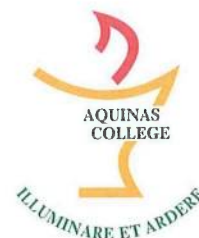


AQUINAS COLLEGE

CRICOS Provider Code 00127G

ABN 67 572 210 499



From the Principal's Office

19 January 2015

Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
Southbank Vic. 3006

Court Ref: COR 2010 000661

Response to the Coroner in the case of Kyle Vassil

The tragic loss of Kyle Vassil on 17th February 2010 while on camp at Alpine Ash Mountain Retreat, Toolangi, marks a very sad chapter in the life of Aquinas College, Ringwood. The loss to Kyle's mother, Ms Pacita Vassil and sister, Kacylyn, is profound and we continue to express our deepest sympathy. The impact on the whole Aquinas College community is also substantial and has forever changed those who were close to Kyle and this tragedy.

As a response to Kyle's loss, Aquinas College took immediate action in 2010 to comprehensively review its policies related to off-campus activities and the procedures in relation to the undertaking of risk assessments. This led to the implementation of a comprehensive risk assessment process in which all off-campus activities must have a risk assessment approved by the Head School Organisation before permission is granted to proceed. Off-campus activities that include an overnight component must have the risk assessment approved by the Deputy Principal (Staff and Students) before permission will be granted to proceed.

The professional development of staff to prepare each individual with a specific responsibility to conduct a thorough risk assessment has been substantial. This has occurred under the guidance of the Deputy Principal (Staff and Students) and Head School Organisation. The Head School Organisation is a senior leadership position at the College with specific responsibility in the areas of timetabling, staffing allocation and scheduling of daily events.

Due to the specific nature of the events that led to Kyle's death, protocols in relation to water based activities were reviewed to ensure compliance with the guidelines as published by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). This led to the adoption of the following protocols in relation to swimming events which address recommendations of the Coroner.

Recommendation 1: I recommend to the National Catholic Education Commission, that if such has not already occurred, that all Victorian Catholic Schools voluntarily adopt the DEECD protocol, concerning the management of safety issues relating to all school student swimming and related water based sporting activity.

Recommendation 1 was applied at Aquinas College prior to the handing down of the findings with the implementation of the following interventions:

- **Swimming locations are assessed according to the recommendations of the DEECD Swimming Instruction and Water Safety Guide**
(<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/curriculum/pages/swimming.aspx>)
 - Swimming locations are assessed as Type 1, 2 or 3 as defined in the DEECD Guidelines as part of a formal Risk Assessment.

- **Student capabilities are assessed according to the recommendations of the DEECD Swimming Instruction and Water Safety Guide and a record of assessments maintained.**
 - Assessment protocols are based on the DEECD Swimming Instruction and Water Safety Guide.
 - Students are assessed in a Type 1 location before any activity involving water to the minimum standard for the relevant swimming venues. This assessment is conducted by a delegated staff member with an appropriate qualification.
 - In regards to Type 2 and 3 venue requirements, students being tested for meeting these requirements must be assessed by a swimming supervisor who holds one of the designated recreational swimming supervisor certifications for Type 2 or 3 venues.
 - A record that the assessment was conducted is to be maintained in a register on the central administration system (Synergetic).

- **A training register for staff or other persons with assigned supervisory roles is maintained including evidence that those people are suitably qualified to supervise students during recreational swimming activities**
 - Existing swimming qualifications held by staff are recorded in a register on the central administration system (Synergetic).
 - Swimming supervisors are required to hold appropriate swimming qualifications.
 - Staffing ratios and swimming qualifications are determined according to DEECD Swimming Instruction and Water Safety Guide and this is enforced by Head School Organisation
 - A training program with Life Saving Victoria is recommended for staff to gain required swimming qualifications and sponsored by Aquinas College in both time release and cost (<http://www.lifesavingvictoria.com.au/www/html/877-community-surf-lifesaving-certificate.asp>)

Recommendation 4: I further recommend that the Aquinas School (and other similarly interested parties), purchase a defibrillator or defibrillators, and obtain instruction in their use, for deployment at all student camps, and at such other sporting activities as the School's medical officer may advise.

Recommendation 4 was applied at Aquinas College prior to the handing down of the findings with the implementation of the following interventions:

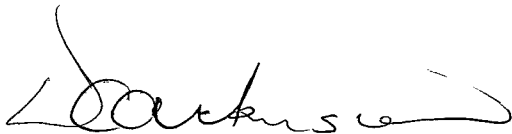
- **Availability of defibrillators**
 - Four defibrillators are available at the College.
 - One of these will accompany student groups as directed by the College Nurse.
 - Such direction is likely to apply to groups undertaking a local off-campus activity with a physical activity component in which the venue does not provide access to a defibrillator.
 - Training in the use of the defibrillator is conducted by the College Nurse.
 - This training comprises a component of a compulsory annual First Aid update for First Aid qualified staff.

Recommendation 5: Having regard to the availability of first rate and cost effective safety equipment, in support of swimming, I further recommend that all Catholic Schools purchase and maintain appropriate levels of safety equipment as advised by Lifesaving Victoria, this through periodic requests for risk management advice emanating from the Catholic School Principals Association, to Lifesaving Victoria.

Recommendation 5 was applied at Aquinas College prior to the handing down of the findings with the implementation of the following interventions:

- **Lifesaving facilities provided at the sites where recreational swimming is undertaken are appropriate and available**
 - Lifesaving facilities required at any proposed swimming venue are determined in the Risk Assessment process and based on the DEECD Emergency Procedures and Safety Measures.
 - Including DEECD guidelines for supervising staff:
 - staff are dressed appropriately to perform an immediate contact rescue
 - staff are positioned to account for all students in their respective swimming groups at all times
 - a 'buddy' system is used during lessons and incorporated into the emergency plan as a check of student safety
 - staff must be prepared for and able to cope with an emergency rescue and apply CPR

- aids such as ropes, poles and approved buoyancy devices are immediately available at each teaching station and other places where students are swimming or diving
- swimming programs are not conducted if the water temperature is low and there is a risk of hypothermia
- students are protected from excessive exposure to sunlight and the resulting sunburn with:
 - hats
 - sunglasses
 - protective clothing
 - broad-spectrum sunscreen creams and lotions
 - waterproof sun creams or clothing while in the water.
- Equipment is stored at Aquinas College and maintained by appropriate College staff.



Darren Atkinson
PRINCIPAL

Supporting Aquinas College Policy Documents:

- Water Activities Safety Policy
- Recreational Swimming Policy
- Excursions and Off Campus Programs Policy
- Risk Plan Support Information
- Risk Management Briefing Procedure
- Risk Management Pro Forma
- Excursion Emergency Management Guidelines Application for Excursion and Risk Management Pro Forma
- Record of Risk Management Meeting
- Excursion Permission Form
- Excursion Incident Report
- Extreme Fire Danger Warning Guidelines