

7 October 2013

BSA finds *Close Up* item was unfair and inaccurate

The Broadcasting Standards Authority has upheld a complaint from Pompallier Catholic College about a *Close Up* item based on a school newsletter objecting to gay marriage.

The *Close Up* item claimed that the Principal suspended a teacher and that students who opposed the comments in the newsletter were “threatened”.

The College said the *Close Up* item was unfair because it suggested that the teacher was suspended merely for holding a different opinion to the Principal, and that it was inaccurate to claim that the students were threatened.

The College said that it made it known to *Close Up* before the programme aired, that it could not comment on the suspension or provide the suspension letter for privacy reasons.

The BSA examined the suspension letter and although it was directly related to the teacher’s support for students who opposed the Principal’s comments, the BSA said it was misleading and unfair not to make reference to additional reasons for the suspension like challenging the order and authority of the school.

“The impression created by the item was that the teacher’s suspension was based solely on a difference of moral opinion in regard to same sex marriage, and for his support of students who objected to the Principal’s comments. The failure to provide context around the reasons for his suspension created an unfair impression of the Principal and the College.”

The BSA also found that the item was misleading in stating unequivocally that students were threatened in relation to setting up a Facebook page. It noted that other media had couched the threats as allegations, or made no mention of threats. The BSA reviewed an incident report from the College’s guidance counsellor who was at a meeting between the Principal and the student(s).

“We accept that students may well have perceived the Principal’s exercise of authority and his request to remove the Facebook page as threatening. It is clear from the information provided to us, namely the guidance counsellor’s report, that the Principal and staff present at the meeting would not categorise the request to remove the Facebook page as a threat.”

The Principal was not given any opportunity to rebut the claims that students were threatened, because he was not informed that this allegation would be put forward in the item.

The BSA made no order for a statement or apology saying that the essence of the story was reflected in extensive coverage by other media at the time so the impact of any statement would be minimal particularly as *Close Up* is no longer on air.

The full report is available at www.bsa.govt.nz

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