

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Martin COOMBS

Background

1. My name is Martin Coombs. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1952. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.
2. I left school at the age of eighteen in 1970. Between 1970 and 1973 I studied at the University of Newcastle and gained a BSc Honours in geography and maths, Class 2, Div. II. From 1973 to 1975 I took a grand tour around the world, including working as a steam locomotive fireman on South African Railways from June 1974 to January 1975. From 1975 to 1976, I again attended the University of Newcastle, where I gained an MSc in Transport Engineering & Operations.
3. From 1976 to 1979, I worked with Tyne & Wear Passenger Transport Executive as an Operations Planning Officer, with occasional additional PR and lecturing duties. During 1979 and 1980, I made further travels, this time in Asia. From 1980 to 1982, I broadened my ground floor experience in the transport industry, as a ticketing department assistant and then as a bus driver with Tyne & Wear PTE, and National Bus Co. This was with a view to finding a position in transport management rather than planning. However, the whole industry was in the doldrums at the time, so I eventually made a decision to change tack and move into teaching. Between 1982 and 1983 I therefore completed a PGCE course at the University of Newcastle.
4. From 1983 to 1987, I taught geography at Enfield Grammar School. This was a boys' school that was by then a comprehensive, though it retained its historic name. In 1987 I moved to Strathallan School, Perth, where I again taught geography. I was a boarding house tutor throughout that time and the acting house-master for seventy boarding boys for one term. However, I was in my mid-thirties by then and could see no obvious route for progression at Strathallan, so in 1989 I decided to

move on.

5. In 1989 I began teaching at St. Anne's School, Windermere, as Head of Geography and running a wide range of extra-curricular activities. I enjoyed the adventurous atmosphere but clashed with the Headmaster, who thought, rightly, that I was critical of him. So again, regretfully, I decided to move in 1991.
6. In 1991 I began working at Keil School, Dumbarton. I had been appointed as Head of Geography and House-tutor in Mason House with the junior boys. I later became House-master of School House for boarding girls. Latterly, in 1999 to 2000, I was also a Senior Master with day-to-day responsibility for staff cover, the school disciplinary system, and special events. Even on my arrival it was clear that Keil's position in Dumbarton was financially uncertain, however, we worked incredibly hard to develop the school and to change its atmosphere. Whilst Keil was not really the school I wanted to move to in 1991, it had become the school in 2000 that I would have been happy to remain in until retirement. However, that was not to be.
7. In 2000-1, after the closure of Keil, I again travelled, in South America, as well as having short-term posts in schools until the end of the school year. In September 2001 I started at Hockerill Anglo-European College, Bishops Stortford, a comprehensive school but with a large contingent of boarders. I was Head of Girls' Boarding and a teacher of maths. However, I was very uncomfortable with the school's uncaring ethos, so moved on of my own volition after just one year. The following year, 2002, I went to Saint Felix School, Southwold, Suffolk. I was appointed as Head of Geography, then became Head of Boarding and once again house-master of a girls' boarding house. I eventually left there in 2011.
8. I retired at that point in 2011 and have since been busy volunteering, for extended periods at a South African school for street-children, which is non-residential, and as a Samaritans listener, a church steward/trustee, a primary school governor and volunteer, and in various capacities on a heritage railway.
9. I have had a variety of additional qualifications. During my teaching career I was also an RYA dinghy sailing instructor, a first aider, an RLSS bronze medallion lifeguard

latterly with the pool lifeguard qualification, and a summer Mountain Leader. For some years I was an assessor of Gold level expeditions for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

Employment with the school

10. I started at Keil at the beginning of September 1991, as Head of Geography and house-tutor, effectively assistant house-master, in Mason House which had about twenty boarding boys in the Transitus (P6), S1 and S2 years. My accommodation was in a bungalow close to the house but not physically linked to it. I also took on a number of extra-curricular activities immediately. These included swimming sessions at Helensburgh pool, open evening sessions for boarders in the computing lab, first aid courses run by St. Andrew's Ambulance Corps, and a community service after-school club. The question had been asked at interview if I was willing to restart sailing at the school, but that only kicked in the following summer.

11. From September 1995, the Mason House building ceased to be a boys' boarding house and was re-used for other purposes. I took on the post of 'House-master' of a new so-called 'house' for day pupils, but I was still living in the bungalow in the school grounds. That meant that I was free to help out if any of the boarding houses needed evening or weekend assistance. In fact that was very rare, for although Keil's staff was small there was a strong team spirit. In fact I only ever remember having to help out once in each of the boys' boarding houses – a Sunday afternoon in Islay Kerr House and one evening in Mackinnon House. However, during the late autumn of 1995 there were problems in the supervision of the boarding girls in School House, within the main school building. The house-mistress at the time was Miss QTZ [REDACTED], an Irish lady who had moved up from [REDACTED] School in Kent to take on the role at Keil. She had long periods off sick, as did her assistant. When those absences coincided that autumn there was a sudden need to find experienced adults who would be willing to spend their evenings/nights looking after the girls. I thus found myself undertaking regular evening duties that autumn in School House, up to but not including bed-times. This was no problem as I had worked previously in a girls' boarding school, St. Anne's, Windermere, and I was at ease with the girls and very careful to respect their privacy.

12. At the end of term it became apparent that the house-mistress had been persuaded to leave. Miss QTZ had been prone to absenting herself from lessons, and indeed from the house, sometimes without notice – a mortal sin for anyone supervising children. When it became clear that some of this was carefully planned on her part rather than being the unfortunate result of ill-health, the school seems to have decided that enough was enough. I was then asked if I would be interested in taking on that role. Although I was assured that the girls had been sounded out and were happy with the idea, I declined as I was unclear as to how a man would cope with bedtimes and other scenarios. This was not because I had any worries about the girls themselves, but I was concerned as to how their parents would view the idea of a man undertaking these duties, and I was wary of taking on such a position in case it ended with them objecting. Nevertheless, throughout the first term of 1996 I continued to fill evening cover duties in the house.

13. Just before Easter, 1996, unexpectedly I was asked to attend a formal interview for the post of girls' house-master. Although I had previously declined such a proposal I loved working with the girls and, if adequate safeguards (both for them and for me) could be put in place and the parents be reassured, I was by then more ready to accept the challenge. I also had opinions about the running of the house which could be aired in such a setting. The interview panel included not only the Headmaster and his Depute, but also a Mrs. MacDonald, the wife of the Chairman of Governors, who was herself a senior personnel manager at the American company Polaroid's nearby plant. I was offered the post but I still had reservations. The following day I was pressed to accept the role, and eventually agreed on condition that it was temporary, so that if it did not work out I could back out gracefully. In fact I ran the house for four years or more, until the school's closure in 2000. I then had another ten years looking after boarding girls in both independent and state schools in England. In School House at Keil, and in one of the two other girls' houses that I later ran in England, I always made sure that I was accompanied/chaperoned by a senior girl when going round at bedtime. As regards parents, only one couple ever queried my position even obliquely in my entire fifteen years of looking after 400 or so girls! I always tried to be open and welcoming to them, and in any case mothers and fathers tended to rely heavily on their daughters' opinions, and if they were happy then so were the parents.

14. In the summer of 1999, the Headmaster, John Cummings, moved on to another position elsewhere. Tom Smith stepped up from the Depute role that he had filled for around ten years, to become Headmaster. I and a colleague were then invited to become Senior Masters to share the Depute Head responsibilities. I took on the supervision of staff cover duties, pupil discipline and the organisation of special events, whilst my colleague organised examinations and other academic matters. Unfortunately the closure of the school was announced before Easter in 2000, to take effect at the end of the summer term.
15. The processes followed when I was recruited, were that the post certainly had been formally advertised in the Times Education Supplement (TES), and I had provided the names of referees from both Strathallan and St. Anne's schools. I believe I heard that the references had been taken up, as I would obviously have expected. I had been interviewed by the SNR [REDACTED] at the time, CGC [REDACTED], and Tom Smith the Depute. It is now twenty-nine years on and I do not recall other details such as mention of probation. I was not GTCS registered, as the majority of my career thus far had been in England. The equivalent English GTC only came into being in 2000 after Keil had closed.
16. As Head of Geography my line manager was Tom Smith, who supervised the academic work of the school. As House-tutor in Mason House my line manager was John Whyte, the House-master. As House-master of School House from 1996 my line manager was effectively Tom Smith, who ran Islay Kerr House and as Depute Head was the most senior, though not the longest-serving, of the House-masters.
17. As Senior Master my line manager was the Headmaster, who by that time was Tom Smith. In each of those positions there was very close liaison between the responsible person and myself. I got on well with both John Whyte and Tom Smith, and in a small school we met daily and often at meals as well as more formally. Monitoring and appraisal in those days tended to be informal but was certainly there, as Tom Smith in particular was forthright in his analysis of situations though also very open in inviting comment and suggestions.
18. In respect of training, I had worked in boarding, and in larger schools than Keil, prior to my arrival, so I do not remember any formal induction training. I was, however, encouraged to take advantage of training days organised between the various

Scottish independent boarding schools and, more formally, to go on educational courses. I remember in particular a one week counselling course organised, I think by Glasgow University, for secondary school staff. There were also more practical courses needed to maintain my extra-curricular qualifications in sailing instruction, first aid and life-saving.

Policy

19. In respect of involvement in and responsibility for the care of children, as a member of the staff living on site, and one who had experience in other boarding schools, I was practically involved in discussions about how best to care for the children right from the date of my arrival. However, any responsibility for such matters only began once I became house-master of the girls in early 1996. As a Senior Master during the school's final year I was a member of the Senior Management Team, but only two terms of that involved normal strategic planning, the final term being focussed on giving the pupils and staff a positive and enjoyable end to their times at Keil.
20. There were two huge over-riding changes going on during my time at Keil, one a national and indeed international culture shift, and the other specific to the school. The day that I began my first teaching post, in September 1983, was the very day that that school, a well-regarded boys' comprehensive school in London, received its first photo-copier. The first computers followed later in that decade. Prior to that any replication of documents was by typing onto stencils and then using Gestetner duplicators, or in the classroom by using Banda machines. Any alteration of a document, no matter how minor, could only be done by retyping the document from scratch. In the circumstances 'policies' usually meant a single foolscap sheet on a notice-board in the staffroom, or merely something agreed orally in a staff or management meeting and then more-or-less remembered without paper backup.
21. No-one had the time or the apparent need to keep more than hand-written notes of the day-to-day running of small departments such as individual boarding houses. This attitude only began to change around 1990 once the ability to require more documentation had penetrated down from larger organisations. The new philosophy was taken up first by state schools, driven as they were by the need to keep officers and members in civic centres happy. Independent schools were slower to change. There the literal bottom line was keeping the parents happy and thereby maintaining

the number of pupils in school at the beginning of each term. For them, the change to maintaining more records was driven first by school inspectors and then, slowly, by legal, insurance and other external interactions such as with social services. Having said that, I do not recall noticing that policies or record-keeping on my arrival at Keil in 1991 were in any way more deficient than they had been in that London school.

22. The second fundamental change was specific to Keil. The school had begun as a free institution to give a technical education to boys from Argyll and the Islands. It thus had a very different and more socially-inclusive founding ethos from many independent schools, and one which continued throughout its life despite the eventual need to charge fees. It was certainly true, though, that in the 1970s and 1980s the school seemed to have become something of a backwater. It had been a small 'robust' boys' boarding school with a number of idiosyncrasies, and with some very old-fashioned staff. However, the arrival of CGC [REDACTED] as SNR [REDACTED] in the late 1980s saw the beginning of rapid and far-reaching change. He was aided in this quest by his new Depute, Tom Smith, brought in at least partly for his knowledge of Scottish state schools and the exam system. They set about encouraging a number of members of staff to take early retirement, took a much more active interest in the disciplinary system and widened the curriculum and staffing to reflect current Scottish practice. Coincidentally they were aided in these changes by the increasing number of girls, who took a dim view of some of the less civilised customs of the boys, and by the advent of more day pupils, who broadened the somewhat narrow philosophies of many of the west coast and island boarders.
23. By the time I arrived in 1991 this process of change was well under way, but it did not reach its culmination until the mid-'90s. By then a school which had been renowned as 'tough' was seen by many parents as a suitable haven for vulnerable children who would probably have sunk without trace in some of the local state schools. It is impossible to overstate the importance of this change. It means that comments by former pupils on, say, Facebook, often meet with incomprehension from those who attended the school earlier or later, but the result was that by the late 1990s I was working in an environment which was more caring of its charges than any other school I have ever experienced, either independent or state. Examples of those Facebook comments can be difficult to find, as they were more often made when that forum first brought different generations of 'Old Boys' together perhaps ten or fifteen years ago.

However, here are a few picked out from the mass:

- a. 1980s pupil: "Education, allegedly is easy with a rich mummy/daddy... my family and my husband's were not so blessed. We attended Keil, paid for by bursaries. The education was shite - It is very sad that Keil pupils and teachers lost sight of that and it would be nice if pupils realised."
- b. 1990s pupil A: "For most, Keil was about more than the education in any case. For me, it has set me up for life, from discipline to friendships, and education came second... not because of the quality of education that Keil offered (or lack of in your opinion X) but because I was never an academic anyway, no matter which school I attended, but Keil was a fabulous school for me and still does play a big part in my life today."
- c. 1990s pupil B: "We all sat Standard Grade/Higher exams set by, I believe SQA, like the rest of Scottish schools, and my results were absolutely reflected in my predicted grades from Keil teachers... They were pretty damn good and all down to the education, support and encouragement of the Keil staff. No complaints here."
- d. 1990s pupil C: "If you look through the achievements of my generation of Keil pupils there are endless success stories. I certainly never suffered at the hands of "shite" teaching. I have the string of letters after my name to prove it. Oh and two before it if I ever get finished! ;-) However, as A said Keil was about more than that. It taught me to grow up for one. Gave me endless confidence in my abilities and also showed me my limitations in aspects of life beyond just academia. I have lifelong friends in both fellow pupils and, shock horror, teachers..."
- e. And following the display of a number of photos of school life originally from 1990s issues of the annual school magazine:
- f. 1970s pupil A: "I don't remember any school mags from the seventies. You lot were spoilt. I bet you had heating and edible food as well!"
- g. 1990s pupil D: "I was there for two years, can honestly say they were the best school years ever. Not much photographic evidence of me being there but loving these photos, such amazing memories. So sad that Keil is no more, it's the school I'd send my children to."
- h. 1970s pupil B: "My late father served on the children's panel for a number of years and visited approved schools and borstals several times and did mention that he was paying a lot of money to send his kids to poorer facilities than those kids locked up."
- i. 1970s? pupil C: "You mean Old Boys who were at the real Keil before it went all soft and limp!! (and who carry the emotional scars as a result perhaps)."

- j. 1960s pupil: "Everybody seems to be having fun... different school than the one I went to...I left in 1962."
 - k. 1990s pupil E: "I look at Mr **CGC** being instrumental in changing my life. I was quite a difficult child who got himself into serious trouble before Keil. Including getting his sons... into some serious trouble with me. Despite that he and my dad must have hatched a plan to get me into the school and give me an outlet through sport primarily I guess. I will forever be grateful to him and his family for forgiving me and giving me that second chance I needed."
 - l. 1990s pupil F: "Best school I ever went to. Went to Dollar and Lomond when it closed. Neither were even close to Keil [in their standards, implied]."
24. The training of staff tended to be informal, it being a very small staffroom of only around twenty to twenty-five staff including any part-timers. Nevertheless, I found both John Whyte and Tom Smith as my line managers to be supportive, and there was encouragement to go on courses, which were always advertised in the staff-room. When I became House-master of the boarding girls I had a succession of four female house-tutors working with me, usually one at a time but for a period two sharing the role. I tried to build their confidence and their understanding of the needs of the girls. This was not easy initially, since I had been appointed over the head of a female teacher who might well have felt that there was little she could learn about the care of girls from a man. This was Mrs. Rosalyn Chawner, who had been teaching PE and acting as house-tutor to the girls for maybe one year. However, she moved on within a term or two and the subsequent assistant staff were younger, more open-minded, and obviously not too far distant from their own teenage experiences.
25. The procedures used in relation to recruitment I seem to recall as standard in the field. Vacancies were advertised in the TES, and references taken up, though as I had little involvement in this I cannot comment more thoroughly. After my appointment at Keil I only remember two members of the boarding staff being appointed from outside. Neither of those two appointments was successful, and both were eventually encouraged to move on, in one case very firmly encouraged. This was Miss **QTZ**, as explained above. With hindsight, that person had possibly been given an unjustifiably good reference from a very

well-known school down south to encourage her to leave. This is clearly a known problem of wider importance, especially when there are safeguarding implications. If a new staff appointment is for work with children or vulnerable adults then clearly any inaccuracy or lacunae in a reference could have safeguarding consequences. That is why modern 'safer recruitment' procedures insist on everything being very thoroughly checked. The story that Mr. Bain had 'moved on' from Robert Gordon's College in Aberdeen to Keil, despite earlier concerns, makes the point very forcefully. On the topic of unhelpful references, I have no facts or proof, but I can think of three Head teachers I have worked for who moved on to larger schools despite less than impressive performances. I have also myself read references that with hindsight had glossed over substantial weaknesses in teachers' abilities. I suspect it happens in every field of business, and perhaps more so now that employment legislation makes it harder to 'ease someone out' more openly or indeed to make openly critical remarks in references.

26. Child protection certainly gained a higher profile nationally as the 1990s progressed. At Keil a policy was introduced and then upgraded at least once. It was at Keil that I first received training in child protection, though I cannot remember the precise year. I suspect that there had been no mention of the topic during my PGCE training, though as that was nearly forty years ago I cannot remember details. I don't remember much about the details of the training at Keil either, partly because I have since been involved with such policies in several other establishments and all the paperwork starts to blur together. Clearly our approach was inadequate. That cannot be denied. Hindsight and comment by police officers suggests that Mr. Bain was extremely careful and may only have been abusing one pupil at a time. That is clearly one too many, but Facebook and other conversations after his conviction showed that it was not only the staff but also the vast majority of the ex-pupils who had had no idea of what had been going on.
27. I have had long conversations in the past three or four years with the ex-pupil who first flagged up these unfortunate events to the police. [REDACTED] time at Keil overlapped with mine for a short while, though he was already there when I arrived. We had got on well, and after everything about Mr. Bain came out he arranged to ring me for a long chat, albeit probably twenty-something years after we had last met. A couple of years ago I was up in Glasgow and we then met up for an

extended conversation in a cafe on the Byres Road. I regard this as the least I can do for one of my ex-pupils who clearly has not been able to put past events entirely behind him. I was also very interested to learn of his thoughts and advice, not merely because I am safeguarding officer for a charity but also because I have attempted to write about the experience of being a single man caring for girls and wanted to know if he had suggestions that could improve boarding safety for the future. This was obviously well after the end of Mr. Bain's court case, but even so I was careful not to ask for other witness names. However, my guess would be that the events largely occurred up until the early 1990s but less so after that time. I have explained my reasons for this assertion in some detail. See in particular paragraphs 22, 23, 28, 48 and 57.

28. As mentioned earlier, Keil had been a robust and old-fashioned school but by the later 1990s was very different indeed and with staff who were much more approachable and sympathetic. I would find it very difficult indeed to believe that in the final years of the school's life a pupil would not have found a sympathetic ear. The school nurse, the late Mrs. Evelyn McLean, was much loved by pupils and staff alike, not least for her willingness to make time to listen to problems of all kinds. I seem to recall that she too had arrived in 1991. Interestingly, there seem to have been no allegations that another teacher, Mr. KPC [REDACTED] who was convicted of abusing boys elsewhere, committed any such offences during two years that he spent at Keil. That suggests to me that even around 1990 he had found the school too risky a place for his activities. I did not know Mr. KPC [REDACTED] as he had gone before I arrived.
29. I have been asked about the requirement for qualifications but I am not sure precisely what is meant by this phrase, and in any case do not feel that I have anything useful to say. As far as I knew all staff were appropriately qualified to teach their subjects.
30. There certainly was staff appraisal, both under CGC [REDACTED] regime with its easing out of several teachers who had not changed with the times, and under John Cummings' leadership from 1992 onward, when the system became more formalised. However, again I can remember few details as subsequent experiences in other schools have merged together in my memory. I do not recall the nature of

any formal complaints procedure, largely because I never had to use it.

Discipline and punishment

31. Keil, like many schools of its ilk, did pride itself on giving senior pupils responsibility. That was seen as being excellent training for their future careers and has been commended widely both by past pupils and by their employers. However, if you are going to give young people power over others then you must watch the process very closely indeed, for teenagers do not know the limits and will easily begin to abuse their positions unless kept within clear boundaries. I suspect that the oversight had sometimes been rather slack during the 1980s, but by the time I arrived things had been tightened up considerably. Some of the staff encouraged to retire by Mr. CGC had tended to leave discipline very much to the senior boys. By the beginning of the 1990s the vast majority of the staff with pastoral responsibilities were relatively new to the school and were clearly committed to the need to avoid abuse of the disciplinary system. As the years went on their attitude became more and more taken for granted by the boys and girls. In particular Tom Smith, Depute Head, was in charge of discipline during eight of my nine years at Keil and he was very clear in his expectations that everything should be open and 'by the book'. I took over that responsibility myself for the final year, 1999-2000, and I hope that I maintained his standards.
32. Punishments took two forms. Firstly there was 'NH' which was short for 'natural history.' The origin of the euphemism is unknown. It involved practical work such as litter-picking, sweeping leaves, marking out pitches or moving furniture for a special occasion. Secondly the punishment known as 'Copies' was used. This had varied through the years but latterly meant copying out an article from that day's newspaper. These would largely have been imposed by staff, but senior pupils could give 'House NH' which might have involved fifteen minutes of a task such as wiping down skirting boards or tidying the house kitchen. In general the punishments were respected as being useful rather than pointless, and they avoided the common mistake of creating an association between learning and negativity that can occur when academic tasks are imposed as sanctions. During the school's final year I was in charge of supervising the punishment system and can confirm that I watched carefully over the reasons for its imposition, the tasks to be done, and the patterns of misbehaviour that the weekly records revealed. I recall there being lists filed in ring-binders, which Tom Smith would

have maintained before I took over.

Disciplinary process re complaints and allegations

33. I cannot recall any serious events that required such a process, and thus I am unable to help much here. In relation to whistle-blowing I had had occasion in other schools to want to flag up problems to governors, and I can confirm that they vary in their availability to staff and in their willingness to listen to problems that inevitably will cause them more work. In general I think Keil had a better set than most and some who were particularly good at taking on board problems, though as the school approached its end inevitably they sometimes seemed overwhelmed by the task facing them. However, as was normal at the time in most organisations, I cannot recall any formal whistle-blowing procedure and I doubt whether there was one.

Record-keeping

34. For better or worse, that was a much more trusting era, and for reasons already recalled less was written down than is now expected. Nevertheless, I certainly kept a diary of record when I was running School House. I have no idea what happened to them after the school's closure. More formally, the school had a big walk-in safe in the main corridor and it's shelves certainly appeared to be full, but what they contained I rarely had cause to discover.

Strategic planning

35. I was not formally involved in or responsible for strategic planning until my appointment as a Senior Master in 1999. This was only two terms before the announcement of the forthcoming closure of the school, so my recollections are necessarily restricted.
36. In relation to my recollection of school's strategic approach, rather than attempt to recall what limited decisions we made during those two terms, I will expand upon the impression of strategic planning during my whole nine years at the school. In a small school facing a difficult financial situation there was inevitably much debate about our options, and such informal speculation fed regularly to and from the deliberations of senior management. Major topics of discussion included the need to encourage change in the standards of work and behaviour whilst retaining some of the

school's more positive eccentricities; marketing opportunities and indeed the different rural, urban and overseas markets to be tapped; publicity materials, some of which I created; the optimum use of buildings and the structure of the boarding and day houses; the safety of our pupils in the social context of Dumbarton; our wider involvement in the community, which had been widely praised; the security of our buildings given the local levels of crime; drug and alcohol education; the development of initiative and resilience; the particular welfare of vulnerable pupils. The school had always encouraged the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, and latterly when we were trying to come up with additional selling points to attract families, we discussed ways in which we could raise the profile of the Award and make it a larger part of our philosophy. A DofE Gold Award, for example, can be a significant asset for a less academic teenager on leaving school.

37. Throughout my time running boarding houses I had regular weekly meetings with the school nurse, particularly necessary for a man caring for girls and seeking advice and an insight into how my charges viewed my ways of working. Such meetings also tended toward discussion of any boarder who was giving us cause for worry. Boarding staff evening meal-times could also become informal pastoral meetings of a similar kind, but only if the staff were separated from the boys and girls and could not be overheard. That was the case at Keil where the staff ate in a separate room in the evenings and in any case lingered after the boarders had gone.

Other staff

38. In relation to the management of other staff by me, as Head of Geography I had the occasional assistance of other teachers with the younger classes, but could not have been considered to be their line manager. Similarly, as the House-master of School House, I had the assistance in turn of each of the four house-tutors previously mentioned, but in every case house-duties were a relatively small part of their workload and thus I was not their principal manager. They did, especially during the earlier of my house-mastering years, cover the overnight period from ten in the evening to about seven in the morning, since it was not initially seen as ideal for me to have to deal with the girls' needs after bedtime. I was very conscious, however, that I needed to reinforce their efforts as much as possible, and thus would turn out automatically to provide support in case of any alarm. After the first

two years, as the girls themselves seemed comfortable with the idea, I did then cover the majority of overnight duties, albeit with the school nurse, Mrs. Evelyn McLean, normally available in her flat downstairs if there should be an emergency. I don't ever recall that she was needed.

Recruitment of staff

39. In relation to my involvement in staff recruitment, I do not recall any formal roles, though if I had met candidates during their tours of the school I would have been asked for my opinions. Any knowledge that I picked up informally at Keil of recruitment policy and practices has long since been overtaken in my mind by my more formal role in recruitment in a later school. This also applies to the obtaining of references. I am not aware if referees were contacted by phone, since by the time I joined the Senior Management Team at Keil we were not in a position to be looking for further new staff. As Head of Boarding at that later school, clearly I was deeply involved in interviewing and appointing boarding staff. However, by that time, say in 2005, 'safer recruitment' did have its own accepted sequence of events, all of which were recorded by the school's bursar, and checked by Ofsted inspectors whenever they visited.

Training of staff

40. I was a participant in staff meetings which included training, and also in drug education meetings and external development courses. However, I was not involved in the planning of such events.
41. As well as the formal meetings mentioned above, clearly the majority of training is given 'on the job' in any role, though this is often under-valued. I was very aware, for example, that my new house tutors in School House needed encouragement, and in particular induction in an awareness that a boarding house needs to be as much like a family home as possible. Yes, there need to be clear rules, which all teenagers crave to make them feel safe, but there needs also to be a slight distancing from the regulations of the school day, so that kids can 'let their hair down' or maybe have a moan to a substitute parent without fear of it getting back to other teachers. I always permitted a slightly greater level of familiarity from the girls at bedtime than I would have in the classroom. Even when supervising bedtimes with the younger boys in Mason House during my first years at Keil, I was more

relaxed about them referring to me by nicknames than I would have been during the school day. I made it clear that this was a privilege to be kept within the house, and by and large they respected that. Girls are less prone to use nicknames, but in contrast they would make more use of the assurance that what was said in the house would stay in the house. Day pupils clearly have a break from school life when they go home, and I have always believed that boarders need the same means of escape. However, that must not mean unbridled licence. A member of the boarding staff cannot forget their responsibility for caring for the boys or girls and for setting a good example.

42. That house/school distinction can be difficult for teachers to grasp especially when they are young, new to the school and maybe nervous, or are only staying in for a couple of nights a week, but it is crucial if a happy and supportive atmosphere is to be created. A new young member of staff is likely to be worried though, that a relaxed attitude within the house might have consequences for their ability to maintain discipline within the classroom. That is completely understandable, and therefore that new house-tutor needs support, advice and careful mentoring from the older house-staff.
43. As I have mentioned elsewhere, some details slip easily from the memory over a period of twenty-five years or so, especially when I have had more involvement elsewhere during my later career; this is the case in relation to training and development policies, and their implementation.

Supervision/staff appraisal/staff evaluation

44. I was involved in supervision, staff appraisal and evaluation as a participant, but only to a limited extent as a supervisor. I was the supervisor of my house-tutors in School House, who spent a minimum of two evenings a week or up to four nights a week on duty depending on the arrangements for that year. Certainly I appraised and evaluated their efforts and passed this on to their line managers, but this was a relatively small part of their duties when compared to their classroom teaching. It is difficult to recall the school's policy after twenty-five or more years and after experiencing other systems since.

Living arrangements

45. Initially I lived in the West Bungalow. This was a few yards from Mason House where I did two evenings of duty per week. If I needed to cover the house for a weekend so that John Whyte the house-master and his family could get away, I stayed in the spare bedroom in their home, which was directly linked to the boarding house. This happened once or twice a term.
46. The senior boys' houses, Islay Kerr and MacKinnon Houses, each had accommodation for a house-master and family and for a single house-tutor. In Islay Kerr both were within the main house building, but in MacKinnon the House-master's residence was in a nearby cottage. School House, the residence of the boarding girls, was upstairs within the main school classroom building, the old Helenslee House of the Denny shipbuilding family. There was limited staff accommodation in two separate locations in that area, one a self-contained flat and the other merely a bedroom.
47. The boarding houses were each protected from intruders from outside by code locks and alarms, though the girls' accommodation was within a building that was slightly less secure during the day because of its use for other school purposes. As is normal within boarding houses, the opposite sex were very firmly banned from going upstairs at any time, though they could visit any downstairs common-rooms. During my time as House-master of the girls I was extremely conscious of the importance of security and I can say with confidence that I never ever met an illicit visitor within the house during those four years. Maintenance staff occasionally needed access during the school day, but the girls were warned of this and reminded by 'Men at work' signs at the access doors.

Culture within Keil

48. As I have mentioned above, the culture within the school changed markedly during my time there. Certainly when I arrived it retained some of its earlier toughness, but that was on the way out, actively encouraged by increasing numbers of staff. However, that does not give the whole picture. There were a number of very positive characteristics which we were keen to retain. One was the 'squad' system, whereby each member of the school, from the very youngest to the oldest, was a member of a mixed-age group or 'squad' for roll-calls, assemblies and meal-times. The squads were changed every half term or so. This meant that by the end of a

single year even the youngest boy or girl knew every pupil by name right up to the top of the school, and the same applied to older students. This was hugely beneficial in creating a tight-knit community, and it meant that a younger 'Keillie' in difficulties almost always knew a sympathetic older girl or boy who could help.

49. Another strength was the extremely high participation rate in sports and other activities. That a school of less than two hundred could field perhaps five rugby teams and up to four hockey teams each Saturday morning, spoke volumes not only for the staff but also for the boys and girls. It was a characteristic noted by others after Keil folded. A much larger independent school, Kelvinside Academy, to which a number of pupils moved after the closure, found itself in due course largely led by ex-Keil girls and boys despite their small numbers as a proportion of the whole.
50. There was also a pleasure taken in being somewhat different from other schools. Whether it was older boys still wearing shorts, sometimes throughout the winter, from choice rather than compulsion, (an eccentricity which got us a visit from a Guardian photographer one year), or the first XV going for their traditional end-of-season dip in the Clyde after the final home match of the season, these were traditions kept up by the pupils rather than the staff.
51. It needs pointing out too that some of Keil's earlier toughness had not been inculcated by the staff but by the boys' (and remember that it had been solely a boys' school until the late 1980s) own backgrounds and by the situation they found on their arrival in Dumbarton. Even now there is a down-to-earthness about the life led on the Scottish islands which prizes independence and resilience and tends to have very little time for officialdom. Then bring such boys to Dumbarton where they were regarded by the nearby 'Brucehillians' (the sometimes infamous Brucehill housing scheme was over the school's back wall), as fair game for virtually anything. In the circumstances, toughness was a survival strategy rather than a cruel imposition by uncaring teachers.
52. Officially, fagging certainly did not exist. However, as mentioned previously, teenagers need careful watching to ensure that they don't abuse rules. When running School House, I had to maintain a sharp lookout to ensure that the Head of House, who allocated the pre-breakfast tasks to be done around the house, did not

end up getting her own room tidied by the younger ones. That can be tricky with girls, for sometimes younger residents would offer to make her an early morning cup of tea off their own bat. All well and good up to a point, but not to be taken for granted or institutionalised into a habit.

Discipline and punishment

53. As has been mentioned, children were punished largely by being given 'NH' on a Saturday afternoon, or 'Copies'. These could be given by staff but senior pupils could also give 'House NH' meaning jobs around the boarding house. In earlier days I strongly suspect that inadequate supervision by staff had permitted this system to be abused by the senior boys, but CGC [REDACTED] and Tom Smith had seriously tightened things up by the time that I arrived.
54. I didn't retain any paperwork after Keil closed, so I can't quote documents verbatim after twenty years. However, I clearly recall the types of punishment, and the conditions under which they were to be imposed and undertaken, being set out for everyone to see, in some document in common use such as a school diary or the like. I have looked to see if I could find one, but without success.
55. As mentioned, the punishments were set out for all to see. As far as the keeping of records was concerned, when I took on the supervision of NH during the school's final year, certainly there was a log kept of punishments. Similarly, there was a log kept in my boarding house of any House NH imposed by Chief or Deputies, (the Keil equivalent of prefects, by analogy with clan chiefs).
56. The senior pupils did have more responsibility than in many schools, in the positive sense of ensuring that the school ran smoothly through rollcalls, mealtimes, assemblies and the like, and in supporting younger boys and girls, rather than merely in the more negative sense of imposing discipline. The old Scottish exam system certainly helped here, by giving S6 students the time to manage school duties because their Highers were already out of the way. I recall one Keil Senior Chief, or Head of School, after a meeting with senior students from other schools, being amazed that the Head of School position in those other establishments seemed to be a sinecure rather than a genuinely important management role. I also had a casual conversation with an ex-Keil pupil around five

years ago in which he emphasised that he had learnt more about leadership at Keil than he had during all his later training in his chosen career.

57. I think I have made clear, however, my belief that such a system requires very sharp eyes on the part of the teaching and pastoral care staff if it is to work well and if abuse is to be prevented. During the 1990s that supervision was there, and that not only minimised bullying but over time it vastly raised the expectations of younger pupils that they would be treated fairly, would be listened to, and would be seen as valued individuals. Whether that alertness had always been there during earlier years I rather doubt.

Day to day running of the school

58. As a new member of the resident staff with a commitment to boarding and what it could do to help sometimes troubled adolescents, learned in earlier years at larger schools, I threw myself whole-heartedly from day one into helping this small and rather vulnerable establishment. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in boarding and my role in the broader education and upbringing of boys and later girls. At its best boarding can provide a structure, a safe environment, an escape sometimes from family stresses, firmness without the emotional baggage that the parent-child relationship inevitably carries, and opportunities to throw oneself whole-heartedly into sports or other activities just at the point when hormones threaten to derail youthful equilibrium. The invitations that in recent years I have received to attend weddings, and even the occasional Father's Day cards received from my 'surrogate daughters', suggest that my efforts were appreciated.
59. In practice that level of commitment meant a full teaching timetable, lunchtime and afternoon activities on most days of the week, boarding duties originally two evenings a week and later four or five evenings, overnight duties latterly virtually every night, a wary eye open all the time not only in school but also when shopping down in Dumbarton, weekend trips out with a minibus, a listening ear when approached about a problem or rung by a parent, and even once a geography lesson at 4am when Comet Hale-Bopp approached and some of my girls wanted to get up and see it! The commitment could at times be up to 100 hours per week. Looking at it a different way, residential caring for kids as a surrogate parent involved never turning a blind eye to something of concern, never pretending that

something was not my job, never 'shutting the door' on my girls in the house.

60. Was I confident that any abuse would have come to light? At the time I, like many others of that era, believed that if you listened to your pupils then any problems would in due course appear. I did listen – when running activities, at bedtimes in the boarding houses, and when driving minibuses, to name but three common situations – and often problems did get flagged up. However, I now appreciate that this was not sufficient, for a clever abuser will target the very girl or boy who would be least likely to tell anyone of his/her problems. Thus the peer group probably never knew, and were not able to tell me. Many adults find this a puzzle; surely a child would want to tell someone of any abuse, but I can understand the embarrassment felt by adolescents for I met one or two strange people during my early teens and would have 'died' rather than tell anyone. Fortunately my own bad experiences were very minor.
61. Now, two decades on from my time at Keil, I have a great deal more experience. This has resulted not merely from many sessions of 21st century safeguarding training, but also from time as a safeguarding officer for a charitable organisation and years as a Samaritans volunteer during which I have listened to many who were abused in childhood.
62. It is my belief that whilst it is possible to create an open, supportive and caring environment, with the result that abuse will be discouraged and perhaps 99% of anything that does occur will come to light, no-one can be sure that everything will be discovered in any institution.

Concerns about the school

63. I am not aware that the school was the subject of concern because of the mistreatment of children. I don't know of any instances when it was applicable for the parents to be made aware of such concerns, though if that had been the case it would have been the responsibility of House-masters/mistresses and/or the Head or Depute, depending upon the circumstances.

Reporting of complaints/concerns

64. I don't recall a formal process, for pupils reporting complaints in any of the schools I

have taught in, either state or independent, unless the situation was extremely serious. I think the distinction depended upon the degree of seriousness, and the likelihood that outsiders would need to be involved or that there would be a need for events to be recorded for later examination. Even then the formal process would in earlier days have been limited to informing senior management, involving outside agencies and parents, and recording what had gone on. In another school, for example, I had to investigate allegations of rape, once supposedly by a student and another by an outsider. As nothing of that nature or level occurred within my jurisdiction at Keil I do not recall the procedure.

65. At the mundane level complaints are at the centre of every teacher's life: "Sir. Miss so-and-so has given us..." or "Mr. Coombs, can you get me off NH? I only..." Writing all those down would see school life grind to a complete halt. At the next level up were those that came via parents, not necessarily much more serious but nevertheless needing to be dealt with more formally. Email made this much simpler since there is a 'paper' trail of query and response without anything more having to be done.
66. More serious complaints were pretty rare. I do recall one annoyed set of parents coming in and shouting at me sometime around 1996, and then very obliquely apologising a few weeks later, but I don't think it merited more than a note in the diary to help me remember date, time, names and topic.

Trusted adult/confidante

67. Whilst I can think of a number of very sympathetic teachers who were clearly trusted by individual boys and girls, the member of staff to whom this applies above all would have been 'Matron', the school nurse Mrs. Evelyn McLean, now sadly no longer with us.
68. She was a quiet very motherly middle-aged nurse who lived on site, in a flat within the boundaries of School House. This meant that she was available for the boarding girls at any time, but she was also greatly beloved by the boarding boys and indeed all the day pupils too. I think she arrived at the same time that I did, in 1991, and she remained at Keil until the school's closure in 2000. Certainly I can think of occasions when she raised minor day-to-day welfare concerns with the school

management and I have no reason to doubt that she would have done the same with anything more major.

69. I do not know of any abuse concerns raised by Evelyn. As I have said, she would raise other welfare concerns regularly, often resulting from things she had heard from individual pupils, but Evelyn was very discrete and I would generally not hear of them unless I needed to.

Abuse

70. I don't recall the school having a formal definition of abuse. Certainly child protection was becoming more of a topic as the 1990s progressed and we had a child protection policy which was periodically reviewed and updated as 'best practice' developed, but I can remember very little of the details.
71. The topic was raised in staff meetings, and no doubt copied to staff pigeonholes and probably displayed on staff-room notice board. I really can't remember when it was introduced and when it changed.

Child protection arrangements

72. Certainly guidance on care and protection gained a higher profile as the 1990s decade progressed. New advice was mentioned in staff meetings after Headmaster or Depute had been away to conferences.
73. I recall a small laminated card issued to staff on how to deal with reports of abuse, with the basic principles to be followed and the contact details of those needing to know. For many years I kept this and displayed it in later establishments as an example of good practice. That will have been a summary of the relevant information from the full policy. It was introduced during my time at Keil, rather than having been there earlier. I seem to recall its introduction after one or more members of staff or management had attended a training course of some kind. Right from the start there were rules not to be broken, such as not investigating allegations one's-self and not questioning a boy or girl, for fear of prejudicing later enquiries. These obviously remain in guidelines elsewhere to this day.
74. I can't remember the details of child protection arrangements in place, for the

reason mentioned elsewhere, i.e. that all these policies in several schools merge together in one's mind after a decade or two.

External monitoring

75. I seem to particularly recall two visits by educational inspectors whilst I was at Keil, but there may have been more. They certainly spoke with the children; they always asked to meet with small groups, of varying ages. Staff weren't present during these meetings. That was intentional and rightly so.
76. The inspectors spoke to me. In my later role as a House-master looking after girls I particularly expected to be questioned. Slightly to my surprise my situation was seen in the earlier years as definitely a positive, partly because the 1989 Children Act actively supported the care of children being by both men and women. However, in more recent years I inevitably found that the inspectors needed a little more persuading that it was a good thing. In general though, after investigation they were happy to run with what the girls and their parents were comfortable with. They gave feedback, though rightly only in broad terms and certainly not revealing what individual boys or girls had said.

Record-keeping

77. In relation to record-keeping, my earlier comments about the pre-photocopier age apply. The big walk-in safe will have held a large number of hand-written ledgers back in those days. As the 1990s progressed so more and more data will have been recorded and kept. Academically I obviously kept my own mark books, and indeed still have most of those. We also reviewed each child's progress at a monthly meeting. Within the boarding house I kept a diary of record, and there were signing-in and out books, files of correspondence from parents, (which started to move to email during that decade), but I can't recall much more than those.
78. I didn't have access to the school's earlier records until the very end, and at that time there wasn't the time or the need to review what had gone before. Whilst some materials were saved, I do not know what has happened to them since 2000.

Investigations into abuse – personal involvement

79. I was never involved in any investigation regarding abuse or the ill-treatment of children at the school or any inappropriate behaviour by staff or others towards children.

Reports of abuse and civil claims

80. I was never involved in the handling of reports regarding civil claims made against the school by former pupils concerning historical abuse.

Police investigations/criminal proceedings

81. I learned of a police investigation into one particular colleague, Mr. Bill Bain, about five years ago. I had been made aware that the police were looking into allegations about an ex-colleague at Keil, and eventually in the autumn of 2015 I was visited by appointment at my home in Cumbria by two officers seeking to build up their picture of life at Keil. I seem to recall that they took a statement from me and that after it was typed up I signed it, but I cannot find a copy and may not have one. This was part of Police Scotland's Operation Amador and the contact was DC Gillian Fulton. I was not asked to give evidence.

Convicted abusers

82. I knew William Bain, who was convicted four years ago or so. Whilst he arrived perhaps three years before I did, he remained there until the school's closure, as did I. We often sat opposite each other in the staff dining room and, for a number of years, were members of a small group of boarding staff who went out for a drink at a local pub on a Friday evening in term time. To be honest I would have been happy to call Bill a friend, except that on his part there was no opening up. After nine years I still knew nothing more about his background and family than I had done in 1991.
83. I had no suspicions about misbehaviour at school but, as I told the police, I had wondered whether he had ever been a spy! He had been at Cambridge University and seemed to have Russian climbing friends. His reticence would have made him a good secret agent. After Keil closed I think I sent one message via email, but there was no response so I effectively wrote our acquaintanceship off.
84. Within the school I accompanied him on a couple of Sunday hill-walks for boarders

during my first term, in order to get the feel of the local Arrochar hills, but after that our extra-curricular activities rarely coincided, for in a small school there is rarely the spare time to indulge in accompanying someone else's group unless it was necessary for safety reasons. In any case my time in boarding was latterly almost wholly taken up by my girls, and I very rarely ventured into either of the senior boys' houses.

85. I did not have any concerns or was made aware of concerns by others. I had thought that I kept my ear to the ground for school gossip, though I was aware that I was not enough of a gossip myself to have been entrusted with anything really juicy, but the news of Bill Bain's conviction has belatedly shown me that listening to a class or year group is not enough, because such an abuser will have picked precisely the boy or girl who would not confide in his or her peers.

86. I have no knowledge of how William Bain was recruited as he had already been at the school for some time when I arrived. I do not know of his child care qualifications, if any or if he had any child care training before his employment at Keil. As far as I am aware he was not the subject of any supervision and/or monitoring or any previous allegations of abuse. Since the closure of Keil I had become aware that other teachers who had taught there had been implicated in inappropriate behaviour elsewhere: KPC [REDACTED] was mentioned earlier; a rather different situation was that of OZC [REDACTED] who had been hugely respected as an [REDACTED] teacher by the pupils at Keil, but who sadly [REDACTED] after an allegation was later made at a different school. The allegation was then withdrawn. Neither of them came up on the radar until long after they had left Keil, and as you say there have been no suggestions of misbehaviour by either of them at the school, which I am tempted to see as a partial vindication of our structures.

87. On the other hand I mentioned QTZ [REDACTED] during the interview with DC Gillian Fulton, referred to earlier. Miss QTZ [REDACTED] had taken me aside soon after she arrived at Keil in 1993 to be house-mistress of the girls and to teach [REDACTED]. She wanted to raise questions about the dangers of a single man running extra-curricular activities with girls. I was absolutely mortified, and thought she was suggesting that I had been acting inappropriately. However, it rapidly became clear that she wanted the girls

solely for herself and was trying to frighten other teachers away. I and other bachelors were seen as easy targets to warn off. During the subsequent couple of years I did hear of behaviour that made me think she was leaning on the girls emotionally, when they should have been able metaphorically to lean on her, but until she left I never heard of anything physical or otherwise that I could pin down as definitely inappropriate in any way. However, in email conversations twenty years later after Mr. Bain was first accused, an ex-pupil to whom I had taught geography Higher recalled that Miss QTZ had once made a sexual pass at her. In fact [REDACTED] had been a confident senior boarder and one well able to look after herself. She told me that she had brushed off the approach and thought no more of it. However, my comment in paragraph 94 about teenagers not seeing the wider implications and needing encouragement to speak out for the sake of others was inspired partly by that event. I suspect that [REDACTED] may not have been the only one, but again in hindsight Miss QTZ [REDACTED] first veiled threat to me had made me excessively wary of having anything to do with her. It was indeed ironic that her unprofessional behaviour in a broader sense actually resulted in me taking over her role as principal carer of the boarding girls some time later.

88. Incidentally, sometime after Keil closed we heard informally that Miss QTZ [REDACTED] had died, back in Dublin. I have no evidence for that but the police to whom I talked may have found something.

Helping the Inquiry

89. Lessons that can be learned to protect children in a boarding school is a topic that I have thought a good deal about over the years, particularly from my special viewpoint as a man who had fifteen years caring for boarding girls. In fact I have made attempts at writing a book on the broader subject of the care of boarders. However, whilst it is easy to think of hints for teachers wishing to learn how to do the job well, it is much harder to come up with ways of preventing abuse by someone less well motivated. However, for what they are worth, I do have a few thoughts I would like to share with the Inquiry.

Rules and relationships

90. Steps to prevent or to discover abuse in schools can be either 'negative' or

'positive'. The negative ones tend to focus on making rules to prevent situations occurring. I won't elaborate here on precisely what rules are needed, except to make the point that lines drawn by outsiders or even day teaching staff tend to be utterly incompatible with the complexities of residential life. For example those colleagues without experience of boarding house life often used to say "You can't be too cautious". It wasn't true; one could indeed be too careful. Just as trust begets trust, mistrust will breed further mistrust. For example, by seeming to be worried about minor situations I would have destroyed whatever relationship had been so carefully built up. The lesson was: by all means be careful, just don't make it obvious. For example, if I met a girl wrapped only in a towel along an upstairs corridor, who called out, "Mr. Coombs, can you help with my maths prep?" I could have reacted sharply, perhaps turning away abruptly and ticking her off for being improperly dressed. However, she would very likely have interpreted that to mean not that I worried about her but that I mistrusted myself in the company of young girls. It would thus have put doubts into the minds of the whole house. Far better to have taken it calmly, perhaps jokingly covering my eyes whilst smiling to show that it didn't concern me, and then apologising that I had an urgent phone call to make but that I would be happy to see her in the office a few minutes later, "And besides, that'll give you time to dress." On the other hand positive steps to prevent abuse include encouraging children to talk to adults and to raise anything that they are uncomfortable about. They also must include encouraging those adults to listen, and then to follow the appropriate procedures.

91. Unfortunately, for those in management it is far easier to make 'negative' rules than to encourage 'positive' communication. The former are instant decisions that can be shown off to school governors or local authorities, whilst the latter are long term measures that require time, patience and the very relationships that the rules have done so much to discourage. However, I am not the only teacher to believe that reliance solely on rules will never guarantee that abuse does not occur. After all, whilst the vast majority – including some of the less dangerous potential abusers – may obey the rules, those whose activities are most to be feared are precisely those who will ignore or sidestep any regulations.
92. As an ex-colleague framed it recently, as well as rules there must be relationships which empower children to speak out. Rules often risk throwing babies out

with the bathwater. The babies in this case are the appropriate links with adults that children need in order to grow and to learn trust. The latter is a two way process. If it seems that adults generally are not trusted by others, and indeed that adults do not trust children, then there will be no growth of trust in a young person.

A climate of confidence

93. One of the biggest steps in the prevention of abuse has come about anyway, within our whole culture. Children these days grow up, in most cases, knowing implicitly that their bodies are their own and that any interference by another is inherently wrong. That comes across from the media, from their peers, and from PSHE lessons. That is a huge change from the atmosphere of the mid-20th-century, when such topics were not only the subject of normal teenage embarrassment but were also felt to be unmentionable.
94. However, what needs adding to that is an understanding that any inappropriate action by an adult or other young person needs to be stopped not just for the sake of the current sufferer but also so that others will be safe in the future. Children rarely see the broader implications. It would clearly be wrong to make them feel responsible for the actions of adults, but they can be reminded that they have the power to help others.

Mentors

95. I mentioned earlier that it is easy to think of helpful hints for new boarding teachers who want to do their best. One of those suggestions was to match each boarding teacher with a mentor or 'friend' in the same line of work but not their line manager. As a man caring for girls mine was usually a school nurse. So far so good, but this suggestion might also make a difference to the incidence of abuse. It is commonly assumed that abusers are focussed, manipulative, and utterly incorrigible. Some certainly seem to be, but the levels and expressions of acceptable human emotion and sexuality are infinitely varied. I think it highly unlikely that the unacceptable equivalents are any less so. Thus there may well be opportunistic abusers, or those merely unable to resist temptation. Whilst not under-estimating the danger from the very worst, let us not ignore opportunities to detect, or deflect, those less single-minded. A mentor should not be there merely to give advice when asked, but also to

watch and listen, mature enough to be able to distinguish genuine mistakes from intentional manipulation, and strong enough to raise issues in an appropriate manner when merited.

Confirmation bias

96. Three things may be needed for child abuse to take place: an abuser, a child who may or may not tell of their experiences, and adults who do not react appropriately. This last thing has clearly been a major problem in the past, often because the consequences of believing the child seemed to be so catastrophic – for the institution, for the listener personally and maybe for a colleague or friend – that it was simpler to bow to one's own wishful thinking and become convinced that nothing had happened. Recent high profile cases have probably tipped the balance toward a realisation that a problem ignored may become a problem tripled, but I still believe that many many otherwise responsible adults inherently shy away from bad news. Nowadays that may result in them passing the buck hurriedly on to senior management or to social services even when such a precipitate course of action can have devastating effects on the child's family. I wish I knew the answer to this dilemma.

Further research

97. I met several teachers during my career who turned out to be very dubious or even actively misbehaving, though no others at Keil or indeed within Scotland. Each, without exception, was very private or even secretive. Obviously this is only anecdotal, but it would be interesting to find out if others feel the same, and if there is any more profound pattern to be discovered. No doubt there are psychologists busy trying to correlate the danger areas; for example, at a very simplistic level, imagine a graph plotting physical attraction/revulsion against emotional respecting/despising which might flag up the dangerous combinations most likely to lead to sexual or emotional abuse or to infatuation. Whether that understanding could ever be precise enough to be useful in advance I am not qualified to say.
98. 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.....

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Dated.....

19 November 2020