

(No. 87.)



1880.

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TASMANIA.

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY.

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M R. A. B. BIGGS :

PETITION.

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Laid upon the Table by the Colonial Treasurer, and ordered by the House to be printed, September 9, 1880.



*To His Excellency the Governor of Tasmania in Council.*

The humble Petition of Alfred B. Biggs, late Master of the Public School, Campbell Town.

RESPECTFULLY SHOWETH :

THAT your Petitioner was for several years Head Master of a Public School in Victoria, and holds a Certificate of "First Division of Competency" under the Victorian Board of Education; also very high testimonials from the local authorities of the said school, and from other influential persons.

That owing to failing health Petitioner was, in the beginning of 1864, induced to resign his Victorian engagement in favour of an offer of employment under the Tasmanian Board, and Petitioner and wife were appointed Master and Mistress of the Public School at Bothwell.

That Petitioner was at least tolerably successful in this charge is evidenced by the statistics of the school as compared with former years, and also by a Certificate from the Inspector, dated 1st April, 1875.

That subsequently Petitioner was compelled to solicit a removal, in consequence of the air of Bothwell disagreeing with the health of Petitioner's wife, and he was appointed to the Campbell Town School in June, 1872.

That Petitioner found the said school completely disorganised, and the pupils scattered amongst the other schools in the neighbourhood, the Public School having been previously closed for several weeks.

That by earnest effort Petitioner so far succeeded in working up the school that in September, 1874, the average attendance for the year current was higher than it had been since 1869.

That about July, 1874, a person having no official connection with the school, namely, Rev. Dr. Craig, of Campbell Town, addressed a communication to the Board of Education, injuriously and untruthfully reflecting upon Petitioner's professional character and his management of the school, although the said school was under the supervision of a Local Board who, so far as Petitioner is aware, were fully satisfied with his conduct of the school.

That the Board of Education, contrary to the usual practice of remitting such communications to the accused for his explanation, without reference to the Local Board, and without investigation, permitted, in the first instance, the accusation to be published in the newspapers to the serious detriment of Petitioner's character, and to the destruction of the school.

That notwithstanding a certificate in favour of Petitioner signed by 39 heads of families, representing 87 of his present and former pupils in the school; also that Petitioner had shown the untruthfulness of the accusation by reference to official documents; and notwithstanding the distinct refusal of the Board to investigate the charges, Petitioner was ordered to remove to an inferior school, in a locality where Petitioner's wife had proved that she could not retain her health; thereby publicly condemning him upon an unjust and untried accusation.

That the Board took exceptional measures to screen Petitioner's accuser from the legal responsibility of his defamatory communication.

That the Board refused to listen to Petitioner's remonstrances, or to accede to his request for some other appointment in consideration of the health of Petitioner's wife, which Petitioner considers amounted to a virtual dismissal from the service, the mandate of the Board being such as, under the circumstances, Petitioner could not obey.

That the Board's letters to Petitioner are so contradictory that he is unable to discover the grounds, if any, for such harsh treatment, the ostensible reasons affirmed in one letter being as distinctly denied in the next.

That although the Board distinctly notified that, failing compliance, Petitioner's dismissal should date from 1st March, it is nevertheless made to take effect from 31st December.

That although the Board profess to have given Petitioner "over two months' notice," the salary of himself and wife for those two months, namely January and February, 1875, is withheld; the first official notice being dated 10th December.

That the effect of the unusual and irregular action of the Board in Petitioner's case has been his dismissal from the service without cause, and with an unjust slur upon his professional character; and, in addition, his salary for the last two months of his engagement has been unjustly withheld.

Your Petitioner therefore most humbly prays Your Excellency to institute an enquiry into his case; that your Excellency would be pleased to grant him compensation for his unjust deprivation of office, and for the injury done to his professional character; also to grant him his salary for the last two months of his connection with the Department still remaining unpaid.

And your Petitioner will ever pray, &c.

A. B. BIGGS.

*Campbell Town, 16th August, 1875.*

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CERTIFICATE OF PARENTS.

*Campbell Town, 21st December, 1874.*

WE, the undersigned parents of pupils who are or have been attending the Public School, Campbell Town, within the period during which Mr. Biggs has had charge, hereby certify that we are fully satisfied with Mr. Biggs's management of the school, and also with the progress of the children.

(Signed) ROBERT BROWN, F. A. PADFIELD, and 36 others, Parents of 89 pupils.

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MEMORIAL FROM INHABITANTS OF CAMPBELL TOWN.

WE, the undersigned inhabitants of Campbell Town, having learned from the newspapers that the Board of Education, upon the representations from the Minister and Churchwardens, propose to remove Mr. Biggs from the school, and believing the charges against that gentleman have not been fairly represented, beg to express our confidence in Mr. Biggs as a teacher, and would therefore most respectfully request that he be allowed to remain in his present situation.

(Signed) FREDK. HART, DANL. SAUNDERS, and 64 others.

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EXTRACTS FROM THE SCHOOL VISITORS' BOOK.

*29th October, 1874.*

I do hope that Mr. Biggs will not leave us until after the most careful consideration shall have been given to his case. We can ill afford the loss of so good a member of our little community.

*Vide also my Memo. of 25th December, 1875.*

(The Rev. Dr. Turnbull is a member of the Local Board.)—A.B.B.

(Signed) ADAM TURNBULL.

*30th October, 1874.*

HAVING visited several parents of children attending this school, I have much pleasure in stating that as a teacher, as well as visitor of the absentees, Mr. Biggs has been highly appreciated, and his removal would be regretted.

(Signed) CATHERINE M. SAUNDERS.