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## School's inaction astounds parents after alleged sexual assault in toilets

Mike Mather | June 1, 2023



The 5-year-old boy is reported to be terrified at the prospect of returning to school and encountering the two older boys who allegedly sexually assaulted him. (File photo posed by model)  
 123RF

A 5-year-old boy was cornered in the toilets of his Waikato school by two older pupils who allegedly pinned him down, beat him and sexually assaulted him.

The shocked parents of the young victim have now pulled him out of the school because – to their further astonishment – the two alleged perpetrators of the abuse have not been expelled or even suspended.

The couple say they believe the school's principal is not taking their son's situation seriously because the parents of the alleged abusers are involved in the school community.

The school's principal has declined to divulge anything about the situation – including why the alleged perpetrators are still at the school – other than she was “working through a sensitive matter involving young children”.

The *Waikato Times* cannot name the school without leading to the identification to the young boy – or, for that matter, the older children who allegedly assaulted him.

However, it can be confirmed the police and ōranga Tamariki have investigated the incident. The outcome of their investigations and what – if any – actions are being taken as a result remain, for now, unknown.

The boy's father said the attack happened on Friday, April 28, in the school toilets. He became aware something was badly wrong after his son came home very upset, and kept pulling his pants up.

As became apparent, he was doing so because he had lost control of his bowel motions as a result of being sexually violated by the two older boys, who are aged about 8 or 9 years old.

The boy tearfully told his parents that he had been punched and kicked by the older boys before being molested.

The couple took their son to Waikato Hospital for an evaluation by a paediatrician “and our worst nightmare was confirmed”.

Soon after they emailed the school's principal asking for urgent action to be taken.

“It has broken both [the boy's mother] and myself to know that our son has been beaten and molested in your school's care,” they wrote.

“It is now your responsibility to take immediate action to address this and make [the school] a safe place for our child and other children to attend. The behaviour of these two boys who attacked [our son] is extremely violent and dangerous to other students.”



They were also astounded their son's teacher was apparently not concerned he was crying in class following the incident, and had told her he had a sore bottom. The teacher also did not inform the parents the boy was upset when they picked him up from school that day.

The boy's mother had been employed in the education sector and was aware of the "red flags" that teachers needed to watch out for.

"When a child who is normally happy at school behaves like this, you do not brush it off and tell them they are tired and to get on with it."

The couple said their anger was compounded by the lack of response from the school.

After meeting with the principal, they took their son to an interview with Oranga Tamariki Investigators – who subsequently informed them the boys who allegedly abused their son had allegedly assaulted him on previous occasions.

The following day the father contacted the Ministry of Education to follow up the case, but was told by staff they knew nothing about it.

The next day they received an email from the principal.

"I wanted to touch base with you again (as I said I would) and to give you assurances that I am not sitting idle on this serious matter," she wrote. "It seems the wheels of progress and process in governmental departments are often slow."

The principal said she had met with ministry staff to develop a safety plan for their son and other pupils attending the school, and they also planned "to make some significant changes to the way we manage the way our toilets are used.

"Once I have confirmation from police and Oranga Tamariki that their investigations are finished, then I am able to conduct my own school investigations with the boys and any decision around the consequence for those students will be made after that."

The couple had enlisted the help of their lawyer in their ongoing dealings with the school.

"Our concern is the safety of all the kids at this school," the father told the *Waikato Times*.

His son was horrified by the prospect of returning to the school and encountering the boys who attacked him.

"He's not ready to go back. He has been traumatised.

"He used to be a bubbly, outgoing boy. Now he is in a shell. He is the victim and now he is being re-victimised. Now he has to change schools.

"These boys were twice his size ... he had fingers or other things rammed up his bum, basically."

The couple's discussions with Oranga Tamariki staff had led them to believe the principal was "in denial" about the incident.

The father said he was astounded the two boys allegedly involved had not been immediately suspended.

"It feels like the system has failed our son ... These children can just gang up and do their thing again."

The school's principal declined to respond to questions asking why the alleged perpetrators were still at the school, whether the school contacted the police after the incident, and how the school's investigation was proceeding.

"We are confident that our school is a safe space for all students," the principal said.

"I can confirm that we have been working through a sensitive matter involving young children. To ensure that it was handled appropriately, we have worked closely with the Ministry of Education, Oranga Tamariki, Child Matters and the NZ Police.

"We have also liaised with the families. Oranga Tamariki undertook an investigation, which has only recently been closed."

The school had reviewed supervision across the school, including during break times.

"We requested and received additional funding for this from the Ministry of Education."

The school's staff and board had booked a workshop with Child Matters "to further review our child protection policy to ensure it is as strong as possible" and had brought forward a "Keeping Ourselves Safe" child abuse prevention programme initially scheduled for later in the year.

Oranga Tamariki, the ministry and the police were also all approached for comment.

Alison Cronin, Oranga Tamariki's regional services general manager confirmed a report on the incident had been received.

"An assessment was completed. For privacy reasons we cannot comment further."



In a statement police said they were aware of the incident and "will maintain oversight of investigations by Oranga Tamariki and Ministry of Education.

"Child safety is a critical issue and the investigation of child abuse is given a high priority by police.

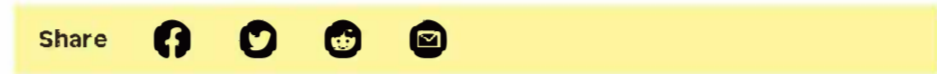
When a report of concern is received, the safety and wellbeing of the child is the first and paramount consideration.

"Police cannot achieve this on its' own or in isolation from other partner agencies. An inter-agency approach is necessary to ensure the child's protection, enhance the accountability of the offender, and to enhance the child's partial or full reintegration into the family where appropriate.

Education ministry central deputy secretary Jocelyn Mikaere had a similar response, but said schools were self-governing.

Our role is to provide advice, support and guidance whenever requested through our Te Mahau (regional) teams. Our traumatic incident team has been on hand providing support and advice to the school."

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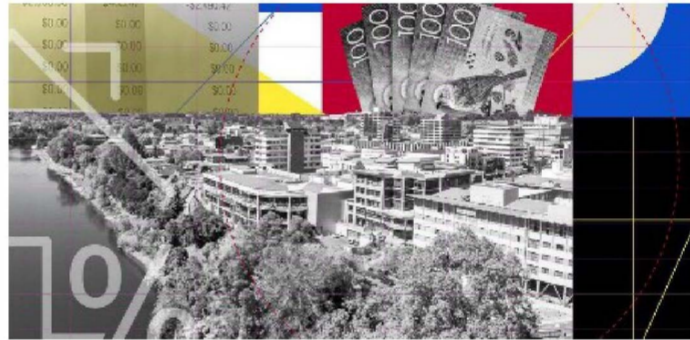
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