

### BACKGROUND

In early 2020, three former students of Our Lady of Mercy College (**OLMC**) disclosed to the current Principal that they had experienced “highly concerning conduct” from a former teacher, JLR<sup>1</sup>. OLMC has assisted Victoria Police and other regulatory agencies with the investigation of JLR.

In August 2020, an article was published in several national newspapers and online detailing sexual offending committed by Graham Robert Partington (**Mr Partington**), a former teacher at OLMC, against a 14-year-old female in the 1980s. The victim referred to in the article was not a former student of OLMC.

In September 2020, OLMC instigated an independent investigation into the alleged behaviour of Mr Partington and any other current or former staff member. The investigation was also to explore what, if anything, College Council members, staff, volunteers and the broader OLMC community may have known, and what action was taken about any alleged behaviour.

### INVESTIGATION

14 former students, a current staff member, two former staff members and a former Principal were interviewed during the investigation. Unfortunately, Sr Beth Calthorpe RSM, former Principal of OLMC, was unable to be interviewed due to ill health.

Throughout the investigation, contact with Victoria Police was maintained, with several reports of alleged criminal offending concerning former staff members being made. These reports are not discussed here so as not to impede any police investigation.

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### JLR

Most former students interviewed disclosed instances of JLR making highly inappropriate comments to them or touching them inappropriately. Most also disclosed JLR would enter the change rooms while they were changing and would openly compare students’ breasts during class. Former students’ disclosures indicate the student cohort were generally aware of JLR’s behaviour.

A former teacher disclosed being present in class when JLR made highly inappropriate sexual comments to students. The former teacher asserts she reprimanded JLR for the remarks but felt he continued with this sort of behaviour.

A former student asserts herself and two other former students reported JLR’s inappropriate behaviour to a senior staff member at the time.

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonym.

Another senior staff member recalled receiving several complaints about JLR's behaviour and asserts they implemented procedural changes concerning swimming classes as a result.

A former teacher asserts they brought JLR's behaviour to the attention of Sr Calthorpe on multiple occasions. However, they recall Sr Calthorpe being dismissive of what they had to say.

JLR's personnel file could not be located during the investigation. As such, any documentary evidence of disciplinary action being taken by OLMC leadership at the time was unavailable.

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## GRAHAM PARTINGTON

Mr Partington had sexually offended against two female children before his employment at OLMC. However, OLMC could not be aware of this, as these crimes were not reported to police until 2016, 14 years after Mr Partington had ceased employment at OLMC.

Many former students remembered Mr Partington entering the change rooms unnecessarily whilst they were changing. However, none recalled bringing this to the attention of OLMC staff at the time. Evidence suggests OLMC had some level of knowledge about this aspect of Mr Partington's behaviour, as a former teacher recalled reprimanding Mr Partington for his behaviour.

Mr Partington was colloquially known as "happy hands" amongst the student cohort due to his touching of students during physical education and sporting activities.

A former teacher recalled OLMC receiving a complaint from a parent about Mr Partington touching a student on the buttocks. When Mr Partington was spoken to about the complaint, he claimed it was accidental touching while coaching the student.

A former student recalled being lifted on to a bar during gymnastics training by Mr Partington, during which he touched her groin and buttocks multiple times. She asserts she brought Mr Partington's actions to the attention of a former teacher, who summarily dismissed the former student's claims. It is unknown if the former teacher reported the student's disclosure to OLMC leadership.

In 1989, Mr Partington wrote to parents inviting students involved in the indoor soccer team to his beach house for a weekend. Whilst Mr Partington made it clear in his correspondence that the event was not associated with OLMC, he advised he had informed the Principal. Therefore, OLMC was aware of his intention to take students for a weekend to his beach house.

## GENERAL COMMENTS

There is no reason to doubt the validity of the evidence proffered by former OLMC students and staff. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that several concerns about the behaviour of Mr Partington and JLR were brought to the attention of senior OLMC staff; however, it appears little, if any, action was taken.

It is important to note that this report has examined events which occurred over twenty years ago. Education institutions, especially in Victoria, are markedly different today. Following the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, schools are highly regulated and child-safe aware environments.

Victorian schools' child safety practices are reviewed by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority every three years. Schools are required to have implemented the Child Safe Standards and provide training to their staff about child abuse, mandatory reporting, and other child safety topics and practices.