



B' N A I B' R I T H I N T E R N A T I O N A L

CHARLES O. KAUFMAN, PRESIDENT

Oct. 3, 2019

Mr. Karl Russell
Principal
Cheltenham Secondary College

Dear Mr. Russell,

I am reading the disgusting details of a clear incident of anti-Semitic behavior by nine students at Cheltenham Secondary College. Somehow you find the hurling of vile anti-Semitic slurs and physical abuse against a 12-year-old Jewish student as mere bullying, an isolated incident. Somehow you feel powerless to do anything about this shameful act because the incident occurred off campus. Are these nine students enrolled in your school? If so, you have an ethical and professional responsibility, if not a legal one, to address this matter with the students and their parents. You should be able to identify the students involved, weigh the facts (or denials) and determine the discipline, which should include suspensions at the very least.

Meanwhile, I note that the Victorian Department of Education and Training released a statement that “anti-Semitism and racist bullying are not tolerated in Victorian schools.” Well, evidently that is false. Let’s see if you tolerate this behavior.

Without disciplinary actions, these incidents will continue. This matter cannot be dismissed as “kids being kids” because clearly not all kids behave this way. The aberrant behavior can be corrected and when disciplinary measures fail and such behavior continues, the bad students — and make no mistake, these are bad kids — must be separated from those who wish to have a positive educational experience.

Do you have the courage to care for your students? Do you have the courage to care about growing a civil society for the future of your community? If you do not make an example of such abuse, which goes beyond youthful foolishness, then you run the risk of sullyng the reputation of what you promote as linking a student’s learning to his or her social and emotional health. Is that how you describe your handling of this incident? You could have at least said you would refer the matter to your Wellbeing Team, which you identify as part of its focus to help with, among other matters, “bullying,” “anger management,” “restorative justice” and “friendship disputes.” Do something. Sticking your head in the sand is not an option.

B’nai B’rith International condemns this hateful, criminal assault. If you sit and do nothing, you sit in shame.

Sincerely,

Charles O. Kaufman

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