

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

John Clark McMURTRIE

Support person present: No

1. My name is John Clark McMurtrie. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1953. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Qualifications and academic achievements

2. I obtained a Bachelor's Degree from St Andrews University in 1975. Thereafter, I got a postgraduate Certificate of Education from Dundee College of Education in 1976.
3. It was standard procedure at that time to obtain Provisional Registration when graduating with a Post Graduate Certificate or Diploma in relation to the Secondary School in Professional Studies and in the Practice of Teaching, then successfully complete a 2 year supervised Probation Period in full time employment, before becoming a Fully Registered Teacher. That period was later reduced from two years to one year.
4. I was therefore fully registered as a teacher with the General Teaching Council on 1 August 1978.
5. I then studied for a Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Studies at St Andrew's College of Education, which I completed in 1996. I also went on to do a Postgraduate Diploma in Professional Studies there, which I obtained in 1997.
6. I have completed Chartered Teacher Modules at Glasgow University between 2006 and 2008.

Employment History

7. I worked as a maths teacher at Vale of Leven Academy, which is also known as VOLA, from August 1976 to September 1984. I then worked at Keil School, also as a maths teacher, from September 1984 to June 2000. Thereafter I worked as a maths teacher at Dunoon Grammar School from August 2000 to August 2012.

Keil School, Dumbarton

8. I worked at Keil School from 10th September 1984 to 30th June 2000. During that time, I taught maths at S1 level right up to Higher level, as well as Scotvec modules.

Recruitment

9. The [REDACTED] SNR [REDACTED] at Keil School, SNR [REDACTED] CGC [REDACTED] telephoned me to ask if I would be interested in a post as a maths teacher.
10. I had not applied for the job as I was not aware of the position being available. I had never previously considered working in the private sector.
11. I had never previously worked with, met, or even heard of Mr CGC [REDACTED] I believe I was recommended to him by one of the Governors as someone to contact because I was a well-known, experienced local teacher, known to be looking to develop my career and meet new challenges.
12. I was interviewed by him, the [REDACTED] SNR [REDACTED] and the Head of Mathematics.
13. I expect references would have been taken up from VOLA, but I cannot confirm that they were. I had been fully registered with the General Teaching Council since 1978. There was also a further one year probation period when I started the job at Keil School, which was particular to that job.

My role

14. As well as teaching maths, I was also a day house tutor from 1st September 1985 to 23rd August 1992. This involved me having to monitor and meet curricular and pastoral needs of individuals in a primary 7 to S2 tutor group. Primary 7 was introduced to the school during that time.
15. I have a copy of the job description document for the post of Day House Tutor amongst my papers. This is dated as a 1998 draft based on a 1994 description. It has a long list of what the duties are, which include: pastoral care of pupils, monitoring pupil attendance, behaviour and progress, liaising with parents, inducting new pupils, collating reports, supervising pupil social areas and lockers. This list is similar to what my duties would have been up until 1992.
16. I was then Day Housemaster from 24th August 1992 until I left Keil on 30th June 2000. That role involved monitoring and meeting curricular and pastoral needs of individuals in an S5 and S6 group. I also lead and co-ordinated a team of house tutors.
17. As Day Housemaster, I supervised the running of a mixed, vertical house, ranging from primary 6 to S6 day pupils. Primary 6 was introduced in this time. Additionally, I arranged the content and conduct of weekly house assemblies.
18. I was the careers co-ordinator from 1st September 1997 to 30th June 2000. I liaised with the careers officer, the head of Education for Personal and Social Development and tutors. I also arranged visits and visitors, as was appropriate.

Line managers

19. As maths teacher, my line manager was [REDACTED] whose name was OPR [REDACTED]. We had informal discussions several times per day.
20. Latterly, we had formal meetings with agendas and minutes. This was a recommendation by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education. I think her name was Anne Craw, a very pleasant and positive individual whom we often met, and conversed with, at conferences. I considered it to be good practice and applied it to my house staff meetings.

21. I also had annual meetings with the Headmaster to discuss results in detail. My appraisals with the Headmaster took the form of an annual formal meeting. He could come into class at any time to observe, and would discuss with me any issues that were brought to his attention concerning day pupils.
22. In my other roles, my line manager was initially the Headmaster, but later it became the Depute Headmaster, when he was appointed.
23. When I first joined there was a Senior Master but no Depute Headmaster. Then Thomas S. Smith was appointed as Depute Headmaster from outwith the school, and he brought a wealth of experience and enthusiasm. He later became an exceptionally effective Headmaster.
24. Informally, I had meetings at least weekly, plus formal house staff meetings.
25. Any training and staff development that happened, was largely through a mutual desire to continually improve the service we provided. The maths department attended the Stirling Maths Conference every year.
26. The whole staff training, which was for all the staff in the school, was arranged as required. This included things like training on drugs.

Policy

27. I was only involved in the development of non-residential aspects of the tutorial system.
28. Until about 1991, tutor groups met for roughly ten minutes, once a month to discuss 'gradings' which monitored effort and progress in every subject.
29. I proposed that we have a weekly timetabled tutor period to enable discussion of different issues and further develop a co-operative climate. This proposal was accepted and implemented.

30. The tutor period was like a Form or Registration Class in the maintained sector. It was introduced as a whole school system and was available for all pupils, although it was adapted to fit the needs of different pupil groups. The boarding lifestyle was different and I don't have first-hand knowledge of how the boarders were treated.
31. When the system was introduced and explained to the pupils, it was made clear to them that they could raise any issue they had with any staff member. This point would be reinforced from time to time by me at house assembly.
32. It was made clear that a pupil could raise issues with whichever member of staff they were most comfortable with. This did not necessarily have to be the pupil's assigned tutor
33. It proved to be a successful way of improving a co-operative climate as it enabled tutors and pupils to get to know each other better and develop mutual respect. Participation in tutor periods was formally listed as a duty of a house master in the job description thereafter.
34. If there were any allegations, they would go to the Housemaster or Housemistress, or the depute Headmaster.

Strategic planning

35. From 1992, as Housemaster, I was involved in regular house staff meetings to discuss planning, etc. There was an awareness that, as in any group of people, there is always the potential for bullying, of which abuse is an extreme form.
36. There was a tendency to "catch and punish" which meant automatic punishment when a pupil was caught bullying. Strategy evolved quite quickly from this when I became Housemaster.
37. I removed the practise of automatic punishment and encouraged communication with pupils to try to prevent recurrence. My belief was that the accused in a bullying type situation was not always aware of the impact they were having on the person they were bullying, and the most important thing was to prevent recurrence.

38. The removal of automatic punishment improved the flow of information, and meant that pupils were more willing to report misdemeanours, including where they saw bullying of another, as their peer would not automatically be punished but the issue would be resolved.

Other staff

39. After 1992, as Housemaster, I had one to three tutors in my team who I was line manager for. We spoke informally most days and had meetings with agendas and minutes as required.

Recruitment of staff

40. I was only involved in recruitment of staff at the school after 1992, and that was for the recruitment of day tutors in my house. After discussion with me, the Headmaster would speak to suitable people.
41. Day tutors were recruited from existing members of staff who had shown an interest in pastoral work. They were qualified experienced teachers who were already employed, so no references were involved. It is also worth noting that, at that time, in the maintained sector, promoted guidance teachers were appointed without special experience or any additional qualifications.
42. I had nothing to do with senior or teaching positions, which were advertised and interviewed for.
43. I was not involved in the process of checking references from former employers, and I don't know if any referees were spoken to.

Training of staff

44. I was only involved in training of staff after 1992, but usually just for my day tutors.

45. No formal training was required as the work was just an extension of what was regarded as normal teaching duties, with some extra admin.
46. I would "trickle down" relevant ideas from post graduate courses and conferences. Sometimes, I would also do this at house staff meetings and occasionally deliver whole staff in service training.
47. After Child Protection started, I think we had an annual refresher on it at the start of each session.

Supervision

48. I was involved in supervision of staff after 1992, and that was for my house tutors.

Living arrangements

49. I lived in my home in Kilcreggan, 26 miles away from the school. Day pupils lived in various towns and villages within commuting distance of the school and therefore at different distances from me.
50. The other day staff lived various towns and villages within commuting distance.
51. The Boarding staff lived in the Boarding Houses or other properties in the school grounds.
52. The boarding staff would have had access to the children's residential areas. I am not aware that anyone else other than boarding staff or pupils would have had access to the residential areas.

Culture within Keil School

53. My overall recollection of the school is of a caring, co-operative community with a relaxed, high standard of behaviour and a good work ethic.
54. A former pupil, who is now Head Teacher of a primary school, commented on the good education she had had, and said that Keil was "ahead of the game". It was an informal conversation and we did not go into details.
55. I was not aware of any "fagging" going on at the school.

Discipline and punishment

56. The policy in relation to discipline and punishment was contained in the Handbook titled "School Discipline and Routine," which was issued to all staff and pupils.
57. As part of their education, senior pupils were responsible for some organising and supervision of tasks. Any misuse of their devolved authority should have been reported, like any other issue, to whoever a pupil felt comfortable reporting it to. It would then be addressed by the Housemaster or Housemistress.

Day to day running of the school

58. I was involved with the day to day running of the school. This was from 1992. I had responsibility for the day pupils. This included co-ordinating the work of tutors and representing them at house staff meetings, meeting regularly with senior pupils, supporting and guiding them in their duties. I also dealt with any issues referred by pupils, staff or parents.

Reporting of complaints

59. There was a complaint procedure in place if any child, or someone, on their behalf, wished to make a complaint.
60. Any concerns could go via another pupil, parent, tutor, any member of staff, the matron or Chaplain who would then refer it along the chain of command, as appropriate. Occasionally, they could also come via a Friend of Keil or a Governor, the Housemaster, Headmaster or Depute Headmaster.
61. I think The Friends of Keil were a bit like like a Parent Teacher Association and were involved in fund raising. I think that anyone interested in Keil could join without a formal selection process. I had no direct involvement with them.
62. This procedure was regularly used and usually resolved at Housemaster level unless serious.
63. I kept a record of incidents and I think other teachers kept their own logs as part of normal procedure.
64. Significant complaints, and the responses to them, would be recorded as it is normal practice for teachers to keep written records. The form can vary to suit the individual, except where the form is for some specific purpose, such as registers of attendance and marks books.

Trusted adults

65. There were people that a child could speak to about any worries they may have had. Each pupil had a tutor they could have spoken to, but it was made clear to them that their concerns could be shared with any of their class teachers, matron, chaplain or whoever they were most comfortable with.

66. Children, did in practise raise their concerns this way. My tutors and I routinely dealt with issues such as loneliness, missing property or bullying, often referred by pupils outside our own groups.

Abuse at Keil School

67. I do not remember if the school had a definition of “abuse” in relation to the treatment of a child, during my time there.

68. I don't remember defining “abuse”, but we did define bullying as a “misuse of power” and “abuse” is an extreme form of that.

69. Bullying was discussed at staff meetings and sometimes at meetings of prospective parents on bursary days

70. As aforementioned, the Strategy evolved, moving quickly from ‘catch and punish’ to encouraging communication with pupils and trying to prevent recurrence. Removing automatic punishment improved the flow of information.

71. While there were various routes for abuse to be reported, I cannot be confident that they would always be used. In my experience, both as a parent and a teacher, children do not always report issues at the time, for various reasons. With every day issues, they may see reporting it as a form of weakness or be concerned about getting others into trouble. With regards to abuse, the abusers may bribe, threaten or otherwise discourage reporting.

72. The reason I think this is that my own two children would say they got on fine at the local primary school. It was much later that I learned from third parties that both had suffered sustained spells of bullying. Neither had informed their class teacher or us, their parents.

73. Many pupils came to Keil because of bullying at their previous schools. I often had parents, sometimes in tears of gratitude, describing the positive changes in the behaviour and attitude of their child after moving to Keil.

74. To my knowledge the school was never subject to any concern because of the way children or young people were treated there.
75. I was not involved in the investigation of any abuse or ill treatment of a child on behalf of the school at the time I was there.

Child protection arrangements

76. At every level of staff interaction, it was clear that we continually worked towards an ideal of a caring community with pupil welfare at its heart.
77. We were regularly reminded about procedures, and were issued with a small, white card summarising these. I think we were given these by the Headmaster and they read as follows:

‘The staff member must above all display sympathy and understanding and not transmit any element of disbelief’.

(a) Observe

(b) RECORD –

R - Respond gently

E - Enquire casually

C - Confidentiality NOT promised

O - Observe

R - Record in detail

D - Do NOT interrogate

(c) REPORT to Headmaster

78. We were encouraged to refer to our line manager if we were in any doubt about how to handle any child protection related matters.

79. Towards the end of my time at the school, child protection procedures were just starting to be developed. Every effort was made to proceed in line with national progress, which would have had The Children (Scotland) Act in 1995 as the main driver.
80. Keil would also have received updated information from all the usual sources, such as Scottish Council of Independent Schools, Teachers' Unions, as well as other bodies, and they would have updated their own practice in line with the updates, as appropriate.
81. In terms of whether the child protection measures worked, the school seemed to be a happy and safe environment.

External monitoring

82. I remember Her Majesty's Inspectors and Scottish Council for Independent Schools carrying out inspections.
83. I recall them speaking to children individually and also in a group during these inspections. I don't remember if staff would also have been present during those talks.
84. I was spoken to during the inspections, and I also remember them giving us feedback.

Record-keeping

85. Recording of attendance, academic progress and effort were all thorough.
86. A gradings system monitored children's progress and effort, in every subject, roughly monthly. These were then discussed at staff meetings and any anomalies were investigated.
87. Termly reports, including from tutors, were also issued to parents, with copies stored.
88. I do not remember a formal policy about recording anything regarding allegations of abuse.

Police investigations

89. I was involved in the investigation of abuse at Keil School when I was contacted by the police in 2015, as part of an operation called Operation Amador.
90. The school had closed by this time and I was contacted by the police when I was at home.
91. I was interviewed by the police on 28 October 2015 at Helensburgh Police Station, and gave a statement to Ricky Linus.
92. During the interview, I learned that a member of staff, Bill Bain, had been accused of abuse. No day pupils or day staff had been involved.
93. I am aware that Bill Bain was convicted for the abuse of children at Keil School. He had been one of my colleagues at the school from 1987 to 2000. I found him to be intelligent, cheerful and an enthusiastic teacher of his many talents, from rugby to physics. I was not aware of any concerns about him, nor did I have any concerns about him myself.
94. I don't know how he had been recruited by the school, or anything about his qualifications or training.
95. In his role at the school, he initially would have been supervised by his Housemaster and later, by the Headmaster and Depute Headmaster.
96. I have never given evidence at a trial concerning any alleged abuse of children at Keil School.
97. I am not aware of any previous allegations of abuse that the school may have been made aware of.

Specific alleged abusers

98. I have been asked about a member of staff called **CDK**, who worked at the school during my time there. I do not remember anyone of that name.

CFJ

- 99. I have been asked about a member of staff names CFJ and I do remember him. I worked with him circa 1984 to 1987. He would have been about forty years old at that time.
- 100. He was a teacher at the school and was a colleague of mine. I recall him being pleasant, intelligent and competent. I did not know him well; just as an easy going, co-operative colleague.
- 101. I did see him with children and he seemed relaxed, enthusiastic and friendly. I never saw him discipline or abuse any child. I also didn't hear of him having abused any children.

Final thoughts

- 102. Whatever systems or procedures are in place to protect children, it is imperative to appreciate that many potential abusers are cunning and possess many attributes that are desirable in a teacher, for example, charm, enthusiasm and a sense of humour. All members of a community must be aware of this.
- 103. The rapid evolution of technology poses new threats to child safety, both in boarding and day school environments, which schools must keep up to date with.
- 104. I have no objection to my witness statement being published as part of the evidence to the Inquiry. I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed..... [Redacted Signature]

Dated..... 11 December 2020