



27<sup>th</sup> April 2018

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am writing to make you aware of a growing concern I have. The difficulties that many young people and members of our community are having in King George's Park are increasing in frequency, to the point where I am deeply worried about their impact on our students and families.

There is regular anti-social behaviour as a result of many of the people who are present in the park in the evenings and weekends; this presents two risks. Firstly many people are intimidated by the presence of a large group who dominate the area, or are directly insulted when they venture into the park. Secondly, peer pressure for young people is a significant influence and some students who behave well the vast majority of the time are finding themselves drawn into unpleasant situations because they feel they cannot refuse to be part of the dominant group. I do not want any of our students being damaged by being targeted – or by becoming involved with what is often a very negative presence in the park.

I receive frequent reports of criminal behaviour in the park as well, including rumours of the use of drugs, or fights that become assault and warrant police investigation. While we are extremely fortunate that such activity has rarely involved any GAA students to date, I am concerned that the risk is increasing. Any such activity – whether anti-social or criminal – can have long-lasting effects on wellbeing, life chances and circumstances and almost always have consequences for families and friends that care about our young people.

I am therefore asking that all in the GAA community make an active decision to avoid allowing our young people in King George's Park for the time being. This will be challenging because peer pressure is strong and the students know that there is a "normal" practice of gathering in the park; they will find it hard to be told they are not allowed to go because they will worry about missing out. I hope that if enough of us create a new normal practice whereby the students gather socially at friends' houses instead for example, we can reduce the pressure they can subject mums and dads to when they want you to agree to something!

It does not sit well with me to make this request, because our public spaces should be for those who will use them well. We should not have to ask good children to avoid spaces because of those who do not use them well. However, my immediate priority is the students' education – and the many distractions created in King George's Park are creating anxieties that will limit their ability to succeed. Most importantly, I want to see our young people happy and well-adjusted, without feeling that they are in any way unsafe, and sadly some of the impact from events in the park does lead to them feeling unsafe or afraid.

I hope that you feel able to support me in this and are able to take the decision to keep your child from the park. In my professional opinion it is wholly in their best interests not to be there, and as a mum, it is not somewhere I would be happy for my children to be at this time; my advice is meant very genuinely and based on very real worries.

If you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to get in touch and we will do all we can to help you.

Yours faithfully

Mrs Langley  
Principal

