

## **Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry**

Witness Statement of

**David COWLING**

Support person present: Yes – [REDACTED]

1. My name is David Gordon Cowling. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1939. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### **Background**

2. I am originally from Ipswich. My primary schooling was in a mining village in County Durham, where my father was working at the time. My secondary schooling was at a Quaker boarding school, Sidcot in Somerset. My father was the head of an approved school before becoming an ordinary schoolteacher when he wasn't so well. My mother was also a teacher. When I left school, I went to Birmingham University to study maths, but I failed my degree. I then worked in a remand home in Surrey from 1962 until 1964 or 1965. I qualified as a residential social worker following a year-long Home Office course at Selly Oak College in Birmingham in 1965. I obtained a diploma when I completed the course.
3. When I left college, I went to work at Kingswood School in Bristol. It was one of four big approved schools in England. It had three schools on one campus, a training school, a classifying school and a new secure unit. I worked in the secure unit from September 1965. It was supposed to be run on progressive lines, which were if you couldn't keep a boy from running away, you couldn't treat him so you had to lock him up. It was seen by the boys as a punishment, but it wasn't intended as a punishment. It was meant to be that you could at least get hold of them and keep them and do some sort of therapeutic work on them.

4. I wasn't at Kingswood for very long, but I got married while I was there. I got on very well with the boss at the secure unit. However, he was asked to leave because of absconsions. There was going to be a change of regime and I could tell that I wasn't going to like it. My next-door neighbour worked in the training school part of the campus, which they called a therapeutic community. I had a pint with him in a local pub one night. He was a Scotsman and he asked me if I'd heard about Loaningdale in Biggar. He told me that it was a new experimental school and a therapeutic community. He was thinking of applying to work at Loaningdale and told me that they were looking for four housemasters, one of whom would be a third in charge. The school had already been open for a year with twenty boys. It was expanding to have two houses with twenty boys in each. It was being run on therapeutic lines and wasn't punitive. I decided to apply for a job there too. We both applied and we both got jobs at Loaningdale. He got the job of third in charge and I was a residential social worker.

#### **Loaningdale School, Biggar**

5. I started at Loaningdale in February 1967. I had an absolutely great time there. I was at the school for four years. It had its problems, following the conviction of a pupil for the murder of a local girl in August 1967, but it survived. The friend who had moved to Biggar with me left Loaningdale and I was made third in charge. Things were going well, except for my marriage. Loaningdale was seen as the greatest thing and rightly so. I loved it there. They wanted to expand that kind of school out to other places.

#### *Application to work at Balnacraig*

6. Max Paterson was the head of a group of four Home Office psychologists who worked in Scottish approved schools at that time. He was the visiting psychologist at Loaningdale and a great friend of the headmaster, John Wilson. I had built a little boat and I was talking to him about my boat. He asked if I had ever thought of going somewhere that I could sail my boat more often. I asked him what he meant and he said there might be a job for me in Perth. He told me that there was a girls' school there and they were looking for a head. He asked me if I wanted to go and have a look at it. I did go up and have a look at Balnacraig, but I didn't apply for the job at that time.

I met Miss GXJ [REDACTED] as SNR [REDACTED] school. I thought about it and realised that I SNR [REDACTED].

7. They came back to me and asked me if I wanted to apply for the job. I decided that I would. I don't think there were other applicants. I think that I was head-hunted and I didn't see anybody else applying. I was interviewed by the committee, which was a strange experience. They didn't seem particularly knowledgeable about schools which dealt with girls of that age. I didn't know it at the time, but at one time the members of the board were partly a political appointment. The chairman of the board of governors was ex officio from the council. He was actually the provost. Before I went there, the Home Office had decided that they didn't want the chairman to change every year. The person who was provost at the time just stayed on as chairman of the board.
8. I got the job, but there was no house for me to live in with my family. [REDACTED] Miss GXJ [REDACTED] lived in [REDACTED]. She hardly had any staff. She had a partner who stayed with her at weekends. Her partner was a psychologist somewhere. The place was run on very different lines than I wanted to run it. The psychologists obviously wanted it to be run differently as well. The psychologist at Balnacraig was a man called Sandy Paterson. He met me before I started as head and we chatted about it.

### **Balnacraig School, Perth**

9. I began as head of Balnacraig in 1971 and remained in my post for two years. It was a List D school for girls and was in a row of big old houses on a hill above Perth. I think the house itself had belonged to Coats cotton spinners. It had its own grounds, but they weren't terribly big. It was a big old house and wasn't entirely suitable for a school. It was okay. In a way, it was a good thing that there were bedrooms of different sizes. Initially, they gave me a house in the town whilst they built a house in the grounds.

### *Employment with the school*

10. Before being offered the job, I had to provide references from Loaningdale. I think Balnacraig probably did take up my references, but I don't know for sure. The board of governors would have known the head at Loaningdale so I presume that there was

some contact. I was employed as the headmaster of Balnacraig. I had responsibilities for just about everything at the school. I was a man going into a girls' school. Around about that time, male heads were appointed to about three or four girls' schools. I don't know the reason for that. It may have been because they were trying to replicate Loaningdale elsewhere in Scotland. At the age of 32, I was just about the youngest head in Scotland. I didn't have a probationary period.

#### *Oversight of my role*

11. I was really responsible to the board of governors. I had to provide monthly reports to them and attend their monthly meeting. There was a correspondent to the Home Office on the board of governors. He was the connection between the school and the Home Office and I suppose he was my line manager. I had quite a lot of liaison with him. He was a local solicitor and he was very supportive of me. He wanted to be involved in various things at the school and he was an active member of the board of governors. There was also a man called Gillespie from the Home Office. He came to the school occasionally. My conversations with him tended to be about budgets. I was always wanting something. The place was quiet and old-fashioned in terms of the curtains, the bedclothes and clothes for the girls so I would ask him for funding for those things.
12. As far as appraisal of me in my role was concerned, we did have a visiting psychologist. Firstly, it was Sandy Paterson. He left and went somewhere else. He was replaced by Janet Hassan. I had known her from before I went to Balnacraig. I think she came once a fortnight. She saw girls, sometimes repeatedly. She would discuss girls with me afterwards. She would discuss how the school was going and so on and so forth. She was good.

#### *Culture and regime at Balnacraig*

13. My first impressions of the school were that it was quite an antiquated regime, but that it was quite doable. I don't want to say too much about [REDACTED] because I might be wrong, but I did spend a day with Miss <sup>GXJ</sup>[REDACTED]. I therefore knew a bit about how the school was being run before I arrived. I felt that she tried to change the girls into something they weren't. She did something that was horrible to my way of thinking.

Sometimes, she tried to change their names. She would call them by a different first name than their own names. I thought that was weird.

14. They didn't seem to do any activities that girls would want to do, like having a record player and dancing. They would watch television every night between about 6:00 pm and 8:00 pm and that was it. They did it all together, with the headmistress sitting in the middle and her partner there at weekends. It was very regimented. The girls weren't allowed to walk around the place, never mind talk to each other. The relationship between staff and children was pretty strict and pretty remote. There wasn't much closeness between staff and children at all.
15. Before I became head, the children were regimented and disciplined. I felt that I could do something with it. I felt that there was a lot of scope for changing things. Things went pretty well. I changed lots of things slowly and changed the regime entirely. I got the girls wearing more fashionable clothes. I wanted to run the place as a more child-centred place where people could talk to each other.

#### *Policy*

16. I made changes when I was head of Balnacraig. I started a daily meeting of all the girls and staff at 4:00 pm, when they came home from school. Anybody could bring up anything. They could make complaints or bullying accusations. Staff could complain if a child hadn't done something. All sorts of things came up, including anything of concern that had gone on during the day. If there were complaints made at the meeting, they weren't recorded. They were spoken about and dealt with at the time.
17. I stopped the use of corporal punishment in the classroom. I don't think it had been used outside of the classroom before I arrived, but it was used in the classroom. The teacher had a tawse so I presume she used it before I arrived. I had some discussion at a staff meeting on one occasion. Somebody had been behaving particularly badly and a member of staff suggested the reintroduction of the tawse. I said that it wasn't up for discussion and we weren't doing it. The staff accepted that. I discussed most things with them, but I wasn't going to have any violence in the place at all.

### *Strategic planning*

18. I was responsible for strategic planning at the school. Abuse didn't feature in that. There wasn't a defined policy when it came to abuse at the school. There was no discussion about what would be considered as abusive or how that would be dealt with by the school. Although there was nothing formal or written down, everyone knew my views on violence towards children.

### *Structure and Recruitment of staff*

19. When I arrived at the school, there was already a man who worked as handyman, driver and gardener. He had a vegetable garden for the school and he was also a sort of joiner and handyman as well. He was there when I arrived at the school. The previous headmistress had employed other staff. I know that because I once met a housemother who had worked for her. I don't really know what happened to the previous staff before I arrived, but all the housemothers who worked with me were all newly appointed. I employed three housemothers after I took over.
20. I was involved in the recruitment of staff at Balnacraig. I was part of the interview panel. Although I had an input, the chairman of the board of governors had the final say. I think that references must have been taken up, but I wasn't involved in that. My first job was to appoint a deputy head. In my opinion, that had to be a woman. There hadn't been a position of deputy head at the school before I arrived. We employed a good person called Katherine Healy. She had a degree in something and she'd had some contact with List D schools previously. She was younger than me and in her late twenties. She was fine and she was good with the girls. She was artistic, which I'm not. That immediately meant she could do things with the girls. We had a Christmas party and she got all the girls painting scenes from the twelve days of Christmas. It took ages, but it was creative and brilliant.
21. I employed three house mothers who were essentially unqualified. Two of them were recruited through the local press and then interviewed by the board and me. The third had been a cleaner in the school and I recommended her to the board. I thought that she was as good with the girls as anybody else. She was a mother herself and the



girls would speak to her. We advertised for the other two house mothers. There was a younger one, who was single. She took oversleeping in the old head's bedroom. We got it redecorated for her. She became very good with the girls. She was young and accessible.

22. The housemothers were totally inexperienced and untrained. I had to work very hard and so did Katherine, but it worked. We made all sorts of changes. That was the best time at Balnacraig, but Katherine fell pregnant and left to have her baby in July 1972. The school advertised again for her job and I ended up with a male deputy, which I didn't like. I thought that was crazy. I should have said more against it, but I didn't. My fear was that I'd be left with nobody if I spoke up. I was doing everything myself anyway. It wasn't a good idea. The new deputy was nice enough, but he had no particular skills. His name was Iain Cameron,
23. Whilst I was there, I persuaded the governors to appoint a night staff. It had been okay when Miss GXJ there the whole time, but the young housemother didn't want to be there all the time. Somehow, the board managed to find the budget for it and we employed a night staff. That was really important. A big place like that needed someone to be around in case there was a problem at night.
24. There were volunteers working at Balnacraig. They were students who came to the school in the summer. Their role was to engage with the children and do activities with them. They were overseen by myself and the permanent staff, as well as whoever sent them to us. Somebody came to the school to speak to me about the students, but I can't remember who that person was. I can't remember which organisation that person came from. There was no vetting process when it came to the students.
25. My leadership style was as democratic as possible. I had weekly meetings with the staff. I tried to get everybody to work together. The staff very much looked upon me as the leader and authority. If you're head of a place, it's easier to have people listen to you just because of your title. People will automatically listen to you even if it's not necessarily the right thing to do. The staff tended to agree with me, but I definitely tried to get people working together. All of the staff were quite good with the girls.

### *Training of staff*

26. I didn't receive any training for my role. I did do a week's course in personality development, but it wasn't specifically for heads. There wasn't any training of staff going on when I was at the school. I would like to have done training of staff. There are all sorts of things that I would like to have done.

### *Supervision/staff appraisal*

27. All the staff at the school reported directly to me. There was no appraisal of staff in the two years that I was there. The students who came to the school were supervised by the permanent staff and their university or college tutors. I don't think we recorded anything about the students.

### *Children*

28. Children were placed in the school by Children's Hearings, which were only just beginning around that time. Before Children's Hearings, they would have been placed in the school by the courts. It wasn't really a proper school. It was part school and part children's home. All of the children stayed at Balnacraig, but the children that were suitable went out to the local high school. There were eighteen girls and approximately half went out to school.
29. I don't really know much about what schooling was like for those who remained within Balnacraig. I think it was pretty basic. There were some girls who really had special needs and I don't know whether they got much in the way of education. The teacher at Balnacraig had a very difficult job. She had eight or nine girls of all ages and all abilities. It remained that way. The aim was always going to be to get them out to school as soon as possible. It's far better for them. The teacher left shortly before I did so I had to recruit another one.
30. The age range of children at the school was quite varied. There was pressure on me to take girls of just about any age. At one point, I had girls from age eleven to sixteen.



As far as care staff were concerned, the ratio of staff to children was something like one to six.

31. The length of time children stayed at Balnacraig varied. Very often, I'd wait until the end of the school year if the child was going out for school. The school leaving age went up as I was leaving Balnacraig. Most girls were there for about a year, but it depended. There were at least two girls who were in care. If they didn't stay, where would they go? They might be better staying at Balnacraig. Their local authority social workers were also very much involved. We were linking up with girls' families to try and help them move on.

#### *Living arrangements*

32. There was a cook, except at weekends. Weekend cooking was a bit of a problem, but I did have a weekend cook for a while. I gave a former pupil a job doing the cooking at one point. I can't remember how we chose who sat at which table for meals. All the staff on duty ate meals with the children. Preferably everybody would be there at lunchtime. At breakfast and teatime, all the staff would sit at different tables and eat with the children. Once a week, I invited two members of the board of governors for lunch. They took it in turns and they would sit at the tables with the children.
33. The standard of the food wasn't bad. It did improve. When I got to the school, they had chicken for lunch on a Sunday. They had one chicken for the whole school. I changed that. If girls didn't like something, there probably wasn't much of a choice but they wouldn't be made to eat anything. We tried to get things that they did want. There were one or two things that all the children didn't like. Arbroath smokies was one of them and they had been one of Miss GXJ's favourites. I think it had become a tradition that the girls didn't like them. We made changes to the menu to reflect what children of that age would normally like. I didn't think there was anything to be gained by rigidly sticking to menus.
34. When it came to sleeping arrangements, I copied something that happened at Loaningdale. I gave the girls a choice. Every three months or so, girls were given a piece of paper. They wrote down who they wanted to share a bedroom with. The

concern would be that there would be one poor girl who nobody wanted to share with, but it actually did work. It sorted itself out remarkably well. I didn't end up with someone who had no mates at all. You couldn't please everybody all of the time, but it really worked quite well.

35. The size of the bedrooms varied. I can't remember whether the biggest was for five or six girls. I think it was five. There were a couple of rooms for three and four girls. The washing and bathing facilities were upstairs. I never visited them. I had no reason to be there and I can hardly remember going there. The girls didn't need supervision in the baths and they had privacy. There were bathrooms, not showers.
36. The girls had to do a quick clean of their bedrooms in the mornings. I think they might have cleaned the dining room after breakfast, but I can't remember. We did have a cleaner so they didn't do all of the cleaning, but they certainly had to keep their bedrooms clean and tidy. They were allowed to help in the kitchen if they wanted.
37. If the girls had any health problems, they would be dealt with by the housemothers initially. We also had a visiting doctor. I didn't see much of the doctor. I don't think we had a lot of health problems.
38. My family and I lived in the town for the first nine months or so. We then moved to a new house, built behind the school on the grounds. It was just walking distance from the school. I had two children by that time. There were two members of staff who stayed in the school overnight. The younger housemother lived there. The older housemother stayed overnight as well, but she went away at weekends and didn't live there. She had another house somewhere. I had access to the bedrooms, but I had no cause to go there at night-time because the night staff were there. I don't recall an occasion when I was required to be there at night. There was access for all the staff to the bedrooms. I'm not aware of the night staff bringing anybody else in overnight. I never went into the bathroom area.

#### *Leisure time/trips*

39. One thing I started was home leave. After girls had been at the school for about six weeks, they could go home every fortnight. They would go home from Friday night to Sunday night, which left four nights for leisure time. One night, we arranged for girls

to go to Bells Sports Centre. Those who wanted could go and it was fairly well attended. We had a minibus that could take twelve girls and it was often pretty full. Another night, they could go to the swimming baths. The teacher was actually PE trained. She also took a formal swimming lesson every Monday morning that was not part of the leisure activities. A group of volunteers came in from the community. They would do flower arranging and that kind of thing. The girls could also watch television in their leisure time. I started letting the girls buy records and have a record player, which was unheard of. They used the dining room for that and they would dance. I thought that dancing was excellent for girls who didn't want to do any other exercise. They liked dancing so much that I moved the television into a smaller room at one point so they could use the bigger room for dancing.

40. I started a trip to Cumberland while I was there. It was near Hadrian's Wall. There were two women who lived in a caravan and used their house for children's holidays. My deputy took half the children one week and I took half the other week, both with a housemother each. Informally, children were also taken out by staff. Children would come to my house. On Saturday afternoons, girls who had behaved themselves were allowed to go down to the town. Sometimes, housemothers would go with individual girls to buy clothes for them. I started that as well.

#### *Visits/family contact*

41. I encouraged family to come and visit girls at Balnacraig and tried to make them feel welcome. They could take their children out. There were no set days, but it was usually at weekends. They could come whenever they wanted, as long as they let us know. If there was any reason to do so, I would visit girls' homes as well. I can remember visiting several homes, but I can't remember why. It might have been to check suitability before home leave was arranged. One girl, who was a great girl from Glasgow, had a brother with leukaemia. I took her home and left her there for a bit. Her brother did die in the end. I can remember going to the house in the Gorbals area of Glasgow at one point. I tried to make as much contact with families as possible.
42. Once a week, I invited two members of the board of governors to eat lunch at the school. They would sit with the children and were able to talk to them. Social workers very rarely came to visit. I always told the girls that they could contact their social

workers if they wanted. I would let them use the phone to do so, but they hardly ever wanted to. They would certainly be able to speak to their social workers alone when they did visit.

*Review of placements/leaving the school*

43. Placements at the school were reviewed regularly. In my monthly report to the board of governors, there was a separate section about girls who had hearings coming up. I would provide a summary of what I was going to say at the hearing and any recommendations that I planned to make. I would also provide some review of girls' progress, regardless of whether they had a hearing coming up.
44. The process for leaving the school would involve a discussion with the girl first. I would then ask to call a hearing. I would already have been in contact with the social worker. I would prepare a review for the hearing and take the girl to the hearing. Each girl had an annual date, but that wasn't very often. I could organise a hearing if I felt a girl was ready to leave the school. That happened quite often, but always with the girl knowing about it. If I was taking a girl to a hearing, it meant that she was going home. The hearing wasn't going to say no if I recommended that she leave.
45. There was no formal preparation for girls entering adult life at the school. One of the housemothers, Mrs McLeod, did quite a lot of sewing with them. They could also help in the kitchen if they wanted. After leaving the school, nobody was going to live on their own. There were children who were in care, but I don't remember anybody going to live on their own. I can remember taking one boy from Loaningdale to a flat in Glasgow with his suitcase. It was dreadful, but I didn't have a case like that at Balnacraig.
46. There was some follow up after girls left, but it usually came from the girls. One girl phoned me up from Glasgow. She said that she wasn't getting on very well at home and asked if she could come back. She said that she couldn't get a job. I told her to come for the weekend, but we were full. She slept in my house with my family for the weekend. There was a little office in the house and she slept there. It had a spare bed in it for visitors. She asked if I could get her a job in Perth. I can remember taking her

somewhere in the minibus, but I can't remember where I was taking her. She went all quiet and said that she didn't want to do it. She said she thought she should go home again, so we turned round. I can only remember those things. Later on, I gave that girl a job in the kitchen at weekends. She came every week but every fortnight she got a free lift because the minibus was taking girls to Glasgow on home leave.

### *Discipline and punishment*

47. I was responsible for discipline and punishment at the school, but punishment didn't come into it very much. There was no formal policy on discipline or code of conduct. There was absolutely no physical or corporal punishment at Balnacraig when I was head. The big thing, which was never used, was withdrawal of home visits at the weekend. That was the most prized thing. I never had to withdraw that from somebody, unless they'd been running away or doing something really unsettled and it was too risky to send them home. It wasn't withdrawn if there was unruly behaviour but could have been withdrawn if someone had run away. If that did happen, it would have been recorded in my monthly report.
48. If a child was cheeky to a member of staff, she'd be sent to her room or something like that. We also had the afternoon meeting, at which behaviour could be discussed. Silly things like smoking would result in me confiscating the fags and disregarding it. I didn't take any further action and I didn't record it anywhere. If they were going out to school every day and they had money, they could get a fag if they wanted one. They could buy them one at a time.
49. I can't remember girls being restrained by staff when I was at Balnacraig. They certainly weren't restrained by me. It wasn't a thing that was done so there wasn't a written policy about it. There may have been some points when staff had to break up fights. I don't know whether you'd call that restraint. I don't recall physically splitting people up and I can't recall ever seeing that happen. If I came in and girls were fighting, they split up of their own accord. That was the effect that being head had on people. The action I then took would depend on what the fight was about. I might put the girls in separate rooms for a bit. It would certainly be discussed at the afternoon meeting. Normally, both girls would be equally to blame.



50. I'm not going to say that there wasn't any bullying at Balnacraig. How can I? Hopefully the meetings were some kind of outlet for people to say that they had been bullied. It didn't always work, but I can recall that happening. You did have to watch for bullying. We did take action if we discovered bullying. We might threaten to stop home leave. The fact that it was brought up at a meeting meant people knew we'd be keeping an eye on it and that bullying wouldn't be allowed. I would speak to the bully about it and make sure that they weren't in a position to do it again. We might increase supervision or even change the bedrooms around. If it was serious enough, it would be recorded for the monthly meeting.
51. I can only remember girls being restrained on one occasion and that was by the police. Four girls had absconded together. They were picked up and brought back in a police van. They wouldn't get out of the van. The police used some restraint and manhandling to force them out of the van. I didn't join in with that, but the police did use some force. When they got into Balnacraig, I sat the girls down with all the staff present. I got them to calm down. I can't remember what happened after that and whether they were sent to their bedrooms.

#### *Concerns about the school*

52. To my knowledge, the school was never the subject of concern, within the institution itself or to any external body or agency, or any other person, because of the way in which children were treated.

#### *Reporting of complaints/concerns*

53. If a child, or someone working on their behalf, wanted to make a complaint, it would come through the staff or they could speak to me. There wasn't a written process. They had access to their home social workers. They knew that they could phone their social worker if ever they needed to.
54. The local minister, Russell Brown, supported me a lot. He was on the board of governors and he was active in the school. I started inviting him to attend the daily meeting once a week. That was a good thing. It was somebody else that the children

could have contact with. He fitted in very well and the girls could have spoken to him if they had any concerns. They just saw the minister in the meeting, but when I was eventually sacked a group of girls did go to his house with a petition on my behalf. They knew where he lived, but I don't think they used that prior to the petition. I don't remember girls ever raising concerns with me or anybody else when I was at the school.

55. I can't recall any complaints being received. If they had been, it would have been my duty to record them and report them. I didn't receive any complaints of abuse when I was at the school.

*Child protection arrangements*

56. Staff were not given guidance or instruction on how children in their care in the institution should be treated, cared for and protected against abuse, ill-treatment or inappropriate behaviour towards them. No guidance or instruction was given to staff on how to handle reports of abuse. There were no child protection arrangements in place to reduce the likelihood of abuse, ill-treatment, or inappropriate conduct by staff, or other adults, towards children at Balnacraig.

*External monitoring*

57. There were no inspections of Balnacraig when I was head. The only external monitoring was visits from the Home Office chap, but that was for budgetary reasons. The psychologist would tell me about things that had happened to a girl outside the school. She had been sexually assaulted by her grandfather. That was the psychologist monitoring things in a way, by speaking to children. That's the only external monitoring I can think of.

*Record-keeping*

58. Files were kept on each girl and there was also my monthly report to the board of governors. Absconsions would have been recorded in a girl's file, together with reports I received from their own social workers and copies of the reports I made to Children's

Hearings. I think the records probably didn't contain enough information about each child. It was really a question of time. Looking back, there were all sorts of things that could have been better.

59. I presume that my monthly reports will still be around somewhere. The home was operated by Perth Homes Trust, which I think has now disbanded. Donald McDonald was a solicitor at Macnab's on Blackfriars Street. I think he kept the records for Balnacraig. There should be records on all the girls, my monthly reports to the board and the minutes from the monthly meetings.

### **Abuse at Balnacraig**

60. The school did not have a definition of "abuse" that it applied in relation to the treatment of children. I didn't see any behaviour that I considered to be abuse taking place at the school. No child ever reported abuse to me. Looking back, I think that abuse would have come to light at or around the time it was occurring. I think so, but I can't say that for sure. If something had happened, I would remember that. If abuse did go undetected then I don't know about it because I didn't detect it. I don't think it could have done.

### **Investigations into abuse – personal involvement**

61. I was never involved in any investigation on behalf of Balnacraig into allegations of abuse or ill-treatment of children or inappropriate behaviour by staff or others towards children.

### **Reports of abuse and civil claims**

62. I was never involved in the handling of reports to, or civil claims made against, the institution by former residents, concerning historical abuse.

### **Police investigations/criminal proceedings**

63. I did not become aware of police investigations into alleged abuse at Balnacraig. I have never given a statement to the police concerning the alleged abuse of a child at the school.

### **Convicted abusers**

64. Other than myself, I am not aware of any person who worked at Balnacraig being convicted of the abuse of a child or children at the institution

### **Specific allegations of abuse made against me for which there has been no criminal investigation and / or conviction**

BCY [REDACTED]

65. I have been provided with the statement of an applicant to the Inquiry, BCY [REDACTED] BCY [REDACTED]. In speaking about her time at Balnacraig, she stated:  
*"It was run by a man called Mr Cowling. He was really big with black hair. He was a horrible man. He assaulted me twice. He kicked me down the stairs, ripped my hair out and punched me. I can't remember the reason why."*
66. I had to try to remember who BCY [REDACTED] was. I only have one recollection of her. There was an incident when I think a fight was split up by housemothers. I can remember sitting down on a bed upstairs and she was at the other end of the bed. She was sobbing her heart out. I wouldn't have been upstairs unless I'd been called by a housemother. I think there had been some kind of stramash or fight involving BCY [REDACTED], but I didn't see that. She was just sobbing by the time I saw her. I just spoke to her for a bit. I can remember it quite clearly because it was something unexpected. BCY [REDACTED] hadn't been there for very long and I think I just sat and talked to her. That is the only incident I can remember involving her.

67. I have never, ever pushed anybody down the stairs. I have never, ever punched anybody in the stomach. I have never, ever pulled anybody's hair. I didn't do that to BCY [REDACTED] or anybody else. I can't remember an incident at all where I had to break up a fight with her. I knew she was difficult, but I can't remember being involved in even touching her in any way at all. I'm pretty certain I would remember if there had been anything. It's something I never did anyway.
68. I don't know how long BCY [REDACTED] had been at the school when there was the incident with her in tears. She was an extraordinary child. She was excessively polite when she first came in. She arrived at the same time as another girl, who was a bit of a toughie. Everyone thought BCY [REDACTED] was a lovely girl and the other girl was rough, but after a while it was completely the other way round. I can remember her being very difficult indeed.
69. BCY [REDACTED] went to Balgay in Dundee after Balnacraig. I cannot remember taking her to Balgay. I've been to Balgay once in my life. The reason I can remember it is that I went in and there was a toilet roll on the floor of the main hall. That's the only reason I remember being there and I can't remember why I was there. I presume I must have been there because I was taking BCY [REDACTED], but I just don't remember.
70. The passage of time has absolutely not affected my recollection of what BCY [REDACTED] has alleged. I never used violence against anybody. If I'd used it against her or if there was one single incident anywhere, I would certainly remember it. I can't explain why these things have been said. I don't think it could have been anybody else. I don't see anybody at Balnacraig pushing someone down the stairs. It's not a thing that would happen in that school. It didn't happen. If a child had been treated in that way, I would absolutely accept that it was abuse. It's something I would not tolerate at all.

### **Convictions**

71. In November 2015, I was convicted of sexual assault against two girls at the Balnacraig when I was the Head. I don't know the dates of the offences, but I presume they were in 1973. I totally deny the offence involving [REDACTED]. I totally deny having a



sexual relationship with [REDACTED] before she left Balnacraig. I was convicted at Perth Sheriff Court and sentenced to two years imprisonment.

72. I didn't commit the offences so I cannot give an explanation as to how I was able to do so undetected. Others at the school were suspicious that I had too close a relationship with [REDACTED]. That ultimately led to me being sacked.

### **Leaving the school**


73. I left the school because I was sacked. I was sacked because I had an inappropriate relationship with one of the girls. It was alleged to be sexual, but it wasn't at that time. The governors of the school approached me in March 1973. They warned me that I had an inappropriate relationship with [REDACTED]. As a result of that, I discussed with [REDACTED] what her future would be. She wanted to stay on at school and she was quite bright. At one time I'd been thinking of keeping her on at Balnacraig so she could carry on at Perth High School. We decided to change that. My deputy and I went down to social work in Edinburgh. We asked if they could find a place for [REDACTED], somewhere to live and go to school in Edinburgh. That happened successfully. Even so, the governors took it upon themselves in August to allege that I had a sexual relationship with [REDACTED]. Arrangements had already been made for her to leave anyway, but I was sacked.
74. I was given a letter to say that the governors had lost confidence in me. It deliberately didn't state the reason for that. I don't think they had any evidence to go to the police at the time. I nearly went to an industrial tribunal, but I couldn't face the publicity. I was in a very bad place at the time. I was overworked and depressed.

### **Helping the Inquiry**

75. There need to be well-trained staff looking after children in care. More than just the head and deputy should be trained. Everybody should be properly trained. More people know about it now. I think it might help if children had somebody outside the

school who they could refer to. I'm aware that the earlier stages of the Inquiry have produced some horror stories where children didn't seem to have anybody they could turn to. I don't know if there's some sort of way they could have someone they could turn to. Getting the right staff is so important. How you do that, I don't know.

76. 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..........

Dated.....10<sup>th</sup> October 2023.....