

The Marist Fathers : Their culture and concealment of child sexual abuse, and the 'watchdogs' that refuse to watch, bark or bite

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One-page overview of case study submitted to IICSA, October 2020

- 1 My case-study was prompted and inspired by Graham Caveney's 2017 memoir, *The Boy With the Perpetual Nervousness*, which, among other things, describes his grooming and sexual abuse as a teenage schoolboy at St Mary's College (SMC) Blackburn in the late 1970s at the hands of his then Headmaster, the Marist priest Kevin O'Neill. Although I was not in the end physically sexually abused by O'Neill, Caveney's cultivation by O'Neill was so consistent with my own as a SMC schoolboy just a few years earlier that his account confirmed my own suspicions that O'Neill had also been grooming me for abuse.
- 2 The account of my own experiences in Part 1 illustrates that O'Neill's abuse did not arrive unexpectedly from nowhere. There was a culture and climate at SMC, in the Marist Fathers as an order of priests and in the RC church more widely, that actively enhanced the possibility of such abuse happening, of it going undetected and of it being covered up once it was disclosed. The grooming that led to the abuse was not a 'one-off', and O'Neill was not just 'one bad apple'. This culture and climate persisted for decades after O'Neill's abuse was disclosed to the Marist hierarchy by his victim.
- 3 My investigations and account also confirm independently and beyond all doubt both that O'Neill's sexual abuse of Caveney did in fact happen as he describes, and that the Marist Fathers, between 1993 and 2014 at the least, deliberately lied about and concealed O'Neill's abuse from the police; from school and charity regulators; from charitable donors and beneficiaries; from current, former and prospective staff, pupils and parents at SMC; from other potential victims of O'Neill's grooming or abuse; and from the wider public. I say 'beyond all doubt' because, at the time of its publication, there still seemed amongst some SMC ex pupils and staff to be a vein of scepticism that Caveney's account could even be the truth. It was and is.
- 4 The final main theme of my account is the complete absence of any effective, professional, independent scrutiny, governance or accountability in relation either to O'Neill's abuse or to its persistent, deliberate concealment by the Marist Fathers over decades. The Diocese of Middlesbrough, the Department for Education and the Charity Commission have all failed to demonstrate effective, timely, or appropriate oversight of the Marist Fathers at any time since the abuse was disclosed in 1993. Between 2017 and 2020 when I brought these important concerns to their attention in great detail and in line with their statutory or other formal responsibilities, these allegedly independent regulators have blankly refused to address any of them directly. They have simply chosen to turn a blind eye, both to O'Neill's sexual abuse of a child in his care and to its long-term, deliberate concealment by the Marist Fathers.