

Six students charged in St. Michael's College School assault investigation

An iconic Canadian Catholic high school is reeling following the arrest of six students who are charged with assault and sexual assault following an alleged incident in a locker-room that was posted on social media.

The accused are students of St. Michael's College School in midtown Toronto. Five of the students turned themselves into police early Nov. 19 and a sixth was arrested on his way to school.

The identities of the accused are protected under the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

Police announced the charges at a news conference. The accused are facing charges of assault, gang sexual assault and sexual assault with a weapon, said Insp. Dominic Sinopoli, who heads the Toronto police's sex crimes unit.

They appeared in court Nov. 19 and were released into the custody of their parents. They are scheduled to make their next court appearance Dec. 19.

A video that circulated on social media appeared to show teens pinning a student whose pants had been pulled down, while two others allegedly assaulted him with the handle of a broomstick.

The alleged attackers, as well as the youth who allegedly recorded the incident, have all been charged.

Police are also investigating five other incidents, said Sinopoli, all which have occurred within this school year. The school has been cooperative in the investigation, he added.

"All of these instances seem to be hazing related," said Sinopoli. More charges are possible, he said. "I do believe there are more videos and more incidents."

St. Michael's is a private, all-boys school founded 166 years ago by the Basilian Fathers. It is renowned across Canada for its academic and athletic programs, and particularly for its rich hockey history. Dozens of St. Michael's graduates have played in the NHL and 11 are in the Hockey Hall of Fame.

In the wake of the arrests, the school received two bomb threats and students were advised to not wear their school uniforms on their way to and from school.

Police have identified 50 witnesses and are in possession of a number of videos that have circulated on social media. They are asking students with any information to contact police.

Possessing video of the incident constitutes possession of child pornography, according to police.

The charges came a day after the school announced it was launching an independent examination of its "student culture" in the wake of two incidents that resulted in eight students being expelled.

St. Michael's principal Greg Reeves, speaking at a news conference Nov. 19, said the school community "fully support those arrests" and that the school has "made it clear to (police) we are at their disposal" in the investigation. He also said the school has set up a phone hotline for students to report any information.

"It's clear we have a problem, a serious problem," Reeves said, adding that faculty and the board of directors "are as shocked and horrified as you are."

"It's an incredibly sad time for our community," he said.

In announcing the independent examination, Reeves said in a statement: "Recent incidents at our school are offensive to everything we strive to teach the young men at St. Michael's. Through this review, our goal is to examine these unacceptable behaviours at St. Michael's, now and in the past, and take definitive steps to eliminate them."

The statement said a committee of "independent, qualified individuals" is expected to be in place by the first week of December to conduct the "examination of the underlying attitudes and behaviours inconsistent with its culture and values."

A final report is expected to be delivered by summer.

Reeves has faced criticism for failing to contact police immediately after learning of the incidents.

In an interview with Toronto news station CP24, Reeves said he first saw a video of an apparent assault on a student on Monday, Nov. 12. He received a second video – this one showing a student allegedly being sexually assaulted – that same evening.

Police were not notified of that video until Wednesday, Nov. 14.

"When I saw the second video, we were as shocked and horrified as anyone," Reeves said in explaining his delay in informing police.

"At that point I came to understand that he (the alleged victim) had not told his parents. So it was important for me, for total protection of the victim here, that I set up expulsion meetings again for the next morning and that I expel the kids out of the school in protection of the victim."

Reeves added the parents of the victim were "very pleased" with the school's handling of the situation.

“My only concern was the safety of that young man and in my judgment I acted appropriately and the parents were pleased with the timelines that I kept,” Reeves said.

An alleged third incident was referred to the police, as was another video, Reeves said.

“We are deeply saddened and troubled by the events that have come to light over the past days,” Basilian Fr. Thomas Rosica told *The Catholic Register*. “Our primary concern in all of this situation is the protection of students.”

St. Michael’s has more than 1,000 students enrolled in the school from Grades 7 to 12.

Crisis timeline

Here is a timeline of events at St. Michael’s, as outlined by the school and authorities:

Monday, Nov. 12

- School administration receives a video of the first incident (boys’ washroom) that severely violates the Student Code of Conduct
- School begins an internal investigation, interviewing students involved and their parents
- School notifies police about first incident.
- In the evening, school receives video of a second incident (locker room) that severely violates the Student Code of Conduct

Tuesday, Nov. 13

- School continues internal investigation.
- Four students related to the first incident (boys’ washroom) expelled.
- Administration informs faculty and staff of both incidents.

Wednesday, Nov. 14

- School administration continues investigation of the second incident and notifies families involved that police will be contacted by the school.
- Four students expelled related to the locker room incident. One student suspended related to the washroom incident.
- School provides information and video related to the second incident to police.
- School updates faculty, staff and the student body (except Grade 9s) in an assembly, informing students of police directive to delete related videos in their possession.
- School releases a statement to the media; Toronto Police issues statement announcing the second incident involves sexual assault allegations.

Thursday, Nov. 15

- Police inform the school about a security threat and provide extra security on campus.

- Additional crisis counsellors brought in to provide counselling to students, faculty and staff.
- Administration is made aware of a third incident and notifies police.
- Administration and football coaches meet with parents and members of the junior football team.

Friday, Nov. 16

- School holds two information meetings for parents.

Sunday, Nov. 17

- School principal Greg Reeves announces an independent examination of the incidents and a “respect and culture” review to eliminate “unacceptable behaviours.”

Monday, Nov. 18

- Six boys – two 14-year-olds and four aged 15 – arrested and charged with gang sexual assault and assault with a weapon. Police say they are investigating three other incidents at the school, including another sexual assault.

Tuesday, Nov. 19

- Police say they are investigation two more incidents at the school that include new videos. One is being treated as a “threat investigation” and the other is an assault with a weapon.
- School cancels mid-year assessments and all events involving external groups, teams and public performances for the remainder of 2018.