



Press Release

Maximum Sentence warranted in serious child sex abuse conviction

Today in the Whangarei High Court James Parker was sentenced by Justice Paul Heath by to preventive detention for the 74 child sex abuse charges laid against him.

In August last year Parker pleaded guilty to 49 sexual abuse charges, which prompted more complainants to come forwards. In April this year he admitted a further 25 charges, including five allegations of sexual violation involving two boys, the most serious charges he has faced.

Alan Bell, Director of the child protection agency ECPAT Child ALERT is distressed about the damage inflicted upon the victims. *“The abuse in this case was inflicted by someone who used the privileged position given to him as a teacher and he betrayed the trust and responsibilities vested in him. It was a betrayal of the worst kind. In all, the allegations involve 20 victims, aged 9 to 16 at the time, and date from 1999 to 2011”* says Bell. *“The likelihood is that many of these victims will have the entire course of their young lives changed forever as they deal with the trauma arising from the betrayal and sexual abuse. The abuse was planned and orchestrated over a long period of time and even though some had knowledge of this the victimisation continued.”*

Crown prosecutor Michael Smith submitted to Justice Heath that Parker should be given a sentence of preventive detention because of the risk he posed to the community.

"[His offending is], in many respects, without comparison in New Zealand's history. It is without comparison and defies summary."

Police first investigated Parker after receiving a complaint of indecent assault March 2009. He was placed on leave while an investigation took place but the next month the allegation was retracted and he returned to teaching. Nonetheless, police sent former principal Stephen Hovell a letter saying the sleepovers were inappropriate and had to stop. Mr Hovell was sacked in February this year after an investigation found he had not heeded this advice, and had opted to protect his deputy instead of his students.

Bell states *“The Judge has sentenced Parker to preventive detention. This means Parker is considered to be a high risk and should be detained indefinitely until such time if and when he is considered to be safe back in the community. Given the nature and scope of his offending there is obviously a long road in front of him even if he shows a desire to change his behaviour. This sentence will go some way to bring a sense of justice and perhaps some closure for the community in which Parker. The vetting of people who are charged with caring for children needs to be strengthened and it is to be hoped that those who know when children are being abused will report such to the appropriate authorities so that an early intervention can be actioned.”*

Parker has a non-parole period of seven years.

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