

Couple make documentary about daughter's bullying case

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Angel Garden and Steve Paris say requests for acknowledgment of their daughter's claims fell on deaf ears. Photo / Steven McNicholl



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A couple upset at the way their young daughter's school handled her bullying claims are making a documentary to highlight the case.

Steve Paris and Angel Garden, of Auckland, decided to make a film about their experiences of a three-year battle with their daughter's old school, Titirangi Rudolf Steiner School.

Their eldest daughter, who they asked not to be named, started attending the school in November 2008, when she was 7. A younger sibling was already attending the kindergarten attached to the school and had enjoyed it immensely.

Not long after their 7-year-old started, there was a change in her attitude. Where once she was happy and excited about going to school, she became less

enthusiastic.

"She liked the school because it was artistic and organic," Ms Garden said. "But at the end of 2008, over the Christmas break, she got more and more nervous [about going back]."

It is then that their daughter described being harassed by a group of boys in her class. Ms Garden and Mr Paris decided to meet their daughter's teacher to discuss what was happening. The teacher acknowledged she knew about the boys' behaviour.

"The teacher described it as boisterous - and she did describe it as wild - and said it was a New Zealand thing," Ms Garden said. It wasn't until Ms Garden saw the behaviour that she came to understand the gravity of the situation.

In a short YouTube clip they made about the incident, Ms Garden talks about the shock of seeing her daughter suffer at the hands of "boisterous boys".

"We went to the beach and it seemed that everybody was in high spirits ... [My daughter] had her back to me. I saw these two boys go up behind her and both just push her hard under the water and hold her down there and then they let go," she says in the clip.

"When she came up, they immediately pushed her down again. She had turned around and when she came up again I saw her face and they pushed her down again."

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Another occurred while the class were taking part in an outdoor activity, in which they were using tools. It started with their daughter being pushed down a bank by one of the boys and ended with one of the bullies allegedly threatening Ms Garden's daughter with an axe.

The family's requests for acknowledgment of their daughter's claims fell on deaf ears, they say. In June 2009, the school notified the family that all their daughters - the 7-year-old, another in the school's kindergarten and another attending playgroup and registered to begin nursery the following February - were no longer welcome.

Titirangi Rudolf Steiner School manager Mark Thornton did not want to comment on the family's claims, saying that any comments from the school would jeopardise confidentiality.

In the past three years, the family had documented what they say is a lack of welfare protection for children in private schools.

"There was nothing we could do because this happens to be a private school and private schools aren't covered by the Education Act," Mr Paris said.

He said the documentary would also include testimonials from other parents who had removed their children from the school because of bullying.

Boisterous ?



Oops



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