stayed at had two storeys and bunk beds but I can't remember whether it was a rental or owned by one of the adults.
- 13 One day, after we had been to the beach, Mr Steele brought me back to the house ahead of the rest of the group. He stripped all my clothes off and showered me, washing me with his hands and touching my genitals again. I remember him drying me off after the shower as well. I don't remember too much after that; it went blank for me after that. The rest of the group must have returned to the house.
- 14 The third incident I can remember was during the drive back from that weekend in Mr Steele's car. There must have been another vehicle for the trip as we could not have all fit into Mr Steele's car, but I remember sitting in the front of his car driving back while there were other kids in the backseat. I remember it was nighttime.
- 15 While he was driving, he put me on his lap to steer the car. While I was in his lap he put his hands in my groin area and was rubbing my genitals while I was steering the car.
- 16 Students always thought Mr Steele's class was the best class to be in, especially if you loved sport, because he was the sport teacher. It never occurred to me to tell anyone about the abuse at the time.
- 17 I do not recall telling anyone about the abuse at the time and I do not remember anyone talking about those sorts of things while I was at school.
- 18 About [REDACTED] years ago I ran into [REDACTED]. We talked about Beaumaris Primary School and one of them asked if I knew what had been going on between students and teachers at the school. That immediately triggered memories for me. I told him I thought I knew what he was talking about. I understood that he was referring to sexual abuse of students by teachers at the

school. He told me that when he and some of the students in other classes got in trouble and were sent to the Principal's office, the students would tell the Principal that they knew what was going on between teachers and students and threatened to tell someone if they were disciplined. I understood this to mean that students would use the threat of reporting the sexual abuse of other students to not be disciplined.

19 I was shocked and angry when I heard that other people knew what was going on and it seemed to me that they had used this information to their advantage. But they were only 11 year old kids, so I can't be angry that they didn't stop it or tell anyone.

20 On the face of it, I think at least some staff at Beaumaris Primary School knew about what was happening, knew that teachers were abusing students, and did nothing.

21 I want to know whether there was a network of teachers abusing students and if they were working together. How did they end up at Beaumaris Primary School? How were they allowed to continue with nothing being done at the time? I want to understand how these teachers were able to stay at the school as a group and operate over a number of years.

### **Support services and healing**

22 In the years since I was at Beaumaris Primary School I have tried to make sense of what happened to me. I've wondered if Grahame Steele targeted the boys he wanted to abuse and, if so, whether boys were allocated to his class for this reason.

23 I realised the extent of the abuse at Beaumaris Primary School as it has come out in media coverage. I feel there is even more to it, as Grahame Steele had not initially been mentioned in the media coverage in connection with some of the other teachers who have been alleged to have abused students there.

24 After high school I took a step back and stopped playing sport for a while. My experiences at Beaumaris Primary School have always been there for the last 50 years. I didn't speak to any family or friends about it.

25 After I moved back to [REDACTED] and told my GP about the abuse, he asked me if I wanted to try and see a psychologist again. I did and started having telehealth sessions with a psychologist. I was open with the psychologist from the start about my experiences.

26 I've also recently told my [REDACTED] as well as my children about the abuse. I wanted them to understand me better. They knew there was something wrong and that I've struggled.

- 27 At different times when I've struggled in my life, I have accessed mental health support services without disclosing what happened to me.
- 28 I had 14 sessions with the psychologist before I wasn't allowed to have any more. I'm not sure exactly why the sessions stopped—it might have been a funding issue, but she also left the service I was seeing her through and I didn't want to start the process over again with someone new.
- 29 The media coverage, announcement of the Board of Inquiry and my sessions with the psychologist have all helped me start to come to terms with my experiences. It has been liberating and has gotten me to the point where I can talk about what happened without it destroying me for weeks or months. Talking about it, especially with the psychologist, has helped with nightmares I had been having as well. She gave me practical strategies to start to deal with my experiences.
- 30 Previously, I had felt like I didn't get much out of counselling sessions, but I think talking to the particular psychologist I was seeing recently has helped. It was important for me to have found the right psychologist that I was able to be open with. I think this would be important for any victim-survivor – until you speak to a particular psychologist or support person you don't know how far you might be willing to take it or how open you feel you can be.
- 31 The support of my family and friends has been important and I couldn't have spoken up today without them. Talking to the psychologist recently allowed me to then open up to family and friends after 50 years of my experiences getting the better of me.
- 32 I love coaching sport and I love seeing young people get something out of sport. Coaching kids and seeing them enjoy sport have been part of my healing process. It has been a saviour for me and has gotten me back into sport again.
- 33 I like the idea of a public apology to victim-survivors. I know other victim-survivors have been encouraging others to come forward and seeking input on the possible wording of an apology and things like that. I think it would be helpful to sit down and discuss with other victim-survivors what the wording should be. I hope that my evidence to the Inquiry encourages other victim survivors to come forward and speak the truth about what happened to us.

Bernard

A large black rectangular redaction box covers the signature area. The name 'Bernard' is printed in the top-left corner of this box. A horizontal line extends from the right side of the box.

Signed:

Name:

Date: 19/10/2023