

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Case Study no. 9: Volume 3

The provision of residential care in boarding schools for children at **Gordonstoun**, Moray, between 1934 and 2021

Evidential Hearings: 26 March 2021 to 11 November 2021



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| Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

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Contents

Gordonstoun: former pupils and staff	vi
Foreword	ix
Preface	x
The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI)	x
Public hearings	x
Section 21 responses	xi
Written statements	xi
This case study	xii
Leave to appear	xii
Numbers	xii
Witness representing Gordonstoun	xii
Gordonstoun and Aberlour	xiii
This case study as compared to my findings in previous case studies	xiii
Terminology	xiv
Summary	xvi
Aberlour	xvi
Gordonstoun	xviii
1. Introduction	1
Anonymity and identification	1
Children were abused	1
Positive aspects	1
Evidence	2
Standard of proof	2
2. History and background of the schools	4
History	4
Headteachers	8
The buildings	9
The house system	12
Chapel	14
Internationalism and diversity	14
The school roll	15
Structure	15
Finance	16
Staffing	16

3. The Aberlour regime (1937-99)	18
Summary	18
Toby Coghill (1964-89)	18
Limited funds and burdens on staff	20
A lack of boundaries	20
Child protection	21
Staff recruitment	23
Routine	25
Guides	26
Discipline	26
A spartan existence	27
Bullying	29
1990-9	29
Positive aspects	30
Response to evidence about the regime	31
Conclusions about the regime	33
4. Abuse at Aberlour	34
Sexual abuse	34
Physical abuse	43
Emotional abuse	45
Response to the evidence of abuse	46
Conclusions about abuse	47
5. The Gordonstoun regime	48
Summary	48
Regime and leadership	48
The Hahn, Chew, and Brereton years: a system of trust	50
Failures in management: J.W.R. Kempe (1968-78) and Michael Mavor (1979-90)	52
Positive aspects	60
The 1990s onwards: improvements in leadership	61
The changes	64
Response to evidence about the regime	70
Conclusions about the regime	72
6. Abuse at Gordonstoun	73
Summary	73
Sexually abusive conduct by staff	73
Sexually abusive conduct by pupils	85
Physical abuse	89
Emotional abuse	96
Impact	100
The impact of increased pastoral care	102
Response to evidence of abuse	102
Conclusions about abuse	103

7. Reporting	104
Before the early 1990s	104
From the mid-1990s	107
2013–15	108
Response to evidence about reporting	110
Conclusions about reporting	112
8. Reflections	113
Reflections by applicants	113
Words of caution	119
Reflections by other witnesses	120
Reflections by the school	123
9. Records	126
Introduction	126
Retention of records	128
Record-keeping systems	129
Staff recollections of record-keeping	132
Pupils’ recollections of record-keeping	134
Response to evidence about records	136
Conclusions about records	136
10. Inspection reports	137
Introduction	137
Inspection of boarding facilities: background	137
Education (Scotland) Act 1946	137
Education (Scotland) Acts 1962 and 1980	138
The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001	139
Inspection records	139
The Care Commission	142
The Care Inspectorate	142
Aberlour as part of Gordonstoun	143
Pupils’ recollections	143
Staff recollections	143
Conclusions about inspections	145
Appendix A – Terms of Reference	146
Introduction	146
Definitions	146
Appendix B – Corporal punishment in Scottish schools and related matters	148
The parental right of chastisement	148
Corporal punishment in Scottish schools and the views of the courts	148
Corporal punishment in boarding schools	150
Societal change in the approach to corporal punishment	150
Appendix C – Inspection reports relating to Gordonstoun	155

Appendix D - Breakdown of numbers of children at Gordonstoun	195
Appendix E - Number of complaints, civil actions, police investigations, criminal proceedings, and applicants to SCAI	199
Appendix F - Convictions	200
Andrew Keir	200
Appendix G - Notice of draft findings	202
Appendix H - Mark Pyper's talk to the school, 14 September 1990	203

Gordonstoun: former pupils and staff

In order to provide the reader with a clear understanding of the references to applicants and other witnesses whose names feature throughout these findings, I have included quick reference tables, Table 1 (former pupils) and Table 2 (former and current staff).

Table 1: Former pupils who provided evidence to SCAI

Name	Time at Aberlour	Time at Gordonstoun
'Andrew'		1945-51
'Malcolm'		1957-62
'George'		1959-63
'Harry'		1964-8
'Duncan'		1971-6
'Christian'	1968-73	1973-7
'James'	1971-4	1975-8
'Dr Mann'		1975-9
'Sophie'		1977-80
'Angelo'	1976-80	1980-5
'Pauline'	1978-83	1986-8
'Benjamin'	1979-80	1980-5
'Mary'	1979-80	1980-5
'Jane'	1979-81	1981-5
'Thomas'		1982-7
'Seamus'		1985-8
'Sally'		1985-90
'Annie'		1986-8
'Sarah'	1983-7	1987-92
'Paul'		1989-91
John Findlay	1985-91	1991-6
'Donald'	1990-2	
'Bob'		1990-2
'Chris'		1997-2002

Name	Time at Aberlour	Time at Gordonstoun
'Alison'		1997-2002
'Brian'		1999-2004
'John'		2006-10 (junior); 2010-15 (senior)

Table 2: Former and current staff who provided evidence to SCAI

Name	Period of employment	Role(s)
David Hanson	1965-2001	Science teacher and acting head (1991-2), Aberlour
Andrew Keir	1983-94	Physics teacher, Gordonstoun
'Robert'	1984-98	Head of seamanship, Gordonstoun
Wendy Bellars	1985-8	English teacher, Gordonstoun
Diana Monteith	1989-93 1998-2005 2006-21	English teacher, Gordonstoun; assistant housemistress (1989-93); director of pastoral care (2010-15)
Mark Pyper	1990-2011	Headmaster, Gordonstoun (principal from 2009)
'Mr Blue'	2001	Teacher, Gordonstoun
Simon Reid	2011-17	Principal, Gordonstoun
Lisa Kerr	2017-24	Principal, Gordonstoun

Foreword

These are the twelfth of my published case study findings and they relate to the provision of residential care for children at Gordonstoun, Moray.

During the public hearings in the overall boarding schools case study, I heard evidence about many aspects of the boarding provision for children at these schools that amounted to dreadful abuse. It showed that boarders and day pupils were subjected to abuse, that both the boarding and day school environments were ones where there were numerous abusive practices perpetrated by members of staff and other pupils, and that these went unchecked.

Gordonstoun, in common with four of the other schools in the boarding schools case study, continues to offer boarding provision, and I heard evidence about the residential care for pupils there up to the closing date of the hearings. That included evidence about Aberlour House, which, until 1999, was a legally distinct entity, but for practical purposes was understood, from its inception in 1947, to be the Gordonstoun 'prep' (preparatory) school for primary-age children. For ease, Aberlour House and its predecessor, Wester Elchies, are commonly referred to throughout this case study as 'Aberlour'. The evidence of applicants, whilst relating to experiences within the overall period specified in SCAI's Terms of Reference (ToR) – from within living memory to 17 December 2014 – inevitably extended beyond December 2014. It would have been artificial and, I decided, quite wrong to curtail it. Hence the dates specified on the cover of this volume.

I am very grateful to all who have provided evidence to the Inquiry, whether former pupils, former and current staff, or others.

The co-operation and assistance of, and contributions from, all the witnesses about their experiences at the schools, as well as their wider experiences, learning, and ideas in relation to the provision of education and residential care in Scottish boarding schools has been invaluable.

In reaching the stage of publication of these findings – from detailed analysis of all the evidence ingathered to the final document – I have once more had the benefit of being supported by the exceptional teamwork that has become the hallmark of this Inquiry. I am very grateful to the Inquiry counsel who led in the case study and the members of staff involved at each stage; their diligence and commitment has been remarkable.

Applicants and other witnesses continue to come forward to the Inquiry with relevant evidence about boarding schools and this will be considered as part of a continuing process.

I would encourage anyone who has relevant information on any aspect of our work to get in touch with our witness support team. We want to hear from you.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne Smith'.

Lady Smith

Preface

The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI)

SCAI's Terms of Reference (ToR) require it to 'investigate the nature and extent of abuse of children in care in Scotland' during the period from within living memory to 17 December 2014 and to create a national public record and commentary on abuse of children in care in Scotland during that period.

The requirement is to investigate sexual, physical, psychological, and emotional abuse and, at my discretion, other types of abuse including unacceptable practices (such as deprivation of contact with siblings) and neglect. There is also a requirement to make findings about the impact of abuse.

SCAI is also to consider the extent to which any form of abuse arose from failures in duty by those with responsibility for the protection of children in care. In particular, SCAI is required to consider whether any abuse arose from systemic failures and the extent to which any such failures have been addressed. It is to make findings and recommendations for the effective protection of children in care now and in the future.

A copy of SCAI's ToR is at [Appendix A](#).

'Applicant' is the term SCAI uses for a person who tells SCAI that (s)he was abused in circumstances that fall within the ToR.

Public hearings

In common with other public inquiries, the work of SCAI includes public hearings. They take place after detailed investigations, research, analysis, and preparation have been completed by SCAI counsel and SCAI staff. That stage can take a long time. The public hearings of SCAI include – importantly – the taking of oral evidence from individuals about their experiences as children in care and the reading of a selection of evidence from some of their written statements. The evidence also includes accounts of the impact of their having been abused as children in care, including in boarding schools. During and following the evidential hearings into case studies, applicants and other witnesses may come forward with further relevant evidence and such evidence will be taken into account.

Children were abused in a substantial number of institutions in Scotland, and children were also the subjects of an inherently abusive child migration system that resulted in many of them being abused at their destinations. It is not, however, realistic to present every institution and instance of abuse at a public hearing; were SCAI to do so, an Inquiry that is, of necessity, a lengthy one would be unduly prolonged. Accordingly, with the assistance of SCAI counsel, difficult decisions have to be made regarding what, of the wealth of our evidence, should be presented at public

hearings. I have identified, and will continue to identify, particular institutions and matters that are representative of the issues being explored by SCAI and thus appropriate for presentation at a public hearing of evidence.

Section 21 responses

Under section 21 of the Inquiries Act 2005, as Chair of this Inquiry, I have the power to require persons to provide evidence to SCAI. Institutions targeted by SCAI as part of its investigations have been issued with various section 21 notices. These notices include a requirement for them to respond in writing to questions posed by the SCAI team. These questions are divided into parts: Part A – Organisation; Part B – Current Statement; Part C – Prevention; Part D – Abuse and Response. Hereafter these will be referred to as the ‘Parts A-D section 21 notice’.

Gordonstoun responded to its Parts A-D section 21 notice. The responses to Parts A and B are dated 28 April 2017¹ and those to Parts C and D dated 28 July 2017.² During the time leading up to the case study, SCAI requested further information from Gordonstoun. This was provided in responses received in October 2020,

December 2021, January 2022, and January 2023.³ A response to a further section 21 notice, dated 23 May 2023 and seeking further information about and views on mandatory reporting, was received in July 2023.⁴

Written statements

Applicants and other witnesses can tell members of the SCAI team about their experiences as children in care. Applicants may do so at a ‘private session’.⁵ Other witnesses may do so at an Inquiry interview. All witnesses are supported by SCAI’s witness support team. Written statements are prepared covering those matters spoken about which are relevant to the ToR. The applicant, or other witness, is asked to check the statement carefully and to sign it as being the truth if satisfied that it is accurate, but only if and when (s)he feels ready to do so.

The Inquiry also received some self-penned statements and I have taken them into consideration. However, as in the case of written statements prepared by the Inquiry, I have only relied on those statements for the purpose of making findings where they are supported by signed declarations that they are the truth.

1 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003; and [Part B response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0103.

2 Gordonstoun, [Part C response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0112; and [Part D response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0237.

3 Gordonstoun, email response dated 3 March 2020 to section 21 notice, 12 February 2020, at GOR-000004410. Other information provided by Gordonstoun included: Gordonstoun Parent Survey, 2018, at GOR-000004687; Gordonstoun Staff Survey, 2018, at GOR-000004688; Gordonstoun Student Survey, 2018, at GOR-000004689; Gordonstoun Student Survey, 2021, at GOR-000004684; Gordonstoun Staff Survey, 2021, at GOR-000004685; Gordonstoun Parent Survey, 2021, at GOR-000004686; Scottish Boarding Schools qualitative research survey, May 2012, at GOR-000004690 and GOR-000004691; Continual Improvement in Pastoral Care at Gordonstoun, January 2023, at GOR-000004703; Boarding and Day Students Information, at GOR-000004704.

4 Gordonstoun, Response to section 21 notice, July 2023, at GOR-000004710.

5 <https://www.childabuseinquiry.scot/giving-evidence-applicant>

This case study

The scope and purpose of this part of the boarding schools case study was to consider evidence about:

- the nature and extent of any relevant abuse at Gordonstoun. That included consideration of any reported abuse at Aberlour – Wester Elchies (1937–64) and Aberlour House (1947–99) – which operated essentially as, and were widely understood to be, Gordonstoun’s prep schools, notwithstanding having distinct legal entity between 1947 and 1999, after which Aberlour became a subsidiary of Gordonstoun Schools Ltd.
- any of Gordonstoun’s relevant systems, policies, and procedures, their application, and their effectiveness
- any related matters.

Given the discrete nature of the prep and senior schools for so much of the period, and the differing experiences of applicants, evidence of the regimes and abuses at Aberlour (up to 1999) and at Gordonstoun are, in some respects, considered separately in this volume.

Leave to appear

Leave to appear was granted to the following:

- the Scottish Government
- the Care Inspectorate
- the Scottish Social Services Council
- the General Teaching Council for Scotland
- Police Scotland

- the Lord Advocate
- Gordonstoun
- In Care Abuse Survivors.

Numbers

The former pupils who have provided evidence to SCAI in relation to their time at Gordonstoun do not represent every person who has made a complaint over the years relating to their experiences at the school. It must also be appreciated that many former pupils have described not only what happened to them, but also the treatment they witnessed being afforded to other children. [Appendices D and E](#) set out, in relation to Gordonstoun, the numbers of:

- children who have boarded at Aberlour and Gordonstoun
- complaints of alleged abuse received by Aberlour and Gordonstoun
- civil actions raised against Aberlour and Gordonstoun
- relevant SCAI applicants to the date specified in [Appendix E](#).

Some witnesses, including former pupils, have provided evidence to SCAI since the evidential hearings and some of this evidence is referred to. Otherwise, such evidence has been taken into account in assessing the overall picture and will continue to be carefully considered by SCAI as part of a continuing process.

Witness representing Gordonstoun

Lisa Kerr, who was principal of Gordonstoun at the time of the evidential hearings,

provided evidence to SCAI on behalf of the school on two occasions: 26 March and 15 October 2021.⁶

Gordonstoun and Aberlour

Children who boarded at Gordonstoun and Aberlour were exposed to risks of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. For many, those risks materialised and children were abused whilst in Gordonstoun's and Aberlour's care. I have no difficulty in finding that children were abused at Gordonstoun and Aberlour in a variety of ways over a long period of time.

This case study as compared to my findings in previous case studies

The abuse I find to have taken place at Gordonstoun and Aberlour is, in some respects, similar to the abuse I found to have taken place at other boarding schools including those run by the Benedictines and the Marist Brothers, Loretto School, and Morrison's Academy.⁷ There were also some similarities in relation to causative factors such as the lack of appropriate or effective child protection systems; staff who lacked the appropriate skills and training; inappropriate recruitment policies; insufficient oversight of pupils and teachers; prioritisation of the interests of the school; and the fostering of a culture in which children did not dare to speak up.

6 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007; and [Transcript, day 235](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000026, pp.85-110.

7 Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, [Case Study no. 5](#): The provision of residential care in boarding schools for children in Scotland by the Benedictine monks of Fort Augustus Abbey between 1948 and 1991 at Carlekemp Priory School, North Berwick, and Fort Augustus Abbey School, Inverness-shire (August 2021); [Case Study no. 7](#): The provision of residential care in boarding schools for children in Scotland by the Marist Brothers between 1950 and 1983 at St Columba's College, Largs, and St Joseph's College, Dumfries (November 2021); [Case Study no. 9: Volume 1](#): The provision of residential care in boarding schools for children at Loretto School, Musselburgh, between 1945 and 2021 (April 2023); [Case Study no. 9: Volume 2](#): The provision of residential care in boarding schools for children at Morrison's Academy, Crieff, between 1945 and 2007 (March 2024).

Terminology

Many children in care within the period covered by SCAI's Terms of Reference (ToR) were abused sexually, physically, and/or emotionally by other children. Details of such abuse are set out in case study findings including the findings in this volume. It involved coercion, threats, aggression, all forms of bullying, and, typically, an imbalance of power – with that imbalance arising from a difference in age, ability, status within an institution or household, physical size, and/or physical strength. It often occurred in an environment where the culture facilitated rather than protected children from such conduct or behaviour.

Sometimes it involved children specifically targeting other children. The terms 'children abused by other children', 'children who suffered abuse meted out by other children', 'children who engaged in abusive behaviour', and/or 'children who engaged in abusive conduct' are used in these findings when referring to such abusive conduct and/or behaviour.

The use of that terminology is not to be taken as indicating that I do not accept that it may have taken place against a background of the child who abused another child having exhibited harmful behaviour which needed to be but had not been recognised and/or addressed and which may also have been harmful to them. Nor is it to be taken as indicating that I do not accept that the child who

abused another child may have suffered prior trauma or may be adversely affected in childhood and/or adulthood by having engaged in such conduct.

The term 'relationship' may be used in this volume where an abuser engaged in sexual conduct with a child in circumstances where they are said to have had a 'relationship'. That is not to be taken as indicating that what happened did not constitute abuse. Such 'relationships' were usually the result of grooming.⁸ Further, any willingness to engage in the relationship on the part of the child, whether apparent or otherwise, or evidence that there were positive aspects to it, are not to be taken as indicating that it did not constitute abuse.

Many applicants described abuse of a type that could have amounted to a criminal offence. The language in these findings reflects the words they used in evidence. The abuse of children in boarding schools may have amounted to the common law offence of lewd, indecent, and libidinous practice and behaviour, an offence which involved the abuse, including on occasions penetrative conduct, of children under the age of puberty, then taken as 14 for boys and 12 for girls. Today, offences involving children would be prosecuted under the provisions of the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009, and any penetrative conduct involving a child, be it vaginal, anal, or oral, using a penis, is now likely to be described as rape.

8 For discussion and examples of grooming, see Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, [Roundtable no. 1: The Psychology of Individuals Who Abuse Children](#) (June 2022), p.17.

Part V of the 2009 Act introduced a new offence of 'sexual abuse of trust', an offence that may be committed in different ways, including where a person who is responsible for looking after children under 18 in a boarding school engages in sexual activity with them.

Other terminology used in these findings includes the word 'clipe'. A clipe is someone who informs on another or, to put it colloquially, tells tales. Cliping is the act of doing so. A person who clipes is breaking an unwritten code of silence and may be isolated by their peers if (s)he does so.

Summary

- Children were abused at Gordonstoun.
- Some children who were abused also had positive experiences.
- Kurt Hahn was a key figure in the development of experiential education, believing it to be 'culpable neglect not to impel young people into experiences'. In combining his belief in that approach to education with an ethos of honesty, integrity, and service to both school and community, he brought to Scottish education something entirely new.
- It seems to have been assumed that such good intentions having been declared, the school could be trusted to provide appropriate residential care.
- At Gordonstoun, the assumption proved to be ill-founded, largely due to poor leadership. A dreadfully abusive and, in some houses, extremely violent culture was allowed to take root. It was only after 1990 and the appointment of a strong headmaster who understood the importance of pastoral care that abuse eventually began to be addressed and a measure of trust was restored.
- At Aberlour, the 1960s to 1990s were marked by a similar culture of assumption and naivety, exacerbated by the long and unchallenged leadership of Toby Coghill.
- There was a significant failure of governance with no interest in child protection or pastoral care until the 1990s.

Aberlour

- Being a pupil at Aberlour was a spartan experience. The school believed that it had created a warm family atmosphere but for many children, that was not their experience. Not all children were by any means suited to its style, and insufficient account was taken of the needs of individual children. The abuse being perpetrated upon them and their unhappiness went unnoticed. Run on limited funds, and entirely directed by the headmaster, the school operated without process, systems, or adequate oversight. Abuse went undiscovered, and no attempt was made to encourage pupils to report concerns.
- Weak recruitment practices and poor judgment by the headmaster meant that unsuitable teachers were repeatedly appointed.
- A high proportion of staff sexually abused children at Aberlour.
- Toby Coghill, the headmaster, encouraged a culture of nude swimming and actively engaged in a practice whereby girls, on their birthdays, were stripped naked, taken to a bath, and thrown into it. The culture during his tenure was also such that it was not unusual for a teacher to share a tent with a pupil.
- John Conroy, an English teacher at Aberlour in the 1970s, abused at least four boys. He groomed them in ways that included allowing them to walk his dog

and giving them treats. He would begin with hugs and progressed to touching their penises. This occurred over a period of years with individual pupils and in a variety of places: his classroom, his car, the school darkroom, and on trips. He visited one child to abuse him when he was ill in the school sanitorium.

- The response to the discovery of his abuse was woeful. Conroy was dismissed, but the school did not report matters to the police and nor were other staff made aware of how Conroy had been behaving. Toby Coghill reacted by writing to the Gordonstoun housemaster suggesting that one of the boys Conroy had abused was probably homosexual – an observation which, even if correct, was irrelevant and neither excused nor mitigated Conroy’s abusive conduct. It is not clear whether any steps were taken to stop Conroy teaching again in the UK, but he certainly taught abroad.
- That approach to the discovery of abuse was repeated. Three other members of staff left Aberlour after inappropriate behaviour, including one incident of abuse which took place in a tent.
- Mr Harding, another English teacher in the late 1970s, simply went missing after a short tenure and did not return. He had been entering the girls’ dormitory as they undressed. He also plied a 12 year old with sherry, having drawn the curtains in his study in the middle of the day.
- In the late 1980s, an exchange student appointed by Toby Coghill raped a 13-year-old female pupil on a camping expedition. He was the only member of staff on the trip. He had shared a tent with girls, including the girl he raped. He had taken rum with him on the trip and given some of it to those girls. He had also taken condoms with him and used one during the rape. He had previously abused another child.
- Inadequate recruitment practices, supervision, and leadership persisted at Aberlour after Toby Coghill’s retiral. Another English teacher, Derek Jones, sexually abused at least three boys in the course of his single term of employment in 1990. His behaviour included drugging two pupils, taking pictures of their genitals, and engaging in masturbation and oral sex with boys.
- The discovery that Derek Jones had been sexually abusing a particular boy was handled deplorably. The police were involved briefly, but the bursar encouraged the boy’s parents not to press matters so as to preserve the school’s reputation. No pastoral care was provided to that child, and no inquiry was carried out to discover whether the abuse was more widespread, as in fact it was.
- Corporal punishment was used excessively and inappropriately by Toby Coghill. For example, he caned one child for lending a friend his skateboard.
- Two teachers assaulted children. One gave every child in a class a Chinese burn as punishment for some of them swearing, reducing all of them to tears. Another slapped a 10 year old in the face in front of a whole class for having run away from school.
- Violence between pupils was not common but it did happen. Some children were made to fight one another.
- Physical discipline was not supposed to have been administered by pupils at

Aberlour. However, in the early 1990s it happened.

- Emotional abuse went unchecked. It included pupils being mocked for being local, for having a Scottish accent, and for having previously been at a state school.
- Some children enjoyed their time at Aberlour, Some who were abused also had positive experiences.
- From into the 1990s until the school officially merged with Gordonstoun in 1999, awareness of the need for child protection and pastoral care grew, partly due to Mark Pyper's influence. After he became the headmaster of Gordonstoun, systems and processes improved and there was greater engagement by governors.

Gordonstoun

- The system of experiential education and robust ethos applied by Gordonstoun suited some but not all children. As with Aberlour, insufficient account was taken of the needs of individual children, and abuse and unhappiness went unnoticed.
- A code of silence amongst the pupils was normalised. This may have been exacerbated by the culture of self-reliance.
- Some members of staff at Gordonstoun abused children; the norm was 'no clipping'. The abuse commonly involved sexual abuse of boys.
- Andrew Keir, a physics teacher, was a predatory paedophile. Under the guise of being friendly and caring, he groomed boys with a view to satisfying his sexual desires. He took advantage of a variety of settings – the judo club, the canoe club, and the radio ham club – where he could select and then abuse vulnerable children. He invited one boy to his house and many others to the school swimming pool where he encouraged naked swimming and obscene conversation. He touched and masturbated one boy in the physics lab and, as assistant housemaster, encouraged boys to join him in his room with the door closed.
- His behaviour was known about by the boys. The school was also aware. In early 1989, boys complained to Colour Bearers⁹ (a role similar to that of prefect in other schools) who in turn reported their concerns to the school chaplain, Canon Anthony Montgomery. He passed the information up the chain of command, via the deputy head, to the headmaster, Michael Mavor.
- Michael Mavor failed to act as he should have done. A written record was kept of what was reported but was put only in a pupil's file. It was not put into Andrew Keir's. When Michael Mavor handed over to Mark Pyper in 1990, he repeatedly failed to mention any concerns about Keir and, there being nothing in Keir's staff file to alert him, Mark Pyper did not know about that report.
- These grave shortcomings were compounded in Mark Pyper's first term as headmaster. Fresh concerns about Andrew Keir's behaviour came to light, which were documented but, in the absence of hard evidence, not acted upon; Mark Pyper felt he had to assume innocence lest he 'give a dog a bad name'.¹⁰ His primary duty was

9 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.16.

10 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011, principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.162.

child protection. He needed to fully assess the risks to children and should have done so, but he didn't. Andrew Keir continued to abuse pupils until the end of 1991. Had Gordonstoun acted when it should have done, children would not have continued to be abused by him in late 1990 or in 1991.

- Michael Mavor positively supported Andrew Keir's appointment in other schools despite knowing of the abuse. Mark Pyper wrote positive references, including one in support of a job in a school for boys. Those references were silent in relation to what were, at the time, known concerns about Andrew Keir.
- Six other teachers sexually abused children between the 1960s and 1990s. The abuse comprised the repeated rape of a boy by an exchange teacher; the indecent assault of boys by two teachers; indecent assaults on girls by a male teacher (who was subsequently jailed in England for similar abuse); indecent touching of girls by the school chaplain; and voyeuristic practices by a housemaster involving a number of male pupils. That voyeurism was reported, but the school's response went no further than removing the housemaster from his house. Repeated complaints from a parent finally resulted in his resignation but he was not dismissed.
- The captain of the sail-training vessel abused a pupil by imposing an excessive punishment for smoking on board. The punishment involved hoisting her 7.5 metres up the mainmast and leaving her there for two and a half hours.
- In some houses emotionally and physically abusive cultures flourished, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. Staff were

complacent, repeatedly turning a blind eye to children abusing other children.

- Housemasters were, during the 1970s and 1980s, inadequately supported and inadequately supervised, leaving them vulnerable, isolated, and reliant on a hierarchy of pupils. In one case, a housemaster appeared scared of his senior pupils. In these conditions, abusive cultures persisted.
- Violence and cruelty was endemic in some of the boarding houses. They operated as fiefdoms, following their own practices. Where leadership was weak, abuse perpetrated by pupils flourished.
- That abuse would include initiation ceremonies, kangaroo courts, nipple twisting, flushing boys' heads in toilets, hanging younger boys from hot pipes, throwing darts at younger pupils, firing airguns at them, and name calling. Being the target of theft was the norm for some.
- Altyre had a reputation of being the worst of Gordonstoun's boarding houses with serious daily abuse being the norm. It took pride in its reputation.
- Bruce House came a close second.
- In the boarding houses where abuse was endemic, some revelled in their own brutality while others lived in perpetual fear.
- Racism was widespread and overt despite Hahn's vision of boys 'growing up in brotherhood with foreigners'.¹¹
- Alcohol was too freely available until restrictions began in the 1990s. It made

11 'Education and Peace: the Foundations of Modern Society', at kurthahn.org, p.1.

abuse and a lack of discipline more likely, something that should have been obvious much earlier.

- Sexual abuse engaged in by pupils seems to have been frequent. Whilst, after co-education was introduced in 1972, it was not unusual for girls to form relationships – including sexual relationships – with older boys, they would often do so to protect themselves from others. This was, in fact, a form of grooming.
- Some girls who did not so engage were subjected to verbal and physical abuse.
- Boys could, and did, enter girls' boarding houses unnoticed. In at least one case, that resulted in a vicious indecent assault.
- Serious indecent assaults by boys on boys continued and by 1990, this resulted in expulsions. The most recent example was in the 2000s.
- Prior to 1990, there was inadequate supervision by staff in some houses. There was no formal system in place to ensure consistency across the houses in their approaches to child welfare and protection.
- Governors were not aware of or, at least, failed to acknowledge there was an abusive culture and they did not prioritise pastoral care; when Mark Pyper was appointed, the then Chair of Governors told him that 'the current head had done a great deal to raise the academic standards of the school and that was to continue, please; and, secondly, that the school

should continue to be a broadly happy and inclusive place'.¹² Pastoral experience was not stated to him as being a criterion for his appointment.

- Mark Pyper, unlike his two predecessors, recognised that the school had an established abusive culture.
- Mark Pyper could see multiple flaws in the way that Gordonstoun was functioning and actively sought to introduce change, although it was not easy and it was not instant. For example, there was opposition from some staff and pupils.
- A new management structure was introduced in the 1990s and new policies and procedures created. A written code of conduct, which included pupils' rights and responsibilities, was made widely known and regularly reviewed, with input from pupils taken into account.
- Governance changed so as to, for example, move away from a model of membership dominated by old boys and local well-wishers to members with particular skills including being able to serve on specialist committees. They also began to engage more directly with the school.
- Inspectors were invited by Mark Pyper to inspect the school when he discovered they had not done so for over 17 years.
- Gordonstoun offered a genuine apology for the abuse experienced by children entrusted into its care and acknowledged its moral responsibility for those at Aberlour prior to 1999.

12 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011, principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.108.

1 Introduction

At the close of the case study, I undertook to publish my findings as soon as practicable. This, I now do.

The findings that I am able to make on the evidence presented in this part of the case study are set out in this document. I am doing so to make applicants, witnesses, and members of the public aware that I have concluded that children were abused at the schools.

Anonymity and identification

Where applicants have waived anonymity, I have normally used their real names. Otherwise, in accordance with my General Restriction Order, they are referred to by their chosen pseudonym.

I have decided, in the meantime, to preserve the anonymity of most living persons against whom findings of abuse have been established unless that person has been convicted of abusing children. However, the norm will be that where persons against whom findings of abuse have been established are deceased, they will be named.

When a current or former teacher or other member of staff is mentioned, the likely dates they were at the school, based on the available evidence, are provided.

The dates applicants attended the school, again based on the available evidence, are provided.

While great care has been taken to compile the information in relation to the dates that former pupils, current and former teachers, and other staff members were at the school, it may be incomplete or inaccurate due to the limitations of the records currently available. Where there is conflicting information about such dates, the most contemporaneously recorded source has, in the main, been used.

Children were abused

Children were exposed to risks of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. For many those risks materialised. The nature of that abuse is detailed in these findings.

Positive aspects

There were children who were not abused, children who had positive experiences, and children who, although they were abused, also had positive experiences. However, SCAL's Terms of Reference (ToR) require me to investigate not only the nature of the abuse of children who were in residential care in Scotland, including those who were at boarding schools, but also its extent. This includes addressing questions such as whether or not abuse was the universal experience, how prevalent it was, and whether a child who was abused also experienced positive aspects and outcomes. The fact that children also had positive experiences and that there were children who were not abused at all is relevant and

important but in no way compensates for or diminishes the dreadful reality of the abuse that occurred.

I have, at times, made specific findings about these positive aspects. Some applicants spoke of having had positive experiences notwithstanding also having been abused and/or having suffered from witnessing other children being abused. The fact that applicants were prepared to do so supported the credibility of their evidence about being abused. Examples of this included John Findlay, who, after Aberlour, 'had a great time at Gordonstoun. I loved Gordonstoun. In hindsight, looking back, I wish actually I'd taken more of the opportunities that were presented to me';¹³ and 'Annie', who stated: 'Most of what I experienced at Gordonstoun was good and happy and I made lifelong friends and am part of a lifelong extended community'.¹⁴

The fact of these positive experiences also shows it was possible to provide non-abusive care, thereby begging the question of why the school failed to ensure that that was the standard of care consistently afforded to all children.

Evidence

In these findings, reference is made to some parts of the evidence of individual witnesses where I have found them to be particularly illustrative of the main aspects of what was happening. They are, however, of necessity,

a limited selection. The fact that a particular piece of evidence is not referred to or discussed does not mean that it has not been accepted or that it has not helped to build the overall picture.

Standard of proof

In making these findings I have applied the standard of proof explained in my decision of 30 January 2018, namely that:

when determining what facts have been established in the course of this Inquiry, it is appropriate that I do so by reference to the civil standard of proof, namely balance of probabilities. I will not, however, consider myself constrained from making findings about, for example, what may possibly have happened or about the strength of particular evidence, where I consider it would be helpful to do so.¹⁵

For the avoidance of doubt, I have not applied the criminal standard of proof in making these findings. The criminal standard of proof is a higher standard of proof, namely proof beyond reasonable doubt.

The period covered in evidence ranged from about 1934¹⁶ to 2021.¹⁷ All oral evidence was given under oath or affirmation. Where the evidence relied on is drawn from a written statement produced by the Inquiry, the statement has been signed after having been reviewed by the witness and confirmed as being a true account.

13 [Transcript, day 232](#): John Findlay (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985-91; Gordonstoun, 1991-6), at TRN-8-000000023, p.39.

14 [Transcript, day 230](#): 'Annie' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1986-8), at TRN-8-000000021, p.104.

15 [Standard of Proof - Decision by the Rt Hon. Lady Smith](#), Chair of SCAI, 25 January 2018.

16 Written evidence ranges from 1934 to 2021. See Gordonstoun, Minutes of a meeting of persons interested in setting up a new school on Salem lines, 1934, at GOR-000002675. The oral evidence ranges from 1945 to 2021. See [Transcript, day 230](#): read-in statement of 'Andrew' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1945-51), at TRN-8-000000021, pp.147-8.

17 See [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007 and [Transcript, day 235](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000026, pp.85-110.

In describing what happened at Aberlour and Gordonstoun, I have quoted from some of the evidence of former pupils that I have

accepted as establishing what happened. I do this so as, amongst other things, to ensure that their voices are now heard.

2 History and background of the schools

As noted already, and set out in more detail below, Gordonstoun and Aberlour were legally distinct though closely connected for much of the period covered in evidence.

History

Gordonstoun

Gordonstoun was founded in Moray, in the north-east of Scotland, in 1934 as a boarding school for boys aged 13 to 18.¹⁸ Its founder, Kurt Hahn, was a German educationalist who had previously established the Schule Schloss Salem (the Salem School) in southern Germany as one that specialised in an 'experiential' approach to learning. He believed in a system of education that would influence the future of society. His focus was not on the interests of the individual child: 'It was designed to train citizens who could not shrink from leadership and who would, if called upon, make independent decisions, put right action before expediency and the common cause before personal ambition.'¹⁹ It seems unsurprising that the school quickly gained a reputation for providing a harsh and spartan environment.

Kurt Hahn was Jewish by birth and, as an opponent to the rise of Hitler in the 1930s,



Kurt Hahn

was advised to leave Germany at that time. He chose to settle in Moray in 1933 'because he loved this part of Scotland and because he had friends there'.²⁰

Hahn wanted to carry on with educational work in the same way as he had been doing in Germany. Unlike the founders of some of the boarding schools in this case study, Hahn was not a philanthropist. He did, however, have a particular educational vision that was different and sparked the interest of others. With financial assistance from some local families, he established Gordonstoun, initially leasing and later purchasing the Gordonstoun estate. It is said that the basis of his educational approach drew on his own

¹⁸ Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.1.

¹⁹ Gordonstoun, The responsibilities and opportunities for the training of citizens, Extract of an address by Kurt Hahn to the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, at GOR-000004625, p.15.

²⁰ Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.1.



The Gordonstoun crest

experiences of boarding schools in England, on Plato's *Republic*, and on elements of Greek history, including the fact that a nation has a duty to do all it can to make individual citizens discover their own power and be qualified by education to serve the community. Thus, the heads of school were known as 'guardians', the Greek trireme became the school's emblem, its motto became *plus est en vous* ('there is more in you'), and the regime and routines have often been referred to as 'spartan' because of their harsh and challenging nature.

'Harry' said: 'To put it succinctly, the school was set up by radicals ... and its radicalism was still apparent when I was there in the 1960s.'²¹

Outward Bound pursuits were a key aspect of Hahn's educational system; activities such as seamanship and mountaineering were built into the curriculum, and the school ethos included challenging pupils in ways that would take them out of their comfort zone.

Gordonstoun became co-educational in 1972.²² The pros and cons of its decision to offer co-education continued, however, to be debated throughout the 1970s.

Wester Elchies and Aberlour House (1937-99) (Aberlour)

A prep school was founded by Kurt Hahn in 1936, with the intention of providing education for boys and some girls – usually sisters of the boys – aged 7-13.²³ Initially set up at Duffus House, part of the Gordonstoun estate, and then briefly at Rothies Glen House, the junior school moved, in 1937, to a house at Wester Elchies, near the village of Aberlour. Further accommodation became necessary to meet demand so the Aberlour House estate, three miles distant, was purchased in August 1947. Both schools thereafter operated under the title Wester Elchies School though under the management of a new company, Aberlour House Ltd. Kurt Hahn was a director. Pupils lived at Wester Elchies until the age of 10½ and then moved on to Aberlour House up to the age of 13½. Wester Elchies closed in August 1964. Both schools remained co-educational until at least the early 1950s, although the number of girls was low – by 1964 Aberlour was boys only.

The foundation, ethos, aims, and finances of Aberlour House Ltd were always connected with those of Gordonstoun, and in September 1964 the Registrar of Independent Schools was advised that the school should henceforth be known as 'Aberlour House (The Gordonstoun

21 Transcript, day 230: read-in statement of 'Harry' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1964-8), at TRN-8-000000021, p.167.

22 Gordonstoun, Part A response to section 21 notice, at GOR.001.001.0003, p.23.

23 Scottish Education Department, File IS.9/1 – Aberlour House, at SGV-000064486; and Gordonstoun, Minutes of Annual General Meeting, 10 March 1978, at GOR-000002804, p.6.

Preparatory School)'.²⁴ Boys were admitted to the school on the understanding they would ordinarily 'proceed to Gordonstoun in due course'.²⁵ Admissions to Gordonstoun from Aberlour House were not, however, necessarily guaranteed.²⁶



Wester Elchies

The links were always strong and existed on many levels. For example, Aberlour resumed co-education in September 1973, a year after Gordonstoun, and clearly had the intention of providing future pupils to the senior school.²⁷ On occasion, attempts were made to bring both schools under the same administration. The full integration of Aberlour into Gordonstoun as a junior house was seriously considered after the closure of Wester Elchies,²⁸ and Toby Coghill, the Aberlour headmaster, was described in Aberlour Ltd minutes of January 1964 as coming 'under the direct authority of the Headmaster of Gordonstoun and ... in the same position as one of the Gordonstoun

Housemasters'.²⁹ In 1978, the Gordonstoun AGM minutes noted that:

the following decisions should be intimated to the Boards of both Schools:

1. Aberlour House should become a Junior house of Gordonstoun.
2. It should continue to operate under a separate Company for the time being.
3. The Board of Gordonstoun Schools Ltd. should appoint as many of their members to the Aberlour House Board as they considered necessary. It may be desirable for them to have the power to appoint both the Chairman and a Finance Director.
4. The appointment of any new Directors to Aberlour House Ltd. must first be approved by Gordonstoun Schools Ltd.
5. The Headmaster of Aberlour House would be directly responsible to the Headmaster of Gordonstoun.³⁰

That did not happen. Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24) explained that the closeness of the relationship between the schools fluctuated:

I think there was a particular period under ... Sir Toby Coghill where, although he was appointed at a time when the governors of Aberlour House had been considering closer links with Gordonstoun, I think he pulled the schools further apart, and in doing so actually gained membership of the Independent Association of Prep Schools, which could only

24 Scottish Education Department, File IS.23/2, at SGV-000067152, p.38.

25 Scottish Education Department, File IS.9/1 – Aberlour House, at SGV-000064486, p.11.

26 Gordonstoun, Aberlour House – Minutes of meeting of the Board of Directors, 10 February 1978, at GOR-000004623, p.8.

27 Minutes of the meeting of the Aberlour Board of Directors, 13 October 1972, at GOR-000004573, p.3. It was decided during the meeting that up to 12 girls should be admitted in September 1973.

28 Scottish Education Department, Inspection of Wester Elchies, March 1964, at SGV-000007268, p.108.

29 Gordonstoun, Minutes of the meeting of the Directors of Aberlour House Ltd, 29 January 1964, at GOR-000004594, p.1.

30 Gordonstoun, Minutes of Annual General Meeting of Gordonstoun Schools Ltd, 10 March 1978, at GOR-000002804, pp.6–7.

be done, actually, by demonstrating you were not managed by a senior school ... So I think, yes, there were times when there was great closeness, but I think there were times when they were less close.³¹

Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011, principal from 1999) recalled a time when circumstances brought the schools closer together for a while:

after I'd been there one term ... there was a difficulty because the current head [of Aberlour] ... left the school, was asked to leave the school, and the deputy head took over as acting head for a year. In his letter of appointment it was stated that, unusually, he was then to be responsible to the head of Gordonstoun. So for the year that he was there as acting head, he reported to me, but as soon as the new head, Mr Caithness, came in, in 1992, that ceased and we went back to the previous arrangement and he was proudly independent.³²

David Hanson, a science and maths teacher at Aberlour (1965-2001) and acting head from 1991 to 1992, said: 'my understanding was that ... the Gordonstoun preparatory school ... apart from its geographical separation, was part of the system. They had the same founder and so on.'³³ He agreed that the expectation that pupils of Aberlour would progress on to Gordonstoun was 'the general rule'.³⁴

John Findlay, a pupil at both schools, summed it up succinctly: 'It was the same school flag, same founder, and same school song. To me, if you are under the same flag and sing the same anthem then you are the same country.'³⁵

'It was the same school flag, same founder, and same school song.'

Application of the principles of experiential learning, which lay at the core of Kurt Hahn's philosophy, was as much part and parcel of life at Aberlour as it was at Gordonstoun. The Aberlour prospectus for 1958 explained: 'For the principles which underlie the education provided and for the general method employed, reference should be made to the prospectus for Gordonstoun. At Wester Elchies [Aberlour] the method is adjusted where necessary to suit the younger boys.'³⁶ 'James' spoke of the morning run at Aberlour, similar to that at Gordonstoun:

Every morning, regardless of the weather or the time of year, before we did anything else, we were made to put our shorts and gym kit on and go for a run outside. It maybe only took five minutes to run around the triangle, but it was their way to try and toughen us up. We were then made to take a shower, then a cold shower and get dressed and go for breakfast. We then had school classes through the day.³⁷

31 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, pp.25-6.

32 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011, principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.105-6.

33 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.55.

34 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.55.

35 [Written statement of John Findlay](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985-91; Gordonstoun, 1991-6), at WIT.001.001.9906, p.3, paragraph 10.

36 School Prospectus, 1958, at SGV-000067152.

37 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun 1975-8), at TRN-8-000000022, p.20.

'Benjamin' said: 'The ethos of the school was based on the educational workings of Kurt Hahn. It was very much an environment where children were taught teamwork and independence at the same time. We had to think on our feet and the expeditions were hard physically.'³⁸ Again, it was the Gordonstoun system.

Whilst it had a close working relationship with Gordonstoun, Aberlour was a separate legal entity until 1 August 2000,³⁹ when Aberlour House Ltd became a wholly owned subsidiary of Gordonstoun Schools Ltd, following a process first approved in 1997.⁴⁰ As Gordonstoun outlined, 'The merger of the boards was a precursor to the closure of Aberlour House in June 2004.'⁴¹ The reduction in the number of junior boarders, a trend seen nationally, was a major factor.⁴² Aberlour House Ltd was dissolved in February 2014. Lisa Kerr, referring to Aberlour pupils who were abused, said: 'Gordonstoun absolutely has a moral responsibility for its pupils'.⁴³

The new prep school (1999-present)

Aberlour House continued in operation between 1999 and 2004. A new junior school, which retained the name of Aberlour House, opened on the Gordonstoun campus in September 2004. From that point on, the prep school was fully integrated within Gordonstoun. It is both a day and boarding

school but, unlike the Gordonstoun senior school, now has a larger proportion of day pupils than boarders:

In the junior school we are about two-thirds day, which is reflective of the age of the children ... I think if one were to look back at old Aberlour House and the junior school now, I think we would see a much greater proportion of day pupils in the junior school now, in line with the trend away from boarding at younger ages.⁴⁴

Headteachers

Gordonstoun

Gordonstoun has always been led by headmasters, who are overseen by the governing body and supported by other staff, a team that now includes teaching, pastoral, and support staff.⁴⁵ Headmasters are responsible for maintaining the ethos of the school, recruiting staff, reporting to the board of directors, and introducing appropriate rules and policies, including in relation to pastoral care.⁴⁶

Overall, eight people have held the role of headmaster and/or joint headmaster of Gordonstoun (Table 3). Kurt Hahn, as founder of Gordonstoun, Wester Elchies, and Aberlour House and responsible for establishing their ethos, is regarded as the

38 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Benjamin' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.62.

39 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.2.

40 Gordonstoun, Minutes of a meeting of the Board of Directors of Gordonstoun School, 12 September 1997, at GOR-000002852, p.1.

41 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.2.

42 Gordonstoun, Minutes of the Gordonstoun Schools Board Meeting, 28 July 2003, at GOR-000002949, p.4.

43 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.25.

44 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.36.

45 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.82.

46 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.77.

Table 3: Gordonstoun headteachers or principals, 1934–present

Name	Period of employment
Kurt Hahn	1934–53
Henry Brereton MA (joint headmaster with F.R.G. Chew)	1953–9
F.R.G. Chew MA (Cambridge)	1959–67
J.W.R. Kempe MA (Cambridge)	1968–78
Michael Mavor MA (Cambridge), PGCE	1979–90
Mark Pyper BA (London)	1990–2011
Simon Reid BA (Witwatersrand, South Africa)	2011–17
Lisa Kerr BA (York)	2017–24

most influential. F.R.G. Chew, also from Salem, followed Hahn to Gordonstoun in 1934. Henry Brereton joined Gordonstoun as a housemaster in 1935 and was promoted to the post of director of studies in 1936 before becoming headmaster in 1953. Mark Pyper is credited with having been responsible for the introduction and development of pastoral care.⁴⁷

The school management structure has evolved over the years,⁴⁸ and in November 2016, Gordonstoun appointed a new leadership team comprising a principal, a head, and a finance director. Lisa Kerr was appointed principal, Titus Edge headmaster, and Hugh Brown finance director. Lisa Kerr, although a Gordonstoun parent and governor of the school, had not previously been employed in the sphere of education.⁴⁹

Lisa Kerr is due to leave Gordonstoun at the end of the 2024 summer term. Peter Green, currently executive headmaster of the

Rugby School Group, has been appointed to succeed her.

Aberlour

Aberlour has had separate headmasters, as listed in Table 4.

The buildings

Gordonstoun House is at the centre of the school campus. The original boarding houses were Gordonstoun House and Duffus House (situated just outside the boundary of the Gordonstoun estate).⁵⁰ As the school roll increased, additional boarding houses were constructed on campus or remote properties were acquired for use as boarding houses (Table 5).⁵¹ Between 1945 and 1959, there were four houses off campus. One of these, Altyre House, was 12 miles away, in Forres. The physical separation of the boarding houses contributed to the development of significant autonomy amongst the houses,

47 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.83.

48 For full details, see Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, pp.84–5.

49 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.2.

50 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.18.

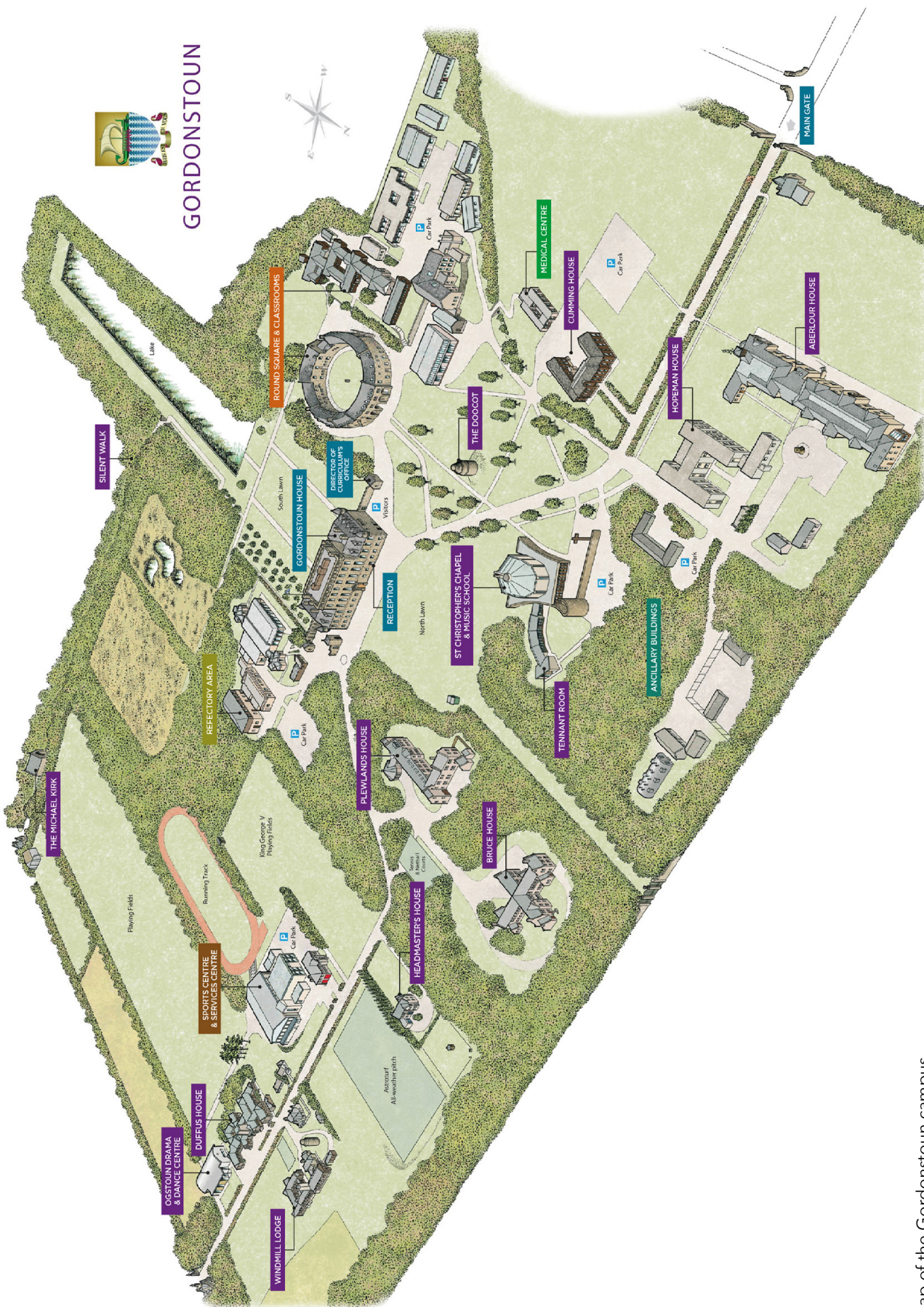
51 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, pp.19–20.

Table 4: Gordonstoun Junior School, Wester Elchies, and Aberlour House headmasters, 1936-present

Name	School	Period of employment
Kurt Hahn	Gordonstoun Junior School	1936
Pat Delap	Wester Elchies	1937-54
Charles Brereton (joint headmaster with Pat Delap, Wester Elchies)	Aberlour House	1948-54
Pat Delap	Aberlour House and Wester Elchies	1954-63
Sir Toby Coghill	Aberlour House	1964-89
Brian Head	Aberlour House	1989-90
David Hanson (acting head with the support of, and reporting to, Mark Pyper, Gordonstoun)	Aberlour House	1991-2
John Caithness	Aberlour House	1992-2000
Neil Gardner	Aberlour House	2000-3
Robert McVean	Aberlour House (Gordonstoun Junior School from 2004)	2003-present

Table 5: Gordonstoun boarding houses, 1934-present

Name	Period
Gordonstoun House	1934-present
Duffus House (new building opened in 2017)	1934-present
Cumming House (refurbished 1990)	1938-present
Round Square	1939-present
Hopeman Lodge, Hopeman (moved to a new site, on campus, 1970)	1945-present
Dunkinty House, Elgin	1948-51
Laverock Bank, Lossiemouth	1949-51
Altyre House, Forres (comprising four houses: Dunbar, Bruce, Comyn, and Moray)	1951-9
Windmill Lodge	1957-present
Altyre House - on campus (refurbished 2000-2)	1960-2016
Bruce House (new building opened in 1990)	1960-present
Hopeman House	1970-present
Plewlands House (female boarding)	1987-present
Aberlour House (junior school)	2004-present



Map of the Gordonstoun campus

and in some cases that autonomy facilitated the establishment of an abusive culture. The number of boarding houses has varied according to changing need.

Some of the houses seemed impressive. Others were anything but, and some accommodation remained spartan for decades. 'John', who entered Gordonstoun in 2005, recalled that 'Cumming House was a World War II barracks because the school was taken over by the Army then. The graffiti went back to 1946 ... They were very old buildings made of wood and there were chimneys where they had fires. When I left then the school started refurbishing it.'⁵²

The house system

Gordonstoun has normally used the vertical house system, with pupils remaining in the house to which they were allocated on admission throughout their time at the school.⁵³ At times, houses have been used specifically for sixth-form pupils, such as happened at Altyre House between 2002 and 2016. Similarly, Gordonstoun House was used only for younger pupils in the 1990s.⁵⁴

Unlike Gordonstoun, Aberlour has had no separate boarding houses. Pupils were, however, split up into 'flights' named after hills near Aberlour, for example Aigan and Rinnes.⁵⁵

When co-education was first introduced at Gordonstoun in 1972, girls were accommodated with boys at Hopeman

House.⁵⁶ The girls were moved to Windmill Lodge in 1973. Currently, some of the houses are co-educational, with separate boys' and girls' dormitories.⁵⁷



Gordonstoun House

Initially, a housemaster was solely responsible for most of the day-to-day running of the houses at Gordonstoun. Most housemasters/mistresses were also teachers at Gordonstoun. They were recruited because they had previous experience in the same role, were already assistant housemasters/mistresses, or were working at Gordonstoun in another capacity and were thought to have the necessary skills to fulfil such a position. Each house now has a housemaster/mistress, an assistant housemaster/mistress, a tutor, and/or a matron. The level of support provided evolved and shifted over time, reflecting changes in student numbers and in the sizes of the boarding houses.

In 1991, Mark Pyper described housemasters' duties as follows:

52 [Written statement of 'John'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 2006-15), at WIT-1-000001044, p.15, paragraph 63.

53 See, for example, [Transcript, day 230](#): 'Annie' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1986-8), at TRN-8-000000021, p.80 and [Transcript, day 234](#): 'Brian' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1999-2004), at TRN-8-000000025, p.61.

54 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.20.

55 [Written statement of John Findlay](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985-91; Gordonstoun, 1991-6), at WIT.001.001.9906, p.5, paragraph 22.

56 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.20.

57 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.40.

to provide a family atmosphere for the pupil and to give them the kind of help, encouragement and adult contact that a day pupil would receive in an ideal home ... to provide a moral education ... to set and expect high standards of behaviour from pupils, particularly in their relationships with others; to ensure that the School rules are understood, and to establish, implement and monitor House rules and disciplinary procedures for all rules.⁵⁸

The housemasters/mistresses were also responsible for the recruitment and supervision of tutors.

Assistant housemasters have been employed since 1970. In 1979, Michael Mavor (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1979-90) expected that any single or unmarried member of staff would become an assistant housemaster/mistress, for a period of three years.⁵⁹ In 1991, their duties included the following:

To be responsible for the cohesion and general welfare of the community in as much as it relates to life in boarding houses ... To work under the Second Master, Head of 6th form and Head of Junior School over matters of pastoral care, discipline, behaviour, rules and punishments and the promulgation of information.⁶⁰

House tutors were first employed in 1969 and, according to Gordonstoun, were all qualified teachers. They were to fulfil pastoral roles. Matrons fulfilled similar roles

at the junior school. Since 2010, they have been required to register with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and to have experience of working with children.⁶¹ The role of director of student welfare/pastoral care was established in 1995.

The structure of the boarding houses became hierarchical as time went on, with tutors being the first point of contact for students. They reported to assistant housemasters/mistresses, who then reported to the housemasters/mistresses. Housemasters/mistresses were directly responsible to the headmaster or, when appropriate and in the case of day-to-day issues, to the head of sixth form or the head of the junior school.⁶²

Pupils also played an important role in the functioning of the boarding houses and their accommodation at Aberlour. They were expected to carry out domestic chores, including clearing their table after mealtimes, making their own beds, and keeping their personal space tidy, 'as they might do in their own homes'.⁶³ Gordonstoun pupils were also involved in other tasks, including manual work, such as the laying of playing fields and restoration of classrooms and the Round Square boarding house. This aligned with the school's belief in service to the community as a central part of its ethos.⁶⁴

Lisa Kerr explained: 'Yes, services within the school to their house, to their school, and most importantly, actually, to the community. Hahn basically believed, and we continue

58 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.14.

59 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.63.

60 Gordonstoun, Staffing policy proposal, 1991, at GOR-000003837, p.8.

61 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.64.

62 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.15.

63 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.31.

64 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.31.

to believe today, that one's sense of self is developed by being of service to others.'⁶⁵ Applicants also mentioned this. 'Harry' said:

from the earliest days of the school in the 1930s, the school operated a fire service, a coastguard service, and a mountain rescue service, all fully trained and accredited. There was also a community service. I was a member of the pipe band, which spent a lot of time entertaining the elderly residents of care homes in Elgin and elsewhere and performing in aid of charity at locations such as Kyle of Lochalsh.⁶⁶

'George' recalled: 'It was mandatory that you joined one of the services within Gordonstoun. These were either one of the armed forces. After this you could join the lifeboat, mountain rescue, or Scouts.'⁶⁷

Chapel

Bringing all pupils together on a regular basis can – if there is good leadership – operate as a means of facilitating a sense of community and also of embedding and maintaining appropriate standards. At Gordonstoun, attendance at chapel has always brought pupils together on a daily basis, and this remains an important aspect of school life. 'Alison' said:

Chapel took place every morning and was usually upbeat and not a chore. The religious element wasn't really a significant factor. The main point of chapel seemed to be the

bringing of the school together at the start of each day and there was always a buzz, even though it was early and, in the winter, often still dark.⁶⁸

Internationalism and diversity

Gordonstoun attracts pupils from Scotland, elsewhere in the UK, and worldwide, and has always had an international dimension despite being situated on the north-east coast of Scotland. This was borne out by the evidence. Lisa Kerr said: 'from the very founding of the school when Kurt Hahn left Salem and came to Moray, even within the first 10 pupils in the school ... there was extraordinary diversity both in terms of socio-economic diversity and also international'.⁶⁹

The make-up of the school population 'has remained remarkably consistent over time, in particular the split of one-third international, one-third Scottish, one-third the rest of the UK'.⁷⁰

In the 1960s it was similarly constituted:

When I joined the school, the backgrounds of the boys seemed surprisingly diverse to me. There were the sons of Lossiemouth trawling skippers and Liverpool seamen, of highland farmers, pub owners, garage owners, film directors, Scottish baronets, clergymen, an Essex policeman, a Cornish GP, several Irish, a Norwegian ship-owner and the grandson of an Ethiopian emperor. Each had its own distinctive ways of speaking, some of

65 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.59.

66 [Transcript, day 230](#): read-in statement of 'Harry' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1964–8), at TRN-8-000000021, p.168.

67 [Transcript, day 230](#): read-in statement of 'George' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1959–63), at TRN-8-000000021, p.155.

68 [Transcript, day 233](#): read-in statement of 'Alison' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1997–2002), at TRN-8-000000024, p.153.

69 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.37.

70 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.36.

which were very hard for me to understand. The overall effect was that the school was remarkably classless.⁷¹

‘Sarah’, who was a local child, stated that children came from ‘all over the world, actually ... And the UK ... very broad’.⁷²

Whilst an international approach and a focus on diversity has its positives, it must also be recognised that this can, if not well managed, lead to tensions and significant abuse, as happened at Gordonstoun.

The school roll

The school roll provides an indication of the number of pupils attending the school since its foundation in 1934 and up to the present day. An estimated 24,570 children boarded at Gordonstoun between 1934 and 2014. A breakdown is provided in [Appendix D](#), Table 10.

No information was provided for the years 1946, 1952–8, and 1961. The school suggests that between 1961 and 2003 there was an annual average of 428 children at Gordonstoun.⁷³

Gordonstoun has also provided information about the number of children at Aberlour between 1999 and 2004.⁷⁴ The norm was 80 to 90 pupils, with at least two-thirds of them being boarders. Although no specific figures have been made available for earlier years, those figures seem to mirror the school roll for the years 1947–99. For example, the 1958

prospectus for Wester Elchies refers to there being 48 pupils in Wester Elchies House and 78 in Aberlour. By 1964, there were 85 in the latter.⁷⁵

Structure

Legal status

Gordonstoun was founded as a private limited company under the name British Salem Schools. It is now Gordonstoun Schools Ltd. It has been a charity since 1952 and is registered with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.⁷⁶ Its stated aim is to provide ‘education in all its branches’.

Gordonstoun was registered with the Registrar of Independent Schools in Scotland in 1957, and with the Care Inspectorate in 2011. Since 1978, it has been a member of the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS).⁷⁷

Governance and administration

Originally, the school had a body of governors, who had financial responsibility and acted as sponsors for the setting-up of the school. They became known as the Gordonstoun Council, overseeing the needs of the school and publishing reports. That body was disbanded in 1978, on headmaster John Kempe’s retirement, and a finance committee was formed in its place. Since 2015, Gordonstoun’s governance system has included committees such as the Board

71 [Transcript, day 230](#): read-in statement of ‘Harry’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1964–8), at TRN-8-000000021, p.166.

72 [Transcript, day 230](#): ‘Sarah’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983–7; Gordonstoun 1987–92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.14.

73 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.34.

74 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, pp.32–3.

75 Report of an inspection by the Scottish Education Department in March 1964, at SGV-000067152, p.23.

76 Scottish charity number SCO37867.

77 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.5.

Executive, the Education Committee, the Finance and Estates Committee, and the Development Committee.⁷⁸

It is now accepted that a practical understanding of the operation of the school and engagement with pupils is important. Lisa Kerr said: 'Our governors, when they come for board meetings ... will stay with a Housemaster, so they will spend a couple of days, the weekend, living in the boarding house, effectively ... I think it is really important that the board can check the work of the executive.'⁷⁹

She also described board meetings as now being 'more focused on risk and identifying what are the key risks'.⁸⁰

Until 1999, Aberlour had its own board of governors. Thereafter, that board became known as the Council of Aberlour House and was answerable to the Gordonstoun board of governors. The Chairman of the Council of Aberlour House was also vice-chair of the Gordonstoun board.⁸¹

Finance

Gordonstoun and Aberlour have always been funded by the fees charged. Fundraising campaigns have also taken place for different building projects, including upgrading the boarding houses, and donations have, from time to time, been received.⁸²

Students may now be entitled to means-tested reduced fees or may be awarded a scholarship or bursary.

There is some evidence from minutes of a meeting of the Aberlour board of directors that there was persistent anxiety about its finances,⁸³ and the perception of pupils such as 'Jane' was that limited funding had an impact on what food was available: 'Well, just to empty a can of tomatoes and heat that up for an evening meal ... the headteacher's wife was doing quite a lot of the cooking ... I think probably funds were quite tight.'⁸⁴

Staffing

Gordonstoun has provided detailed information, where it is available, of the numbers of teachers employed at the school in the years 1934–2014.⁸⁵

Useful summaries of numbers and roles of staff in the various boarding houses are available from 1939 to the present day.⁸⁶ Information regarding the ratio of staff to children from 1969 onwards is also available. That ratio has dropped as time has passed.⁸⁷

Regarding Aberlour, Gordonstoun's Part A response provides some information for the years 1999–2004, including that there were around 10 full-time and 15 part-time teachers, together with gap-year students to support permanent staff.⁸⁸

78 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.68.

79 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.71.

80 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.81.

81 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.69.

82 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.5.

83 Aberlour, Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors, at GOR-000004537, pp.4–5.

84 [Transcript, day 233](#): 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979–81; Gordonstoun, 1981–5), at TRN-8-000000024, p.9.

85 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, pp.52–68.

86 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, pp.58–62.

87 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, pp.65–6.

88 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.3.

Staff education, training, and qualifications

Staff were traditionally recruited by headmasters. Personal preference and budgetary constraints meant that a consistent approach to recruitment was lacking over the eight or so decades under consideration.

Diversity in staff was one of Hahn's aims and formed part of the ethos he sought to develop for the school. Diversity within the school community was aimed at by bringing together people from distinct traditions, social backgrounds, faiths, and cultures.

The schoolmaster must rub shoulders with the man of affairs, the colonel with the artist, the Englishman with the German, the Presbyterian with a partner from the Church of England, the classical scholar with the explorer. The friction and tension which such a mixed society engenders keeps the community vital and healthy.⁸⁹

Hahn did not regard traditional qualifications as being necessary. Most staff members from the late 1960s onwards were, however, qualified to at least primary degree level.⁹⁰ Since 2002, all teaching staff have

been expected to hold a formal teaching qualification.⁹¹

From the 1990s onwards, new government guidelines were introduced, including 'Safer Recruiting' practices. This led Mark Pyper to implement stricter requirements when recruiting staff, such as asking for and collecting appropriate references, interviewing candidates, and checking their names against List 99.⁹² He also proposed a new staff policy for the 1990s which included job descriptions and the objectives for each role. This policy was subsequently accepted and implemented.⁹³

Whilst recruitment had become modernised by about 2010, there were evident weaknesses in the school's recruitment practices into the 1990s. Appointment of staff did not use a consistently rigorous system and could, for example, be based on the applicant knowing the headmaster. 'Sarah', remembering the early 1990s, said: 'It was very openly known that ... teachers were friends of the headmaster ... There was a ... teacher who I had in my final year ... he'd recently retired from the police force and was a friend of the headmaster's and came in ... as an A-level English teacher.'⁹⁴

89 Gordonstoun, *History of the school and ethos behind it*, by H.L. Brereton, 1950, at GOR-000003194, pp.10-11.

90 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.54.

91 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.54.

92 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.54. List 99 was a confidential list used for background checks in the education sector. Established early in the twentieth century, it detailed those barred from working with children and was put onto a statutory basis under various pieces of legislation from 1955 onwards. It was replaced by the legislation establishing and regulating the Disclosure and Barring Service in 2002 (England and Wales), and Scottish legislation in 2003 providing for a list of those banned from working with children to be maintained by Scottish Ministers. This was followed by the establishment of Disclosure Scotland and a new scheme in 2007.

93 Gordonstoun, *Staffing policy proposal*, 1991, at GOR-000003837, p.1.

94 [Transcript, day 230](#): 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.21.

3

The Aberlour regime (1937-99)

Summary

Aberlour was a small school which in some respects (such as discipline) was different from other junior boarding schools in this case study. It considered itself to have a family atmosphere, which might be thought to have made prevention and discovery of abuse easier. However, a naive culture of complacency and assumption, enhanced by the unchallenged leadership of a headmaster who remained in post for a quarter of a century, allowed physical, sexual, and emotional abuse to take place. An awareness of child protection requirements and any associated policies or processes was lacking, which meant that there was inadequate supervision of both staff and children. Poor employment practices, exacerbated by a lack of funds, meant that there were not enough staff and abuse could flourish unchecked.

A number of children, both male and female, suffered very serious sexual abuse by teachers from the 1970s to the 1990s.

Physical abuse occasionally involved excessive and inappropriate punishment by the headmaster and other teachers, as well as violence between pupils.

Emotional abuse was inherent in both the sexual and the physical abuse. It could occasionally be seen in the humiliation of children by a few teachers, as well as the response of some children to the spartan and



Aberlour House, exterior

self-reliant Hahn ethos. Their distress went unnoticed, and the care of young children could lack the necessary warmth. Applicants were subjected to and witnessed emotional abuse, and there was some bullying.

Toby Coghill (1964-89)

Every account given to the Inquiry about life at Aberlour House made mention of Toby Coghill, who, as headmaster between 1964 and 1989, had a profound influence on the school at every level. Even 'Donald', a pupil who arrived at Aberlour House in 1990, the year after Coghill's retirement, remembered that 'the reviews were quite mixed, but he was a legendary figure at the school'.⁹⁵

It is clear that Aberlour was very much Coghill's school, where he was assisted in his activities by his wife. David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2) described him as 'a highly

95 Written statement of 'Donald' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1990-2), at WIT-1-000001252, p.6, paragraph 24.

A naive culture of complacency and assumption allowed physical, sexual, and emotional abuse to take place.

organised, motivated educator, treated with respect by everybody, resourceful, imaginative. An inspiration.⁹⁶ He went on:

It was his school and he was there the whole time and liked to be in control of everything ... Lady Coghill was sort of in charge of the domestic side and the matron side of the school and also played a very full, active part in the life of the school.⁹⁷

An account published in *The Critic* magazine by Jeremy Black, who was appointed by Coghill to teach at Aberlour in the seven months between his leaving school and starting university, neatly sums up Coghill's approach and outlook:

I finished my schooling ... in November ... and would not turn up in Cambridge till the following October ... So, I put my name down at a prep school agency and went on working at the bank ... Come January ... the phone rings ... [Toby Coghill said] he was seeking an English Master, he had spoken to my Headmaster and I seemed OK. Was I available? Could I teach hockey? ... He then asked about cricket ... Satisfied with my responses, Coghill said I could come 'up' tomorrow, and if I seemed okay he would pay the fare up ... Arriving at Aberlour House, I had the interview, which consisted, as an earlier letter indicated, with Coghill looking at me, giving me his views on boys and girls (the school was a mixed prep boarding one), and then saying I should get

out and be told my duties by his deputy. Thus, I became a teacher ... I was the English Master, responsible for teaching English to the senior half, and History and Geography as well to my form. I was also a duty master etc. There was no syllabus because, as Coghill told me, all the pupils, while required to take exams, had already, prior to them, been accepted by Gordonstoun. Anyway, he thought formal teaching and exams terrible. On the Hahn model, he believed in character development, which meant that he ran a Sparta of exposing infants to the snowy clime. The only subject he taught was leadership. I got on better with him than most of the staff as they felt stuck with him ... In practice, his deputy, a dedicated Scot, did all the work of the head, and ran the staff, doing so very well.⁹⁸

"I don't mind the boys playing around with each other, but I won't have them playing around with the girls."

He thought the experience 'straight out of the pages of Evelyn Waugh - the head in the interview delivering the view "I don't mind the boys playing around with each other, but I won't have them playing around with the girls."⁹⁹ Referring to the pupils, he thought 'They were a very good bunch, enthusiastic, inquisitive, bright, and full of fun' with a 'can do spirit'.¹⁰⁰

96 Transcript, day 233: David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.56.

97 Transcript, day 233: David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.56.

98 'Teaching at Gordonstoun's prep school', *The Critic*, 23 January 2020.

99 'History man', *The Critic*, 6 December 2019.

100 'Teaching at Gordonstoun's prep school', *The Critic*, 23 January 2020.

At times the school's reputation was prioritised over the protection of children.

The head and his wife encouraged a culture where children were to be self-reliant and not show weakness or talk about their feelings. John Findlay recalled that 'if you bumped yourself or bruised yourself or you fell off your skateboard, you went to [Lady Gay Coghill] and you were basically told to man up and get on with it'.¹⁰¹ While John Findlay still retains a high regard for both the Coghills, such an approach is not right for all children. It may cause emotional harm.

Toby Coghill was undoubtedly fully committed to the success of the school, and his influence was felt in all aspects of school life, from discipline to employment of staff. That commitment, however, meant that at times the school's reputation was prioritised over the protection of children. When abuse was discovered, it was covered up and staff simply disappeared. Lessons were not learned, and the same mistakes were allowed to be repeated.

Limited funds and burdens on staff

Lack of funds meant staff were relied on to be resourceful and to generally 'muck in'. David Hanson said: 'I think that there were times where the school was not exactly hard up, but it needed to take advantage of opportunities to make things and do things in-house rather than rely upon a lot of external factors'.¹⁰² He continued: 'It was made obvious from the start that this was a full-time commitment and you were

there to do far more than just teach in the classroom.'¹⁰³

It is clear that at times staff were overburdened:

Duties ... varied over the years, but in the early years there was a member of staff on duty and the member of staff on duty for a particular day would be there before the rising bell, ring the rising bell, and supervise the children's general activities, including line-ups, checking housework, checking absolutely everything until the children went to bed at night ... it was an exhausting full day, from 7 o'clock in the evening until 9 o'clock at night ... I don't remember any particular boundaries. The time was completely full from the minute you got there in the morning to the minute you left at night. If things needed doing, you did them but otherwise you were aware of all the things that the children were doing all the way through the day.¹⁰⁴

Inadequate supervision went hand in hand with a lack of boundaries.

A lack of boundaries

Inadequate supervision went hand in hand with a lack of boundaries. Good teachers undoubtedly tried their best, and some are remembered with great affection, notably

101 Transcript, day 232: John Findlay (former pupil Aberlour, 1985-91; Gordonstoun, 1991-6), at TRN-8-000000023, p.9.

102 Transcript, day 233: David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.56-7.

103 Transcript, day 233: David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.53.

104 Transcript, day 233: David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.67-8.

David Hanson, who was viewed by the pupils as kind, supportive, genuinely caring, and a good person.¹⁰⁵ 'Jane' summed him up: 'He was brilliant ... I think in that culture, it created a space for him to be incredibly creative and energetic, and thoughtful.'¹⁰⁶

However, she added a serious caveat:

But I think the culture ... meant that there was particularly one other teacher who just disappeared after a couple of terms and I know that was because he was grooming, so it had these positive opportunities, the teaching – the lack of kind of boundaries, that created opportunities for someone like Mr Hanson, but it also meant there were opportunities for other kinds of people.¹⁰⁷

'Jane's' account echoes David Hanson's explanation of why he loved being a teacher at Aberlour House:

Less red tape. The ability to use your initiative, to do things without having to fill in multiple forms. When I was at Slough ... as part of science we wanted to explore the River Thames and the water voles which were on the banks and to do that I had to fill in multiple forms in different colours, weeks in advance and you didn't know what the weather was going to be like weeks in advance. It was a major hindrance to doing anything imaginative in the science field. Whereas at Aberlour House you had a good idea, you said to Sir Toby: 'I'd like to take a group off and collect woodlice somewhere' – 'Yes, that's fine, go ahead.'¹⁰⁸

Also, according to David Hanson, there were no particular boundaries set on what staff who were supervising in the boarding houses could do.¹⁰⁹ The absence of boundaries worked in the case of good, responsible members of staff but, as the example of the teacher who disappeared shows, it is fraught with risk – space is created within which abuse can occur and children may, as a result, be abused.

Child protection

Formal risk assessments simply did not exist during Toby Coghill's years at Aberlour House. Instead, the school operated according to his view of the world, one that was based on trust and assumption that all was and would be well. His was a naive view. Child protection was not considered when it should have been.

David Hanson confirmed this: 'I do not remember child protection receiving special attention until about 1991, but in a small, generally very happy "family atmosphere" community people looked out for each other.'¹¹⁰ He also said that

children were regarded as young people rather than names on a list. Staff, parents, and pupils generally knew each other well and there was a general atmosphere of friendship. Although I do not remember formal child protection arrangements I never thought to question the lack of it. I thought the school community functioned well.¹¹¹

105 [Transcript, day 230](#): 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983–7; Gordonstoun, 1987–92), at TRN-8-000000021, pp.18–19.

106 [Transcript, day 233](#): 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979–81; Gordonstoun, 1981–5), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.12–14.

107 [Transcript, day 233](#): 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979–81; Gordonstoun, 1981–5), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.12–14.

108 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.58–9.

109 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.67–8.

110 [Written statement of David Hanson](#) (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at WIT-1-000000602, p.4, paragraph 16.

111 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.76–7.

‘We would go skinny dipping in the river Spey and the teachers would come with us.’

He did not think ‘anybody even considered the possibility¹¹² that there might be a problem¹¹³ but he also, very frankly, volunteered that he had ‘been told several times, and by different people, that I am somewhat naive ... I ... am not naturally suspicious or questioning.’¹¹⁴

And when asked whether, looking back now, he accepted the Aberlour regime was ‘somewhat naive’, he said: ‘I think that would be true.’¹¹⁵

It took an incident of sexual abuse of a child by a teacher in 1990 for the possibility of children being abused to enter David Hanson’s thinking. He acknowledged that, and a number of his observations were telling. For example: ‘I think that as the school grew larger, the family atmosphere was still there but it was not quite the same as it was when I started’.¹¹⁶ Instead, from 1965 until around the mid-1970s, when Aberlour House became co-educational, children were permitted to – and did – swim naked in the swimming pool as ‘that was just the way it was’.¹¹⁷

‘Donald’ explained that such practices did not stop altogether, however:

We would go skinny dipping in the river Spey and the teachers would come with us ... and we all had swimming shorts. If you went down to the river you didn’t wear them, but you did if you used the school pool ... It would raise red flags everywhere now but then it was just part of the culture. The teachers would come swimming with us. They were male teachers and they didn’t wear shorts. How did that even happen in the nineties?¹¹⁸

Naked swimming does not appear to have ceased after the school became co-educational. ‘Jane’ recalled that on the last day of her first term, in 1979, Toby Coghill announced in assembly ‘that the girls were going to go swimming. He told us we weren’t to wear our swimming costumes because they would get wet.’¹¹⁹

Also, it was not unusual for teachers to sleep in a tent with children with no thought being given to whether that was appropriate or what the inherent risks might be. David Hanson said: ‘it never occurred to me that it might be’¹²⁰ a matter for concern although he did feel that he himself would not have shared a tent with female pupils because he did not consider that ‘proper’,¹²¹ not because

112 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.59–60.

113 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.76–7.

114 [Written statement of David Hanson](#) (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at WIT-1-000000602, p.19, paragraph 106.

115 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.90.

116 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.61.

117 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.69–70.

118 [Written statement of ‘Donald’](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1990–2), at WIT-1-000001252, p.14, paragraph 64.

119 [Written statement of ‘Jane’](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979–81; Gordonstoun, 1981–5), at WIT.001.001.7327, p.12, paragraph 55.

120 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.64.

121 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.64.

there was any instruction by the school to that effect.

As for pastoral care, David Hanson did not know when it was first mentioned, but said 'it was automatically taken for granted that everybody in the community had a role to play'.¹²² In his time at the school, there was no system or structure in place for pastoral care. John Findlay explained: 'I don't remember there being any kind of supportive structure ... I don't remember there being anybody to go to if I was ever upset or distressed. There was no one to go to if I felt down or I was struggling in a subject.'¹²³

The evidence showed that management of Aberlour House proceeded on the basis of an assumption that teachers and other staff were all good people and would instinctively know how to look after children properly and keep them safe. There was no attempt to devise or put in place a safe system and thus it was that children were abused.

'Sarah' was positive about some teachers, but her evidence showed the lack of any system:

I remember Mr Hanson and Mr Gardner being supportive and kind at a time when I was finding life difficult. Mr Hanson was a good father-type figure in the sort of person that you would want looking after a bunch of kids. Not every teacher would be good at doing that and I don't imagine any of them had any training in that whatsoever ... I can't remember anyone being presented to us as the adult we would go to with personal issues.¹²⁴

These observations highlighted where risks can arise and how all boarding schools need to exercise the greatest of care when recruiting staff and in their subsequent supervision and appraisal of them. All such processes must be designed with child protection in mind.

Staff recruitment

Effective child-safe recruitment processes were lacking at Aberlour. When compounded with limited funds, staff appointments and the supervision and management of staff were inevitably haphazard. Full-time teaching staff were usually graduates, but gaps were filled as economically as possible. Jeremy Black's appointment is a good example. So too are the circumstances in which his appointment almost came to an end earlier than planned. He had told another teacher that Toby Coghill was unpopular, information that was then relayed to the headmaster. Jeremy Black was 'carpeted' by him as a result and, moreover, told that he would not be allowed to move into the school's West Lodge, as he had previously been promised. Jeremy Black felt that Toby Coghill's decision about West Lodge 'broke my rule of being fair' so he 'saw the Deputy, told him what had happened, remarked that it was a pity but I could not return for the summer term under those circumstances and wondered how Coghill would explain to the parents [there had been] three English teachers in one year'.¹²⁵

122 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.74.

123 [Written statement of John Findlay](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985-91; Gordonstoun, 1991-6), at WIT.001.001.9906, p.5, paragraph 21.

124 [Written statement of 'Sarah'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun 1987-92), at WIT-1-000000751, p.7, paragraph 31.

125 'Teaching at Gordonstoun's prep school', [The Critic](#), 23 January 2020.

The approach to appointment was amateurish and lacked any consideration of child protection.

Matters were then resolved, and Jeremy Black stayed on. Toby Coghill also asked him to 'find a cricket master for the summer term', which he did. He suggested a man who was an old school friend of his, and his proposal was accepted.¹²⁶

John Findlay provided another example, explaining that there 'were normally two student teachers each year who came from Australia or New Zealand. I guess they were probably on gap years. They would stay for a year and be involved in whatever they may be good at.'¹²⁷

Recruitment was an informal process, and all decisions were very much up to Toby Coghill during his tenure. As David Hanson recalled:

Except in 1991, I was not involved to any extent with references received from former employers, although I do remember being shown a few over the years. I have no recollection of what references were expected to cover other than the competence in general character, and I do not know if referees were spoken to.¹²⁸

He would simply not have known whether a teacher was appointed using any particular process at all.¹²⁹ There were certainly no

processes being applied which had been designed with child protection in mind.

Even after 1990, appointments could be made in an ad hoc way, however well intended they may have been. An applicant in the Morrison's Academy section of this case study who was abused there sent his children to Aberlour and Gordonstoun. Their experience was such that he thought highly of both schools. Nevertheless, he considered that the approach to appointment was amateurish and lacked any consideration of child protection. While visiting Aberlour as a parent, he was asked 'out of the blue' to do some teaching. He had no training either in teaching or in child protection:

One of the teachers, I don't know whether he saw something in me or, because I have been around a bit, I have a scientific training, I have a lot of interests ... there was no guidance given to me as to what subject I would pick, or subjects, so ... the difficulty there was that the age range of the pupils was 10 to 14.¹³⁰

Staff came and went, and the reasons behind departures were not made public either to pupils¹³¹ or to other staff. David Hanson was not told of the reasons behind the departure of at least two abusers who were fellow teachers.

126 'Teaching at Gordonstoun's prep school', *The Critic*, 23 January 2020.

127 *Written statement of John Findlay* (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985-91; Gordonstoun, 1991-6), at WIT.001.001.9906, p.5, paragraph 18.

128 *Written statement of David Hanson* (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at WIT-1-000000602, p.6, paragraph 25.

129 *Transcript, day 233*: David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.71.

130 *Transcript, day 226*: 'Colin' (former pupil, Morrison's Academy, 1958-68), at TRN-8-000000017, pp.50-1.

131 See, for example, the *written statement of 'Jane'* (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at WIT.001.001.7327, p.13, paragraph 57.

Routine

Routine was always important at Aberlour and pervaded all aspects of the day. The 1958 Prospectus for Wester Elchies sets out the daily routine as shown in the photo:¹³²

DAILY ROUTINE AT ABERLOUR HOUSE	
(Routine at Wester Elchies House is modified to suit the needs of the younger children.)	
7.30	Rising Bell.
8.00	Breakfast.
8.50-11.00	Morning Assembly followed by three school periods of forty minutes each.
11.00-11.30	Mid-morning break with P.T. and agility exercises.
11.30	Milk and bread-and-butter.
11.40-1.05	Two school periods.
1.15	Lunch.
1.50-2.30	Rest period in Assembly Room with reading aloud.
2.30-3.45	Afternoon activities—Rugby Football (Soccer at the Junior House) or Cricket, Field work (survey, etc.) and Practical work on the estate.
3.45	Wash and cold shower.
4.00	Milk and bread-and-butter.
4.20-5.45	Two school periods.
6.00	High Tea.
6.30-7.20	Evening activities or free-time.
7.20	Prayers.
7.30-8.00	Bed according to age.
In the summer term, afternoon school is at 2.30 and activities at 4.30.	

Aberlour House, daily routine

That document made no mention of the morning run that pupils had to do each day, but it was always part of the Aberlour schedule and that continued to be the

norm in the 1970s (and beyond), as 'James' described:

Every morning, regardless of the weather or the time of year, before we did anything else, we were made to put our shorts and gym kit on and go for a run outside. It maybe only took five minutes to run around the triangle, but it was their way to try and toughen us up. We were then made to take a shower, then a cold shower, and get dressed and go for breakfast. We then had school classes through the day.¹³³

Mealtimes were routine:

After our meal we took it in turns to gather up the dirty plates and cutlery and clear the tables. Every day after lunch we would line up in the queue as we were allowed to take one sweet from the Quality Street tin. That was the only sweet really that we were allowed.¹³⁴

'Pauline' said much the same about life in the 1980s:

There was a strict routine at the school, with morning runs, cold baths (after warm showers), and chores for all. For example, every day after breakfast the children swept the floors in the dormitories, classrooms, dining hall, and corridors. We learnt that the rules were to be followed and if they were broken, then there would be punishment: a valuable lesson in discipline, whether we appreciated it at the time or not.¹³⁵

This was the norm throughout Aberlour's existence.

132 1958 Prospectus, Wester Elchies (Preparatory School for Gordonstoun), at SGV-000067152, p.9.

133 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun, 1975-8), at TRN-8-000000022, p.20.

134 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun, 1975-8), at TRN-8-000000022, p.21.

135 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Pauline' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1978-83; Gordonstoun, 1986-8), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.51-2.

Guides

To its credit, Aberlour always seems to have tried to ensure that new pupils were properly introduced to the school. David Hanson recalled that a new child 'was allocated an appropriate pupil guide who would, until the new pupil was confident, provide an introduction to life in the school. Quite often, the new child and the guide became firm friends.'¹³⁶

That was certainly the experience of many applicants, for example 'James', who remembered that 'all the new boys ... were allocated one of the senior boys who showed us around and who we shadowed for a couple of weeks until we learned where everything was, what the format was, and what we were supposed to do'.¹³⁷

However, the system could fail, with unfortunate consequences. 'Jane' remembered:

There were all these rules and regulations and it was very difficult to comprehend the sense of them. There was also the feeling that I didn't fit in and I wasn't good enough ... I had the wrong accent and my parents were not rich. There was a sense that everybody understood the system, but I didn't.¹³⁸

Her intended guide 'was unwell so she hadn't returned to school ... and I don't think anything was done to replace her. I

remember some of the older girls being very sweet and trying to help me. They were aware of how lonely it could be.'¹³⁹

It was the pupils, not the staff, who noticed there was a problem and tried to help.

**'I had the wrong accent
and my parents were not
rich. There was a sense
that everybody understood
the system, but I didn't.'**

Discipline

At Aberlour the approach to discipline was different from that of the other junior schools in the case study. Corporal punishment does not seem to have been the norm. It was available but, on the evidence, was deployed infrequently as compared with the other schools. When used, it was mostly administered by the headmaster with either a cane or a slipper. Witnesses from the early 1970s recalled other teachers giving canings on occasion but felt corporal punishment was becoming less frequent by then.¹⁴⁰ That said, in the early 1970s, 'James' was slapped in the face, in front of an entire class of pupils, by a teacher who, after the boy had run away, complained he had 'wasted his Saturday afternoon because he had been out looking for me and he had been sent the

136 [Written statement of David Hanson](#) (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at WIT-1-000000602, p.9, paragraph 48.

137 [Written statement of 'James'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun, 1975-8), at WIT-1-000000374, pp.3-4, paragraph 14.

138 [Written statement of 'Jane'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at WIT.001.001.7327, pp.4-5, paragraph 18.

139 [Written statement of 'Jane'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at WIT.001.001.7327, pp.4-5, paragraphs 18-19.

140 [Transcript, day 232](#): read-in statement of 'Christian' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1968-73; Gordonstoun, 1973-7), at TRN-8-000000023, p.156.

wrong way'.¹⁴¹ 'James' explained that what he remembered was 'being embarrassed getting slapped in front of the whole class. The embarrassment was worse than the pain.'¹⁴² Slapping a child in the face should, however, never have happened, whether in front of the rest of the class or not. Nor should 'James' have been embarrassed in this way.

The school's preferred method of seeking to instil discipline was to use 'a system of "pluses and minuses" (although the names changed over the years) for good deeds and minor infringements'.¹⁴³ Repeated breaches could result in a variety of punishments, which John Findlay described as follows:

If you got three failures in a week you had to do chores for the entire weekend ... One of the other punishments at school was standing in the hall. I spent a long time standing in that hall. There was a grandfather clock that used to tick loudly ... To this day I hate ticking noises. If you got six failures in one week you were beaten. The headmaster did that ... in [his] study. It was a case of hands on the desk, your butt sticking out, and literally six of the best. It was done with your shorts on.¹⁴⁴

In the early 1990s, chores for misdemeanours were stopped altogether. Other forms of discipline were used, such as being

required to memorise poetry or being put in detention.

Senior pupils did not have any official role in disciplining children, as happened commonly in some other schools. The role of 'Officers' – the Aberlour name for prefects – was, rather, to advise younger pupils; they were 'there to administer and guide'.¹⁴⁵

'Sarah' recalled the rules of behaviour as being fairly basic, such as 'being in the right place at the right time, on time, being kind to each other, that kind of thing'.¹⁴⁶

David Hanson referred to the unwritten Aberlour 'way of life' involving the '10 Rs, namely, reading, writing, arithmetic, respect, responsibility, reliability, resourcefulness, resolve, restraint, and remorse'.¹⁴⁷

A spartan existence

A consistent theme in the evidence was that the school was spartan in both environmental and emotional terms. 'James' said: 'Aberlour was cold and unloving. It wasn't an environment conducive for young children to learn. There was nothing about the school that was particularly positive. I imagine that life at Aberlour boarding school was like living in a borstal'.¹⁴⁸ 'Angelo', whose time at Aberlour postdated that of 'James', also felt

141 [Written statement of 'James'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971–4; Gordonstoun, 1975–8), at WIT-1-000000374, pp.11–12, paragraph 50.

142 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971–4; Gordonstoun, 1975–8), at TRN-8-000000022, p.31.

143 [Written statement of David Hanson](#) (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at WIT-1-000000602, p.9, paragraph 46.

144 [Written statement of John Findlay](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985–91; Gordonstoun, 1991–6), at WIT.001.001.9906, p.15, paragraphs 62–4.

145 [Written statement of 'Benjamin'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979–80; Gordonstoun, 1980–5), at WIT-1-000000453, p.8, paragraph 40.

146 [Transcript, day 230](#): 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983–7; Gordonstoun, 1987–92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.23.

147 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.75.

148 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971–4; Gordonstoun, 1975–8), at TRN-8-000000022, p.31.

that Aberlour resembled a borstal or a camp for juvenile offenders.¹⁴⁹

Ice formed on the inside of windows, which were kept open, and snow fell on the boys' beds in the 1970s.¹⁵⁰ 'Pauline' recalled that 'the dormitories had no carpets, the heating didn't always work, and the food was the same every week, at least for the first years I was there until the chef changed'.¹⁵¹ Likewise, 'Sarah' felt that 'looking back as an adult, you think crikey. You know, to have children living in that kind of environment ... obviously the idea was that it was for their good and to character build, but it was really quite harsh, actually'.¹⁵²

'Aberlour was cold and unloving.'

'Jane' felt the word spartan was too complimentary. Whilst acknowledging how fine the Aberlour main building looked from the outside, her view was:

it's a lie, because ... the state of the interior is, oh, at a completely different level. It was really quite squalid, particularly for the boys ... you know, the boys would kind of clean themselves in the sinks ... 'spartan' sounds quite clean ... particularly for the boys ... the damp and ... just the experience, particularly in the shower rooms ... did not feel spartan but decrepit.¹⁵³

Little changed over time, it appears. Even as late as 1990 the windows still never shut properly.¹⁵⁴ In fairness to Toby Coghill, when he was appointed as the new headmaster in 1964 he recognised that there was 'considerable modernisation to be done both to the buildings and to the teaching programmes'.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the spartan ethos remained fundamentally the same.



Aberlour House, interior

As captured in the 'resourcefulness' and 'resolve' aspects of David Hanson's 10 Rs, self-reliance remained the order of the day and much - probably too much - was expected of young children. 'Jane' explained it this way:

149 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Angelo' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.89.

150 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Angelo' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.89.

151 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Pauline' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1978-83; Gordonstoun, 1986-8), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.51-2.

152 [Transcript, day 230](#): 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, pp.13-15.

153 [Transcript, day 233](#): 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, p.8.

154 [Written statement of 'Donald'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1990-2), at WIT-1-000001252, p.9, paragraph 40.

155 Letter from Toby Coghill, dated 9 January 1965, at SGV-000067152, p.35.

‘Junior boys were treated as slaves and errand boys for the older boys.’

But just the sort of idea that, you know, one member of staff taking us for quite a kind of rigorous two- to three-night camping trip on their own, you know, as a mother myself I’m just completely shocked ... Completely shocked. And just that we were cooking for ourselves and ... it seemed really ... quite a lot to be expecting of us aged 11.¹⁵⁶

The assumption that young children would simply cope helped to establish a culture whereby they could not ‘show weakness or talk about feelings’.¹⁵⁷ Children were not allowed to do so in Aberlour and that continued at Gordonstoun, certainly in the decades before the 1990s.

Bullying

There appears to have been less bullying at Aberlour than at other schools in this case study, but it was not absent. Some applicants, such as ‘Jane’, thought ‘there wasn’t bullying or anything like that ... I think we really reached out for one another.’¹⁵⁸ Others had a very different experience. ‘Sarah’ said: ‘I was bullied a fair bit ... I would say you always have an awareness of there being bullying between other children’.¹⁵⁹ ‘Donald’ felt he was ‘bullied reasonably often’ and ‘teased for not being sporty and ... for having a Scottish accent’.¹⁶⁰ He also recalled a boy being

ostracised because he was identified as a ‘softer character’.¹⁶¹

Fagging was not part of the Aberlour tradition, unlike at some other boarding schools. Nonetheless, senior pupils did, at times, take advantage of some junior pupils. ‘Sarah’, referring to the 1980s, said:

There was the classic, traditional boarding school bullshit of junior kids being made to run errands for older kids ... Girls were more insidious and cunning and it’s all to do with social standing and friendship groups. I don’t remember a fagging system for the girls. With boys it was much more physical and power orientated. Junior boys were treated as slaves and errand boys for the older boys.¹⁶²

1990-9

Toby Coghill retired in 1989 and was replaced by a new headmaster, Brian Head, who was ‘quite a jovial, approachable character’.¹⁶³ For reasons that remain unclear, he was dismissed at the end of 1990, when David Hanson took over as an interim head until the appointment of John Caithness in spring 1992. There are hints, from one Gordonstoun document,¹⁶⁴ that Brian Head intended to institute change, but in the absence of Aberlour records it is

156 Transcript, day 233: ‘Jane’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.22-3.

157 Transcript, day 230: ‘Sarah’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.23.

158 Transcript, day 233: ‘Jane’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.12-14.

159 Transcript, day 230: ‘Sarah’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.25.

160 Written statement of ‘Donald’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1990-2), at WIT-1-000001252, p.26, paragraph 125.

161 Written statement of ‘Donald’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1990-2), at WIT-1-000001252, p.10, paragraph 45.

162 Written statement of ‘Sarah’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at WIT-1-000000751, pp.11-12, paragraph 50.

163 Written statement of ‘Donald’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1990-2), at WIT-1-000001252, p.26, paragraph 25.

164 See minutes of the Common Room Meeting, 27 November 1990, at GOR-000005609.

impossible to know whether the regime at Aberlour materially altered. David Hanson said, in evidence: 'I don't think I changed anything.'¹⁶⁵

He did, however, recall that once the abuse of a pupil in 1990 by Derek Jones, a teacher of English (see [Abuse at Aberlour](#) chapter), was better understood, his own thinking changed; he began to see that there was a potential for children to be abused, and there came to be 'an increased awareness ... and a greater separation of boarding and teaching staff',¹⁶⁶ which meant the duty teaching staff stopped putting children to bed and getting them up in the morning.

However, given the fundamental changes to pastoral care introduced at Gordonstoun by Mark Pyper following his appointment in 1990, including his supervision of Aberlour, it is difficult to believe that any child protection concerns were not shared with headmasters and the Aberlour governors from that point on, just as happened with the Gordonstoun board. Mark Pyper's reports actively highlighted what he called 'THE DOWNSIDE', in other words bad pupil behaviour.¹⁶⁷ Critically, he also flagged up the existence of a UK Act of Parliament, namely the Children Act 1989. As he reported to the Gordonstoun board in 1991, 'although it does not yet apply to Scotland, I have thought it prudent for us to become aware of what is happening', and he advised

that the 'Act requires the proprietor and the person responsible for the conduct of an independent school which accommodates a child, to safeguard and promote the child's welfare'.¹⁶⁸

The timing of this fundamental change in approach, embracing modern forms of pastoral care and rethinking policies and governance with child protection in mind, was broadly in line with the timing of similar changes at other schools in this case study. It may be a reasonable inference that in Aberlour's last years as a separate school, and as amalgamation with Gordonstoun grew closer, processes and input from Mark Pyper aimed at child protection became increasingly apparent. This must have been the case by 2004, when 'it proved impossible to run a viable school at Aberlour'¹⁶⁹ and the new Aberlour House relocated to the Gordonstoun campus.

Positive aspects

Some former pupils who gave evidence had entirely positive experiences at Aberlour.¹⁷⁰ I accept it likely that their experiences reflect the views of those who, like 'Benjamin', were well suited to the experiential system which included so much education that was adventurous and took place outdoors. 'You could play sport, run around the countryside of the Scottish mountains. You were with like-minded people, and my experience of

165 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.78.

166 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.84.

167 See, for example, Appendix to Headmaster's report to the Gordonstoun Board, February 1992, at GOR-000002919, p.9.

168 Headmaster's Report to Governors, Autumn term 1991, at GOR-000002972, p.10.

169 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.76.

170 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Benjamin' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022; and [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Mary' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022.

Aberlour was that it was a wonderful place and I had a fantastic year there.’¹⁷¹

Others found positives in their experience notwithstanding the spartan lifestyle, and highlighted how staff could make a real difference. ‘Pauline’ said:

despite all that, I felt at home and well cared for. The teachers were kind and encouraging and we had a matron who was our mother away from home. It may sound as if it might have been a harsh life but at the same time it was wonderful. We had expeditions, plenty of sports, amazing music and drama productions as well as the character-building lessons that life at Aberlour House provided.¹⁷²

David Hanson was universally praised by former pupils. So were some of the matrons.¹⁷³ Bedwetting, for example, often badly handled in other schools, was dealt with compassionately and without ridicule by staff. ‘James’ remembered, from the early 1970s, that the ‘matron, whose name was possibly Miss Potts, was a nice smiley person. We could go to see her after breakfast if there was something wrong. Quite often we would make things up just so we could go to the sanatorium just to get some TLC.’¹⁷⁴

I have no doubt that the sincere intention of such staff was to create ‘a small family

atmosphere community where children were regarded as young people rather than names on a list’.¹⁷⁵ For some pupils, that was the result. However, the experiences of others – and of some of those who also had positive memories – were of being abused by staff, a state of affairs that persisted over decades. Aberlour could also be a far cry from the idyll of a happy family home.

Aberlour could also be a far cry from the idyll of a happy family home.

Response to evidence about the regime

David Hanson was deeply affected by the evidence of abuse at the school to which he had dedicated his career for some 36 years and for which he had such deep affection. He agreed that the discovery of the abuse of John Findlay by Derek Jones in 1990 had dealt a hammer blow.¹⁷⁶

He acknowledged that both he and the Aberlour regime had been naive, and that he had not thought about things he should have considered. With hindsight he recognised that ‘established written policies, updated regularly, all manner of things are probably a very good idea’.¹⁷⁷

171 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Benjamin’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979–80; Gordonstoun, 1980–5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.58.

172 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Pauline’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1978–83; Gordonstoun, 1986–8), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.51–2.

173 See, for example, [Transcript, day 233](#): ‘Jane’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979–81; Gordonstoun, 1981–5), at TRN-8-000000024, p.12.

174 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘James’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971–4; Gordonstoun, 1975–8), at TRN-8-000000022, p.18.

175 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.76.

176 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.84.

177 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.90.

‘It remains everyone’s duty to be alert to possible signs, symptoms and indicators that all may not be well in a young person’s life.’

Gordonstoun did not challenge the accounts of abuse given by former pupils. Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), while careful to emphasise the separate nature of Aberlour before 1999, accepted that, in relation to Aberlour pupils who suffered abuse,

Gordonstoun absolutely has a moral responsibility for its pupils, and many of those who suffered abuse at Aberlour House did come on to be Gordonstoun pupils. It is one of the reasons that we have sought where we can to provide support to them, but also to provide an apology ... In relation to Aberlour House we have taken the decision that, because the Inquiry doesn’t have anybody appearing before it who can give that apology, then we will give it.¹⁷⁸

Helpfully, Lisa Kerr also sent a letter to the Inquiry in which she provided updates on a number of areas covered in her first day of evidence, in March 2021. She highlighted that

regardless of the legal or even moral position, we understand the focus must be on getting the information the Inquiry needs in order to ensure a response for applicants. Therefore, we are now actively seeking to identify living individuals who were responsible for the running of Aberlour House pre-1999.¹⁷⁹

That led to the Inquiry receiving a letter from Professor Bryan Williams, the Chair of Governors at Aberlour between 1994 and

1999, and Chairman of Gordonstoun from 1994 to 2015. In it, he wrote:

I am Emeritus Professor of Social Work at the University of Dundee, having retired from full-time academic employment in 2009. Among my previous responsibilities was ultimate oversight of the Scottish Government’s national child protection training programme.

As someone whose professional life has been concerned with understanding and researching the nature, causation and effective intervention in cases of the abuse of children and young people and helping others to acquire essential skills in recognition and prevention, it has been a great sadness to learn of the past events now being investigated by the Inquiry. Together, we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to ensuring that such examples of unkindness, cruelty and the abuse of adult power and privilege can never reoccur in this way. Modern forms of pastoral care, proper governance, and professional accountability can go far towards this end but it remains everyone’s duty to be alert to possible signs, symptoms and indicators that all may not be well in a young person’s life.

Whilst we cannot change the past, we can and must acknowledge the lifetime hurt to which such experience in early life have given rise and accept collective responsibility for ensuring that everything is done to prevent their recurrence. As such, and on behalf of the whole school community, I wish to place

178 Transcript, day 216: Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.25.

179 Letter to the Chair of SCAI, dated 5 May 2021, at GOR-000004487.

on record my profound regret that any abuse occurred at Aberlour House in the past and to issue a heartfelt apology to any person who suffered harm whilst resident there.¹⁸⁰

I am satisfied that these apologies are genuine.

Conclusions about the regime

Aberlour was a school set up with the best of intentions, and for many children it could be a place of adventure and fun. Its approach to discipline, particularly the absence of pupil-enforced sanction, was in many ways enlightened. However, prior to the events of 1990 and the shattering of the illusion that it was, for every pupil, a safe and happy family environment, it was also a school governed and operated amateurishly.

Assumption and naivety were the norm and allowed inappropriate practices, such as nudity and sharing tents with staff, to become normalised. Poor leadership by a headmaster in place, unchallenged, for a quarter of a century meant that there was no awareness of the need for there

to be established processes aimed at ensuring pastoral care and child protection. Instead, there was a misguided focus on a make-do-and-mend mentality to keep his and the school's reputation intact.

Such an approach, in the absence of adequate oversight at any level, allowed opportunistic abusers to take full advantage of vulnerable children. It also meant that when abuse was discovered, lessons were not learned, and no meaningful change was implemented. As a result, on the evidence, abuse by teachers was allowed to recur throughout the 1970s and 1980s, right up until 1990, with the staff involved simply being eased out, potentially to teach in other schools.

The same shortcomings in leadership also meant that a spartan and, for some, harsh environment, lacking the emotional support required for young children, persisted. That meant children could not easily share their concerns which, in some instances, allowed cruelty by pupils to go unnoticed, particularly when there were shortcomings in adult supervision.

180 Letter to the Chair of SCAI, dated 22 September 2021, at GOR-000004682.

4 Abuse at Aberlour

Children were abused at Aberlour in a variety of ways, principally by teaching staff, although there was some evidence of children themselves engaging in abusive conduct. A naive approach to the management of an underfunded school, and an associated absence of proper processes and oversight, allowed this to happen. Assumption that all would be well was the basis on which Toby Coghill allowed the school to be run between 1964 and 1989. It was not until the 1990s that modern child protection practices began to be introduced, although the poor practices and absence of child protection that had become normalised over the decades of his headship meant that abuse continued. It is also apparent that protection of the reputation of the school, and of the headmaster, lay behind what were inadequate responses to discoveries that children had been abused.

Sexual, physical, and emotional abuse was experienced by applicants.

Sexual abuse

Aberlour had a high proportion of sexually abusive staff, who took full advantage of the opportunities the inadequate regime allowed them. This was evident from the 1970s until 1990. The common theme was that staff had uncontrolled and unsupervised

access to children in a regime where the need to consider child protection simply did not register.

That is obvious from practices that were seen as acceptable, such as staff and children being naked together. Naked river swimming in the Spey involving staff and boys was taking place as late as the 1990s, according to 'Donald'.¹⁸¹ Prior to the introduction of co-education in 1973, boys swam naked in the school swimming pool,¹⁸² and even after that, nude swimming for the girls was at times encouraged by the headmaster.¹⁸³

Aberlour had a high proportion of sexually abusive staff.

Toby Coghill also engaged inappropriately with the female pupils himself. 'Birthday baths' were part of school life:

The child would be stripped and taken to the bath and thrown in. Thank God my birthday was in August. It was mainly by other children, but Sir Toby would come up and do that to some of the girls. He would take a limb or two ankles. It was usually the older girls. We talked about how strange that he would come up and assist with certain girls. I found him quite scary.¹⁸⁴

181 Written statement of 'Donald' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1990-2), at WIT-1-000001252, p.14, paragraph 64.

182 Transcript, day 233: David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.69-70.

183 See also *The Aberlour regime (1937-99)* chapter, and footnote 119.

184 Written statement of 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at WIT.001.001.7327, p.12, paragraph 53.

‘Why is a grown man watching boys shower?’ Why are adults watching us?’

With such leadership it is perhaps unremarkable that it was also normal for staff to be present in the showers even though some of the children found it disturbing. ‘Angelo’ described how a ‘teacher watches us in the showers often. There’s already a matron there to supervise us. Why is a grown man watching boys shower? ... Why are adults watching us?’¹⁸⁵

These were obvious questions, and they should have been addressed by those responsible for running the school. They were not. It seems to have been assumed that nothing untoward would be happening. David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001), acting head at the time, thought it would just be an ‘unwritten rule’ not to do such things.¹⁸⁶ As a result, the practice continued even after Toby Coghill’s departure, so ingrained was it in school life.

John Findlay remembered that the English teacher who abused him and others watched the boys in the shower and would often have his camera with him.¹⁸⁷ ‘Donald’ remembered a gap student’s surprise in the early 1990s that

there always had to be someone supervising showers. Male and female teachers would sit watching us. I remember Matron Allison used to supervise the showers. That was her job. I don’t know the set up for the girls’ showers,

but I would imagine there were male and female members of staff supervising them too ... There was a graduate assistant aged 21 ... who was working at the school. One day I was among the first pupils back in after games. He asked what we did next and I said that we had a shower. He said he would come back in 20 minutes but I told him he had to watch us having a shower. He was stunned by that idea. There would be 50-year-old members of staff doing the same.¹⁸⁸

There were the same shortcomings in the school’s approach to expeditions where the idea that a teacher might share a tent with a pupil had been normalised. I accept that there can be situations where the inherent risks involved may be managed, but appropriate child-safe risk assessment was not happening at Aberlour. David Hanson, for example, knew it would not be ‘proper’ to share a tent with a female pupil but never thought that rules were necessary as it never occurred to him that doing so might be a problem.¹⁸⁹ That may have been so, but what about all the other members of staff who might be involved in camping?

John Conroy

An English teacher, John Conroy was a serial abuser who was dismissed by the school in 1974 after it was discovered that he had been abusing at least four boys. Three are

185 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Angelo’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976–80; Gordonstoun, 1980–5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.88. The teacher was Mr Harding.

186 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.68–9.

187 [Transcript, day 232](#): John Findlay (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985–91; Gordonstoun, 1991–6), at TRN-8-000000023, p.17.

188 [Written statement of ‘Donald’](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1990–2), at WIT-1-000001252, p.12, paragraph 55.

189 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.64.

known about only from correspondence between the parents of the fourth boy and Toby Coghill. In 1995, Coghill wrote:

As to John Conroy: as soon as I received the first intimation of his activities [from a parent who had been told by his son about it during the Christmas holidays, six months after leaving Aberlour House], I summoned Conroy to see me in the presence of Mr Kempe [the Gordonstoun headmaster]. He was interviewed at length throughout the morning of that first day of term, during which he denied all accusations. I made telephone calls to the schools of the other boys who had been named by the parent and asked the respective Housemasters to inquire of their boys concerning the allegations. Both confirmed the story was true. Conroy was dismissed forthwith – to the total puzzlement of staff and students alike, with whom he was popular ... Conroy was advised by me and Mr Kempe that he should not expect to teach again as we should be informing the SED [Scottish Education Department]. This we did immediately.¹⁹⁰

Toby Coghill, in the same correspondence, claimed not to remember the fourth boy, 'James', whose unchallenged evidence I accept. His careful and detailed account provides a shocking sense of Conroy's behaviour. Conroy, in common with other abusers, took advantage of a vulnerable pupil who found the spartan Aberlour lifestyle alien, and was lonely and unhappy:

It all started probably before I was 11. He would have been in his 30s and was English. The first time anything happened was in his classroom. He asked me to stay behind after a class. He was at his desk and asked me to stand next to him. He was always very warm and friendly. I think that first time all that

happened was he hugged me. To be honest, I didn't think there was anything wrong with this. It progressed after that.

He also taught photography so had access to the darkroom where the photographs were developed. That was where the abuse really started. There were virtually no lights in there so it was almost completely dark. This was where he started touching me and it continued for a couple of years. Initially it was outside my trousers but it progressed and he actually touched my naked penis. He was always very nice to me, gave me sweets and he allowed me to walk his dog. He was someone who gave me a lot of love and attention, something I didn't have. The abuse probably happened once every week after it started. He abused me in the darkroom, in his classroom, in his house, in the car, and on camping trips. It was always the same thing that he did to me in these places. He touched me but never asked me to touch him.

There was one time when I was in the sanatorium for around a week or possibly two weeks. I had pneumonia, probably from when we were canoeing and I capsized. He came to visit me in the sanatorium and he again put his hand under the covers when I was in my bed and touched and abused me.

He would come into the dorm sometimes during the day and sometimes it was in the evenings and just tell me to go with him. As far as I remember it was mostly in the evenings. That was when he took me into the darkroom, which was on the same floor as the dorms. Any of the teachers could come into the dorm for no particular reason. I saw other teachers come into the dorm and they took other boys out. I think this was usually in the evening. I can't remember who these teachers were or who the boys were. I can't say if it was the

190 Letter from Toby Coghill to parents of former pupil, 2 May 1995, at WIT-3-000000493, pp.15-16.

same boys that were picked out. I am sure all the boys knew what the teachers were doing but we didn't openly discuss it. I wasn't abused by any other teacher and I didn't see any other boy getting abused.

We occasionally went on camping trips at the weekend ... The English teacher came with us. There were probably other staff there but I can't remember. He took me into his tent and abused me. The abuse was the same as what happened in the darkroom. He was very clever when he was abusing me in respect that there was never anyone else there. It was always just him and me. He never really spoke to me when he was touching me.¹⁹¹

'James' added that although there was nothing concrete, his 'intuition' told him that other boys who vied for Conroy's attention and were also getting treats from him were being abused too.¹⁹² It seems likely that other boys suffered in the same way and during similar periods as 'James'. It is reasonable to infer that there were more than just the three others referred to in Toby Coghill's letter, given Conroy's determined, confident, and consistent conduct. It was another failing of Aberlour House that, having discovered the abuse, the school did not make further inquiries with the children with a view to supporting them and finding out whether it was more widespread.

When Gordonstoun responded, very properly, to a 2015 article highlighting abuse at Aberlour, former pupils were invited to make contact if they knew of similar

complaints.¹⁹³ One reply to the school, from a pupil of the same era as 'James' and which was passed on to the police, was instructive:

During my time at AH (early 1970s) at least 3 members of staff left for inappropriate behaviour towards pupils, though of course that was not mentioned at the time ... One of the cases happened on our after-exam expedition, when (incredible to think now) the member of staff shared a 2-man tent with the boy ... I think the world WAS more innocent/naive in those days - as 10 year olds we could go off camping for the weekend unsupervised ... the abuse was fondling. I remember the boy discussing it back at the school at the table at supper, and his embarrassment, and he then had the courage to complain, and action was taken.¹⁹⁴

'James' did not tell any other boys about his abuse while he was still at Aberlour, so this must have been another child. It is clear, however, that Toby Coghill found out that 'James' had been abused, given what followed shortly after he moved on to Gordonstoun. 'James' was called to meet Toby Coghill in the headmaster's drawing room there. Asked about what had taken place, he opened up and was thanked by Toby Coghill.

What happened next, however, was disgraceful. A fortnight later, 'James' was called to his housemaster and shown a letter that Toby Coghill had written. 'It read that I had been involved with a teacher and that I was probably a homosexual.'¹⁹⁵ 'James'

191 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun 1975-8), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.28-30.

192 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun 1975-8), at TRN-8-000000022, p.30.

193 '[Gordonstoun junior school linked to child sex abuse allegations](#)', The Observer, 12 April 2015.

194 Letter to Gordonstoun from former pupil, 19 April 2015, at GOR-000004255, p.1.

195 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun 1975-8), at TRN-8-000000022, p.39.

found that traumatising, particularly as the housemaster, Patrick Llewellyn-Davies, also had a reputation amongst the pupils for being an abuser.¹⁹⁶ That trauma remains evident today, as can be seen from the contents of his statement.

Toby Coghill's response more generally was also unsatisfactory. Whilst, in his letter to the child's mother, he is clear that Conroy was dismissed and notice was to be given to ensure that he did not teach again, whether anything was actually done cannot be ascertained. It appears instead that, having left Aberlour, Conroy moved to the Middle East and continued to teach in Oman.¹⁹⁷

What can be said with certainty, however, is that Aberlour did not change. While Toby Coghill suggested he had revealed to two staff and the Gordonstoun headmaster what had happened, more widely the abuse was covered up. All David Hanson knew was that there had been an unspecified incident, which to this day he has never been told about.¹⁹⁸ And no steps were taken to ensure that the school as a whole learnt any lesson from the discoveries that multiple teachers were behaving inappropriately. That was deplorable and speaks volumes about the lack of priority being afforded to child protection.

Mr Harding

Two applicants remembered Mr Harding as a sinister and sexually inappropriate English teacher in the late 1970s. 'Jane' found him concerning for two reasons. First, because he

was the only teacher who would come into the girls' dorm while they were undressing and stood out as the only one who would do that.¹⁹⁹ Second, because he 'was there for the first year I was there, for two terms. Then he just went missing and didn't return. That's what tended to happen. I subsequently discovered he'd been grooming young boys ... It does give the impression that if abuse was disclosed Sir Toby did something about it.'²⁰⁰

Her assessment was confirmed by the evidence of 'Angelo'. Not only did he recall Harding watching the boys in the showers, but he specifically remembered one day where he was

playing outside with friends under trees. The teacher calls me in as if I've done something wrong. He takes me into his study and draws the curtains in the middle of the day. He gives me sherry to drink. I'm close to 12 years old. He makes me feel special in glowing school reports and tells me I have a gift for writing. I like him very much, but years later there are parts of our relationship that concern me that might be described as grooming. I don't feel that his behaviour towards me was appropriate.²⁰¹

It was not appropriate, and I am satisfied that it was all part of a grooming process. Against this background, the fact that Harding disappeared may indicate that he was dismissed for improper behaviour in relation to boys. While, as 'Jane' acknowledged, Toby Coghill appears to have been willing to take some action, it was not good enough.

196 See also the [Abuse at Gordonstoun](#) chapter.

197 Letter from solicitors, 26 January 1995, at WIT-3-000000493, p.30.

198 [Transcript, day 233](#): David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at TRN-8-000000024, p.85.

199 [Transcript, day 233](#): 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.15 and 18.

200 [Written statement of 'Jane'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at WIT.001.001.7327, p.13, paragraph 57.

201 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Angelo' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.88.

Staff were not told, processes were not put in place, and the risk of children being abused remained as strong as ever.

Once again, removal of the problem appears to have been seen as all that was required; that would protect reputations and prevent repetition by that individual, but it failed to address the need to support the children who had been subjected to his abusive conduct or the need to identify and disseminate the lessons to be learned. Staff were not told, processes were not put in place, and the risk of children being abused remained as strong as ever.

The exchange student

As already noted, it was common at Aberlour to use young men who had just finished their own schooling essentially as cheap labour for a year before they moved on in their lives. Some were from the UK, but others came from Australia and New Zealand. 'Sarah's' abuser was one of the latter and appointed because he was a good rugby player and a family friend of the Coghills. Despite having no qualifications and being only 19 or 20 years of age, he was also appointed to teach religious education.

This young man raped 'Sarah' when she was 13 years old. It happened in the second half of the 1980s, while she was on an Aberlour expedition for final-year pupils. He was the sole supervising member of staff. His actions were planned and were part of a wider course of conduct since he had already

formed a relationship with another female pupil in her year. 'Sarah' and her classmates considered him to be 'cool'²⁰² and they were excited about going on the camping trip with him.²⁰³

There were insufficient tents – possibly by design on the part of the young teacher so that pupils would have to share with him. He took condoms with him on the trip and did so notwithstanding that, as an Aberlour final-year expedition, this was a trip for 13 year olds. That is, it was a trip for children. On the first night he selected 'Sarah' and two other girls to share his tent and gave them rum to drink.²⁰⁴ Once lights were out, and 'Sarah' was asleep, he began to touch her, unnerving the other two girls, who left the tent. He then raped 'Sarah', wearing one of his condoms.²⁰⁵ She was scared and it was painful.²⁰⁶

The traumatic nature of that experience for 'Sarah' was abundantly clear when she gave evidence. It was an appalling act of abuse. Matters worsened as she felt she could not tell anyone, and there was no mechanism at Aberlour to assist or support her to do so. Instead, what ensued was that she was bullied by girls who realised what had happened, and she had to cope with her abuser saying to her repeatedly, in the school corridor, that she would die before him and writing that on a t-shirt possibly to intimidate her; unsurprisingly, she was still a child and

202 Transcript, day 230: 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.28.

203 Transcript, day 230: 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.29.

204 The man evidently thought it was acceptable to give the children alcohol; he also bought alcoholic drinks for some of the group, at a pub, later on in the trip. Written statement of 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at WIT-1-000000751, p.14, paragraph 60.

205 Transcript, day 230: 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.31.

206 Written statement of 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at WIT-1-000000751, p.13, paragraph 58.

scared of him after the rape, remembering that on looking at a photograph:

I'm with my dad in the photo and there is a photo of me alone that my dad must have taken. He was so proud of me and he looked so happy and I looked terrible. We were standing together on the steps of the school ... I'm in a ball gown with my hair up and smiling, but my eyes are just dead. I hadn't even remembered what I looked like ... I was so scared of seeing [the exchange student] there and I didn't want to go.

I thought of all the years I didn't tell anyone because I thought I'd made it happen and it was my fault. Now I see these photographs and I see a child. I didn't tell anyone about what happened to me until my daughter was 12 and it was the realisation of looking at [her] that made me realise I had been a child and so young.²⁰⁷

'I thought of all the years I didn't tell anyone because I thought I'd made it happen and it was my fault.'

'Sarah' fairly recognised that such conduct on the part of an Aberlour teacher was not the norm; other teachers at Aberlour would not have behaved that way because on expeditions 'the other teachers always kept themselves very privately'.²⁰⁸ It is nonetheless a remarkable indictment of the school, its headmaster, and its governance that no one had any concerns about sending an unqualified, untrained,

untested, and unsupervised male teenager on an expedition with junior school children including girls, particularly, after the instances of sexual abuse which had occurred in the previous decades, including on expeditions.

Derek Jones

That inadequacy continued in the aftermath of Toby Coghill's departure in 1989. His successor, Brian Head, did not have time to effect change for he was dismissed in December 1990 for reasons that are still not clear but seem to focus on dissatisfaction, including from parents. As a result, not only was David Hanson, acting head in 1991, responsible for the reporting of matters once the further abuse was uncovered, but Toby Coghill had to become involved once again.

Derek Jones was appointed to teach English at Aberlour by Brian Head, in September 1990. At that time, it seems likely that Brian Head followed the generally inadequate appointment processes inherited from the previous regime. Jones lasted only until December 1990 when he was dismissed after it was discovered that he had given a pupil what was believed by the school to be a sleeping tablet.

The pupil was John Findlay. He came from a family with connections to Gordonstoun and Aberlour. His father had attended both schools, his children followed him, his father taught cricket at Aberlour, and the family were friends of the Coghills. John Findlay was a good sportsman and a popular boy, and still speaks warmly of both schools. He thought 'Sir Toby had a fantastic attitude'.²⁰⁹

207 [Written statement of 'Sarah'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at WIT-1-000000751, p.15, paragraphs 65-6.

208 [Transcript, day 230](#): 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.30.

209 [Transcript, day 232](#): John Findlay (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985-91; Gordonstoun, 1991-6), at TRN-8-000000023, p.8.

‘He had a torch in his mouth and he was taking pictures of me with his head under my duvet.’

None of that protected him from Derek Jones, whose inappropriate behaviour was on open view. He frequented the boys’ showers, sometimes carrying his camera. Yet no alarm bells sounded. Instead, after John Findlay had asked him for a painkiller because he had injured his toe playing rugby, Jones gave him two tablets which rendered him ‘paralysed’ but left him ‘perfectly conscious’. John Findlay described what happened next:

He put his hand on top of my duvet and sort of patted me. I thought he was just reassuring me and making sure that I was OK. He then put his right hand underneath my duvet and pulled down my boxer shorts. He then masturbated me for a period of time. I don’t know how long he did that for. It was probably minutes but it felt like hours. It was definitely not just a brief fondle. He then put his head underneath the duvet. I remember furiously fighting to move so I could knee him in the face ... I just couldn’t move. A light then came on from underneath the duvet. He had a torch. I could see the light shining through the duvet. I thought he was about to perform oral sex on me. However, that did not happen. I then heard the ‘click wind click wind click wind’ of his camera ... He had a torch in his mouth and he was taking pictures of me with his head under my duvet.²¹⁰

Once he was able to move, John Findlay told a schoolfriend and together, ultimately without success, they tried to recover the film from Jones. However, after a few weeks, John Findlay told his mother what had happened. Since her husband was away, she contacted the Coghills who ‘were brilliant ... Toby ... wanted to call the police’.²¹¹ However, Mrs Findlay wanted to speak to her husband first and once that was done, John Findlay’s father spoke to David Hanson. One or other of them thereafter phoned the police and Jones was swiftly dismissed.

The police were not involved for long. The bursar for each of Aberlour and Gordonstoun was, as John Findlay’s mother remembers, one and the same person. He persuaded the Findlays that the police were unnecessary ‘for Jones was not at the school any more and there was no way he would ever teach again’.²¹² Mrs Findlay felt he ‘had a great interest in maintaining the reputation of the schools’.²¹³ John Findlay’s parents decided for various reasons, including that they had been assured that Jones would not teach again, not to press matters.²¹⁴ John Findlay did not, thereafter, receive pastoral support from the school. On the contrary, he then had the distressing experience of an English teacher saying to him, in front of an entire class of boys, that he ‘had made it

210 [Written statement of John Findlay](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985-91; Gordonstoun, 1991-6), at WIT.001.001.9906, p.19, paragraph 77.

211 [Written statement of Clare Findlay](#), at WIT.001.002.6657, p.4, paragraph 13.

212 [Written statement of Clare Findlay](#), at WIT.001.002.6657, p.4, paragraph 15.

213 [Written statement of Clare Findlay](#), at WIT.001.002.6657, p.4, paragraph 15.

214 Police Scotland report, at PSS-000018005.

up' and that he 'had got a perfectly innocent lovely man kicked out of his job'.²¹⁵

The approach of the bursar, no doubt encouraged by others in a position of responsibility in the school, was typical of the way a number of schools in this case study handled matters when embarrassing misconduct came to light, including conduct that amounted to abuse. Protection of reputation came first. Child protection did not. Aberlour failed once again to do the obvious and make inquiries with a view to finding out whether other pupils had experienced similar conduct by Derek Jones. Nor did they ask themselves whether they were doing enough to protect children. It may have been assumed that, with Derek Jones out of the way, all was well again and would remain so. That would fit with the school's established approach but if it was so assumed, it was naive and it was redolent of a failure to recognise the need to prioritise child protection.

Protection of reputation came first. Child protection did not.

Had inquiries been made, Aberlour might well have discovered that more children had been abused by Derek Jones. Two have come forward since, and it seems likely there were others. John Findlay met one in 2015 who told him of being asked by Jones 'whether he knew how to masturbate ... then gave him a lesson before performing oral sex on him'.²¹⁶ That witness made contact

with the police in 1992, but again matters did not proceed.²¹⁷ Jones died in a car crash in Kenya in 2009.

Another applicant came forward to the Inquiry after the close of hearings to provide evidence that he too had been abused by Derek Jones. 'Donald' described meeting Jones in a corridor at night and lying that he had a stomach ache to explain being out of bed. He was taken to Jones's room, apparently for paracetamol, and then he too was drugged. His pyjamas were pulled down and photos taken before Jones performed oral sex on him. He also remembered a second sexual assault beginning in the dormitory which was only interrupted by another pupil coming in.²¹⁸

It is also clear that Jones abused elsewhere. A witness, taught by him at a prep day school in England in the late 1970s, made contact with the Inquiry to reveal that he had been sexually abused by Jones on a school canal boat trip. Jones engineered sharing a cabin with the boy, showed him pornography, and encouraged masturbation.²¹⁹ The detail of the location is of moment, for police inquiries following contact from John Findlay in 2014 revealed that some Aberlour teachers had been concerned about Derek Jones organising canal boat holidays with pupils. It raised their 'suspicions' as to whether something 'of a sexual nature' was involved – 'organising such trips seemed to be his particular speciality'.²²⁰

Aberlour, like others, was a school that was blinkered to abuse. Despite knowing of

215 [Transcript, day 232](#): John Findlay (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985-91; Gordonstoun, 1991-6), at TRN-8-000000023, p.34.

216 [Written statement of John Findlay](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985-91; Gordonstoun, 1991-6), at WIT.001.001.9906, pp.20-1, paragraph 84.

217 Police Scotland report, at PSS-000018004.

218 [Written statement of 'Donald'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1990-2), at WIT-1-000001252, pp.24-5, paragraphs 116-22.

219 [Written statement of 'Martin'](#), at WIT-1-000001098, pp.5-6, paragraphs 28-40.

220 Police Scotland report, at PSS-000027966.

repeated abuse, it failed to review its approach to child protection in response. Sexual abuse took place over and over again as a succession of teachers were appointed, abused pupils, and, on their abuse being discovered, quietly disappeared. As a result, the school's litany of failures resulted in unnecessary and significant harm to children.

‘Where was Sir Toby?’ Where indeed?

A parent of a child who was an Aberlour pupil in the 1970s wrote to Lisa Kerr in 2021. She told of her sadness at discovering that her son and his friends had been instructed to sit naked in a caravan by an expedition leader, and that one of her son's friends had been abused by a teacher. ‘What a terrible thing,’ she concluded, ‘and we did not know anything about what was going on. Where was Sir Toby?’²²¹ Where indeed?

For completeness, no sexual abuse by Aberlour pupils was reported to the Inquiry. David Hanson did, however, remember:

I was involved, at the direct request of the governors, in dealing with an incident between children in 1990. Following a tip-off from a parent I was instructed to deal with an issue involving a girl and a boy. It was thought the girl might have been about to engage in activities with a boy.²²²

It is striking that it was a parent who had to make the school aware of this. The school

lacked awareness of the possibility of abuse which could, in this instance, have in fact been happening. Relying on the notion that a small family environment would protect against and expose abuse – which is what seems to have been occurring – was never going to work.

Physical abuse

Despite there being less corporal punishment at Aberlour than at most of the other schools in this case study, it was used and, at times, was excessive and inappropriate. John Findlay, although he thought he normally deserved it, recalled being caned by Toby Coghill:

He would phone up my parents, say what I had done, and ask their permission. I remember on more than one occasion getting seven strokes because my dad had said ‘yeah, give him one from me’. Normally, I deserved it so it was fine. I don’t think I was ever caned without it being merited.²²³

Whether it was merited or not, the number of blows, adding an extra stroke on account of parental encouragement, was not justified. Also, corporal punishment was used in circumstances where it should not have been considered at all. John Findlay provided two examples.

I once got caned twice in one day. I was with a friend ... I lent him my skateboard. He fell off it going over one of the speed bumps in the drive. He cut his eye. I was caned for that. After [he] came back from hospital we had a pillow fight that night in our dormitory. I split the

221 Letter to Lisa Kerr from parent of former pupil, 18 March 2021, at GOR-000004481.

222 [Written statement of David Hanson](#) (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965–2001; acting head 1991–2), at WIT-1-000000602, p.14, paragraph 73.

223 [Written statement of John Findlay](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985–91; Gordonstoun, 1991–6), at WIT.001.001.9906, p.16, paragraph 65.

stitches in [his] eye with my pillow. I got caned again for doing that.²²⁴

It was the headmaster who, on the evidence, gave the most beatings, certainly in the 1980s. There was limited evidence of other teachers using corporal punishment in the 1970s. Two applicants, however, remembered simple violence from teachers taking place in that decade, without even a veneer of it being for disciplinary purposes. 'James' was slapped in the face in front of an entire class not so much for having run away from school but because the teacher who slapped him had had to waste his Saturday afternoon looking for the boy.²²⁵

'Angelo' was the target of a loss of control that impacted his entire dormitory:

We have been playing around as kids do getting ready for morning inspection. We have been giving each other Chinese burns for laughs, horsing around and swearing. Our teacher has been listening outside. He comes in and is angry. He gives us all adult Chinese burns himself to punish us for the swearing, I think. I just remember 12 kids sobbing and holding their forearms. He says: 'I'll show you what a real Chinese burn is like.'²²⁶

The violence and the humiliation described on both these occasions was abusive. They were assaults on primary-age children. 'James' was an unhappy 10 year old for whom only compassion and concern should have been shown. 'Angelo' was correct

when he said that Aberlour's 'standards and controls were poor'.

Violence by pupils themselves seems to have been less a part of Aberlour life than it was in many other schools, but it did happen. Bullying could be physical at times, as 'Angelo' made clear: 'I am forced to fight other kids to avoid getting beaten up. I'm forced to fight other boys. We punch and hit each other to avoid being beaten by the bullies. We are maybe 10 or 11.'²²⁷

This violence also crept into discipline issued by pupils which, to be fair to the school, was never officially sanctioned. 'Donald', talking about the early 1990s, after corporal punishment had been abolished, remembered that, having done something wrong, you could be hit and kicked by senior pupils:

you would have to go on report to one of the senior pupils. I don't know if these senior pupils were self-appointed or not. They would administer punishments. You would be hit with their fist anywhere they wanted. You could be hit in the face. I remember being hit in the stomach once. Another punishment was that they made you lean against a wall in a seated position and hold that position for a minute. In reality most people couldn't hold that position for more than 20 seconds. When you fell down you'd be kicked. I don't think there's a record kept of these punishments. I think the school staff didn't know about the punishments.²²⁸

224 [Written statement of John Findlay](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985-91; Gordonstoun, 1991-6), at WIT.001.001.9906, p.16, paragraph 67.

225 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun, 1975-8), at TRN-8-000000022, p.31. See also [The Aberlour regime \(1937-99\)](#) chapter.

226 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Angelo' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.87-8.

227 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Angelo' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.88.

228 [Written statement of 'Donald'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1990-2), at WIT-1-000001252, p.22, paragraphs 108-9.

‘I told [my mum] that if they didn't come and get me I was going to run away.’

The fact it could happen after the supposed abolition of corporal punishment at the school confirms there must have been inadequate supervision by staff.

Emotional abuse

Children were emotionally abused when exposed to sexual and physical violence. Emotional abuse, for some, was present throughout the Aberlour experience simply because of the stark environment and ethos of the school. This did not lend itself to young children who were not keen on sport or outdoor activity but who, rather, craved the warmth and love of a family environment. Aberlour did not adequately cater for or recognise their individual needs.

‘Sarah’ accepted the good intent of the school but saw flaws in its operation. Food was a problem area. She remembered younger children consistently being made to eat plates of food with ‘tears streaming down their faces’.²²⁹ Similarly, ‘Jane’ remembered children being punished if they did not finish their food: ‘Punishments tended to be standing outside in the hall, but my friend who would not finish, she had to remain there the whole rest of the day until she had finished, and I think was given a much larger portion on which to struggle with.’²³⁰

John Findlay has had a lifelong aversion to porridge, having been forced by Lady Coghill to eat it.²³¹

The approach taken by staff to children who ran away from Aberlour revealed a particularly wretched side to the school. ‘James’ was humiliated by Toby Coghill, as well as being slapped by the French teacher. His account captures the misery of being 10 years old, far away from a loving home, the cruelty of adults, and the inadequacy of Aberlour and its headmaster:

After my first Christmas holiday at home from Aberlour, when it was time to go back I really didn’t want to go. I was only 10 and I was in a bad way. I went back and later decided to write my mum a letter. I wrote it in red ink and I told her that if they didn’t come and get me by the next Saturday I was going to run away. I sneaked out of the grounds and posted it in Aberlour so the staff couldn’t read it. My parents didn’t reply and didn’t appear on the Saturday morning so when classes were going on I got on a bike and cycled away. I wrote down what I was planning on doing in my Oor Wullie annual. I got about 14 miles away on the bike when Toby Coghill caught me and drove me back to Aberlour. On the way back he told me that I had ruined the day for all the other children and the teachers because they had all been out looking for me. He never asked me why I had run away. When we got to Aberlour I was paraded in front of the whole school and I was made to apologise for what I had done. Coghill told me that on this occasion he wasn’t going to beat me. It was when he said that he wasn’t going to beat me that I became very frightened.

229 [Transcript, day 230](#): ‘Sarah’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983–7; Gordonstoun, 1987–92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.17.

230 [Transcript, day 233](#): ‘Jane’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979–81; Gordonstoun, 1981–5), at TRN-8-000000024, p.10.

231 [Written statement of John Findlay](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985–91; Gordonstoun, 1991–6), at WIT.001.001.9906, p.10, paragraph 40.

Coghill then took me into his office and called my mother and father. My mother was in tears. I spoke to my father and he asked me if I wanted him to come and take me home. Coghill was there and listening to the call so I just said that I would be all right. I learned that they hadn't seen my letter that day as they had been out. Nothing much else was said that night.

Aberlour was a completely alien environment to me. I had been brought up in a very loving home, although being Scottish it wasn't too touchy-feely. After the occasion when I ran away and Toby Coghill made me apologise to the rest of the school, that was when I started to build the wall around myself and learn how to protect myself.²³²

The child's misery should have been obvious to any member of staff. Compounding his misery by handling the matter this way should never have happened. Quite apart from anything else, it hardly accorded with the supposed 'family atmosphere' in which the school took such pride.

The same can be said of the emotional cruelty that some pupils inflicted on their fellow pupils. While part and parcel of childhood, it is something that the school should have been alive to and should have dealt with. That does not seem to have been the Aberlour way.

'Sarah's' experience was particularly harsh. She was consistently

teased and bullied at Aberlour for being local, which sounds really bizarre in a school in Scotland, but I at that time did have a Scottish accent, which wasn't particularly common

within the school, and I think ... maybe that the social standing of my family was also not the norm either ... I think those of us, the few of us who were, you know, military children and therefore only really there because the military was partly funding it, we were different.²³³

**'I was teased and bullied
at Aberlour for being local,
which sounds really bizarre
in a school in Scotland.'**

The public berating experienced by John Findlay after Derek Jones was dismissed, referred to earlier in the chapter, could also be viewed as a form of emotional abuse. At the very least, it demonstrated a woeful degree of insensitivity on the part of a teacher employed in the school as late as 1991.

Response to the evidence of abuse

The only witness who held a position of responsibility when abuse was taking place at Aberlour was David Hanson, a decent man who had given long and dedicated service to the school. I accept that he was a committed and caring teacher, liked and admired by all the applicants. He acknowledged he had been naive and found the evidence of abuse difficult to deal with. To his credit he did not deny it and even where his own memory was at odds with the evidence of other witnesses, he accepted that the things complained of could have happened.

Professor Bryan Williams, the Chair of Governors at Aberlour between 1994 and 1999, did not challenge the evidence of

232 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun, 1975-8), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.26-8.

233 [Transcript, day 230](#): 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, pp.13-14.

abuse. He wrote to the Inquiry, saying: 'it has been a great sadness to learn of the past events now being investigated by the Inquiry. Together, we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to ensuring that such examples of unkindness, cruelty, and the abuse of adult power and privilege can never reoccur in this way.'²³⁴

Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), for Gordonstoun, did not dispute the evidence either and said, in relation to abuse suffered by pupils at Aberlour, 'I think with the benefit of hindsight it is possible and it is right to ask whether those in positions of responsibility at Gordonstoun did ask enough questions.'²³⁵

Conclusions about abuse

Aberlour failed to protect children who were in its care.

It had good intentions and afforded many children positive experiences. However, it was also markedly limited in outlook and understanding. It, like David Hanson, was naive and over optimistic about its perceived success as a school. It assumed that all was well and failed to consider that that might not be so. It was assumed that children would disclose their concerns because of the family atmosphere it mistakenly thought was felt by every child. It assumed that processes

were unnecessary, and even into the early 1990s did not register the crying need for child protection until too late. It prioritised the protection of reputation and repeatedly missed opportunities to learn and put in place systems that might have prevented further abuse. So it was that abusers had free rein. Much of the fault for that lies with Toby Coghill, headmaster for 25 years. However positively committed he was to the school and to Hahn's ethos, he was blind to what he knew or should have known was happening and singularly failed to manage the school efficiently or effectively, in a way that protected children. He himself abused children. There was also a lack of oversight by the Aberlour board whose principal concern appears to have been the school's finances. I am not suggesting that the financial health of a boarding school is not important. It is. But any governing body needs to be alert to the risk of focusing on that at the expense of focusing on the fundamentally important matter of protecting the children who have been placed in its care, and being true to the trust that has been placed in it by parents and guardians. The same applied to the Gordonstoun board and headmasters of the time. Further, the connection with and input from senior school was always close, irrespective of legalities, and Lisa Kerr was right to accept that Gordonstoun also failed, just as it did, though to different extents, with its own pupils.

234 Letter to the Chair of SCAI, dated 22 September 2021, at GOR-000004682.

235 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.35.

5

The Gordonstoun regime

Summary

Notes from an HMle inspection of Gordonstoun in 2007 describe the school thus:

The ethos is based on four pillars: challenge, responsibility, service and internationalism. The school aims to encourage learning through experience and all students participate in a continuous programme of outdoor education. Each pupil undertakes at least one form of community service and there are various opportunities for students to participate in international links ... The wide range of activities offer opportunities for students to develop confidence, resilience, motivation, team working and leadership skills and an awareness of the needs of others both at home and abroad.²³⁶



Aerial view of the Round Square boarding house

This accords with Kurt Hahn's unique vision. However, it did not prevent sexual, physical, and emotional abuse of pupils taking place over decades. Lack of adequate supervision at various levels and assumptions that all must be well allowed abusers to commit abhorrent sexual acts on children the school had a duty to protect. The same lack of supervision allowed physical abuse – principally involving the abuse of children by other children – and the emotional abuse associated with sexual and physical violence to happen and to become the norm in some of the boarding houses.

Regime and leadership

The school was initially small but it grew. Until 1945, its pupil roll never exceeded 171. Through the 1950s, there was quite rapid expansion and numbers rose to the high 300s,²³⁷ exceeding 400 for the first time in 1962.

Gordonstoun, in its written and oral evidence to the Inquiry, identified the late 1960s, the 1970s, and the 1980s as periods where there was particular scope for abuse to take place because of inadequate leadership, not only within the boarding houses, but also at school management level. As Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24) candidly accepted:

²³⁶ HMle, Record of Gordonstoun visit, 4 October 2007, at SGV-000011371.

²³⁷ An HMle inspection in 1956 revealed the roll was 375, up from 330 in 1952; GOR-000003628, p.1.

‘The level of autonomy that was granted to housemasters in that era is at a level that we today would find astonishing and completely unacceptable, and it is not hard to draw a line between that and particularly the peer-to-peer bullying that some students experienced in some houses.’²³⁸

The evidence of abuse over those periods was very clear although abuse also occurred before the late 1960s and after the 1980s. The difference was that the culture of the school and its response pre-1968 and post-1989 were very different. I deal with the different eras individually, with reference to the headmasters and principals in post in each of them, agreeing with Lisa Kerr’s observations on the nature of good leadership and its importance to any organisation:

It is not just about one person. I think if we look back in the sector it will significantly have been about the culture set by one person, but good leadership of a school depends upon a strong leadership team ... And I think what I have seen from the records, particularly from the early 1990s onwards, there was a real recognition that a complex organisation – and a boarding school is an incredibly complex organisation – requires a good team of leaders.²³⁹

However, before 1990 Gordonstoun was run, in the main, by its headmaster, whose interests and priorities had a direct impact on the culture and the lives of the children. On the evidence, that did not have a negative impact in the decades when the school was run by Kurt Hahn or his contemporaries. It did, however, become a real problem from the late 1960s through to the 1980s.

Governance

For many decades, the school’s governing body operated at arm’s length from the school itself. In common with many other schools, the role of the Gordonstoun board was largely advisory and it also took responsibility for financial matters:

During the early years of the school there was an unusually large and very distinguished body of ‘Governors’ – that is what they were called, though a small committee carried the financial responsibility and constituted what would normally be considered the Governing Body or Board. Later the original Governors became known as the Council; they have always had an advisory capacity and met formally once a year. The original Governors were really sponsors of the unknown foreign headmaster but almost every one of them made some valuable contribution to the development of the school.²⁴⁰

Board meetings were often held in London or Edinburgh – far removed from the reality of the pupils – and only in 1975 was it agreed that meetings should take place at the school. Real change in the sense of active board involvement in the daily life of the school did not begin until the appointment of Mark Pyper as headmaster in 1990.

Trust, discipline, and Colour Bearers

What the school refers to as its ‘trust system’ was an essential element of Kurt Hahn’s aspirations for the school. He believed children would learn responsibility, compassion, and understanding, and would develop fully if they were trusted to fulfil any

238 Transcript, day 216: Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.42.

239 Transcript, day 216: Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.48.

240 Gordonstoun, Part A response to section 21 notice, at GOR.001.001.0003, p.68.

daily duties and any walking punishments as a matter of individual conscience without being checked up on.²⁴¹ Likewise, each pupil had their own training plan which they were expected to follow honestly.

Corporal punishment was rarely used although it was administered at times. Alternatives such as walking punishments (carried out in silence) or 'penalty drill' (PD) – running for set periods round a lawn on the campus – were imposed instead. For more serious matters, there could be expulsions or 'rustication' – a type of suspension which, at Gordonstoun, involved being required to live outwith the school but attending classes as normal.

Gordonstoun did not appoint prefects but there were 'Colour Bearers'. They 'were senior pupils who were elected by their peers for being selfless, honest and upstanding. Demotion from rank was a major penalty.'²⁴² Pupils were never authorised to administer corporal punishment to other pupils.

The Hahn, Chew, and Brereton years: a system of trust

Kurt Hahn was a forthright individual who, until his retirement in 1953, determined the school's operation at every level. He surrounded himself with like-minded men such as F.R.G. Chew, who joined from Salem in 1934, and Henry Brereton, who came from Abinger Hill School, Surrey, in 1935. Chew became joint headmaster with Brereton in 1953, thus securing continuity. As Lisa Kerr said:

[Kurt Hahn] was a very strong individual, he had a very clear sense of ethos. And the appointment of staff at that time, from what we have seen, was significantly about those who could help deliver the ethos. He was also recognised as an eccentric character, I guess a genius often is an eccentric character, and there was ... a pretty substantial school council built to oversee how he worked, and I think the move to a joint leadership team then in the Brereton era shows a recognition of the complexity.²⁴³

In 1959, Brereton retired, and Chew became sole headmaster until his own retirement in 1967.

'[Staff] sought out and encouraged our strengths and tried to help us overcome any weaknesses.'

Three applicants were pupils in that period and, in evidence, spoke about the influence of Hahn's values. 'Andrew' said:

I was a pupil at the school from 1945 to 1951. Kurt Hahn ... interjected his values of directness, honesty, and integrity based on a love of truth and a willingness to stand up and be counted and speak out in its name. Dr Hahn attracted staff who shared his values, and this and his concern for us as individuals helped make me who I am today. Relationships between staff and pupils were exceptional. They sought out and encouraged our strengths and tried to help us overcome any weaknesses.²⁴⁴

241 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.72.

242 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.16.

243 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, pp.48-9.

244 [Transcript, day 230](#): read-in statement of 'Andrew' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1945-51), at TRN-8-000000021, pp.147-8.

'Malcolm', in the late 1950s, thought the Gordonstoun routines

were very special and without parallel in boarding education in the UK. The opportunities outside of the classroom ... were exceptional, and I participated in most of them. However, the most important aspect ... was the emphasis that was placed on self-reliance, which was nurtured in the context of a secure house environment. The housemaster, and often also his wife, together with the assistant housemaster, provided the basis of that secure environment, but it was the way in which the senior boys were encouraged to play a major part in fostering the development of the younger boys that greatly benefited both generations ... On the specific of discipline, it was particularly well-handled both in the implementation and the punishment, which was non-physical. For trivial discipline matters, the punishment was rather boring and unpleasant, penalty drill, and for more serious misdemeanours, silent walks carried out under trust at inconvenient times, where one had the opportunity to consider where one had erred.²⁴⁵

He recalled minor bullying but 'any serious episodes identified by senior boys or staff ... were swiftly and properly dealt with by the housemaster and when appropriate by the headmaster'.²⁴⁶

'Harry' talked of the early 1960s:

The overwhelmingly positive nature of the relationships between the pupils and between the pupils and the staff came as a

surprise to me when I arrived ... because I had previously experienced an environment at my preparatory school, a very traditional one elsewhere, which was socially different, more hierarchical, and in some ways repressive ... [I had] the sharp realisation as a 13 year old entering Gordonstoun that I had arrived at an institution having an entirely different corporate culture from my prep school and one that was completely wholesome.²⁴⁷

He described the system of trust and services:

The sense of duty is at the core of the school's system. All the pupils are assigned constantly rotating duties within the house ... A pupil in his mid-teens was appointed captain of juniors, whose task was mentoring and helping them generally. The house captain was called the helper, and his task was quite literally to help everyone. There were also duties on a wider school level, especially for the older pupils. Equally important was the system of services. These were largely directed towards the external community and they were operated by the pupils in the sixth form. For instance, from the earliest days ... the school operated a fire service, a coastguard service, and a mountain rescue service, all fully trained and accredited. There was also a community service.²⁴⁸

Clear themes emerge from their evidence: a secure house environment; encouragement from senior pupils towards junior pupils; and a particular model of discipline. Sadly, that was not sustained under the next two headmasters.

245 Transcript, day 230: read-in statement of 'Malcolm' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1957-62), at TRN-8-000000021, p.149.

246 Transcript, day 230: read-in statement of 'Malcolm' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1957-62), at TRN-8-000000021, p.151.

247 Transcript, day 230: read-in statement of 'Harry' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1964-8), at TRN-8-000000021, p.165.

248 Transcript, day 230: read-in statement of 'Harry' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1964-8), at TRN-8-000000021, p.168.

Failures in management: J.W.R. Kempe (1968-78) and Michael Mavor (1979-90)

Kempe was regarded as more 'old school', and his principal focus appears to have been raising the standards of academic delivery, thus introducing tutors into the boarding houses and being aware of the competitive environment in which the school operated. His was a time when, according to Gordonstoun, all funds or sources of funding were directed towards a new building programme aimed at developing the school's overall facilities (with little being done to the existing buildings and boarding houses).²⁴⁹

Kempe, having previously been headmaster of two other schools, allowed 'a harsher and more conventional boarding school culture ... to develop'.²⁵⁰ For example, he said he was opposed to corporal punishment but that he did not rule it out: 'it might be unwise to say that we have abolished it. Housemasters should ask me if they wish to beat a boy.'²⁵¹ All but the most serious cases of discipline were, under Kempe, very much a matter for the individual housemaster. Overall, he afforded a significant degree of autonomy to the boarding houses and their housemasters.

Gordonstoun itself recognised frankly, in its written response, that 'this sense of autonomy led to the possibility of too much leeway for some pupils within those houses to behave inappropriately towards others'.²⁵²

It went further than possibility. Some housemasters were poor appointments and

where they were weak, the consequences were severe for pupils. One house in particular, Altyre, was allowed to become 'feral' over decades without there being any response from school management. It seems likely that there was too much focus on development of the school, and Hahn's ethos was allowed to weaken. That was borne out by the evidence of 'Duncan', a pupil in the Kempe years who thought that 'weak management of the school and houses had a bad effect on the social cohesion of the school'.²⁵³

Weak management and poor social cohesion appear to have worsened under Michael Mavor (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1979-90). His appointment came with a clear mandate from the Board to improve academic results in assessed examinations. Again, Gordonstoun candidly recognised that in that period the

school's culture seems to have been most at odds with its ethos. The trust system was never formally disbanded, but it faded out of use under Mr Mavor, who also briefly dismantled the Colour Bearer system. This led to unrest amongst both pupils and staff, so it was re-established, but along more conventional boarding school 'prefect' lines. Colour Bearers were no longer voted in by their peer group, and there was much more staff involvement in such promotion. The hierarchy between seniors and juniors, familiar in boarding schools across the United Kingdom, but not much present at Gordonstoun in the early years, was evident at this time ... the running of the boarding houses at Gordonstoun remained with individual Housemasters and

249 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.74.

250 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.73.

251 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.73.

252 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.74.

253 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Duncan' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1971-6), at TRN-8-000000022, p.3.

'The children were largely "self-governing".'

Housemistresses. Each house had its own perceived identity, which brought a sense of house pride and house loyalty. Although there were clear school rules, there were no standardised sanctions for misdemeanours, so Housemasters and Housemistresses could be idiosyncratic in their approach to dealing with the children in their care. The children were largely 'self-governing'. The seniors in the boarding houses were in charge of the juniors, and a conventional boarding school dynamic developed, of senior dominance over juniors. This was a dynamic which brought Gordonstoun in line with other boarding schools but at odds with its ethos. It was exacerbated by the standard teenage – and boarding school – 'conspiracy of silence' – where students didn't 'tell' if there were problems in the peer group.²⁵⁴

Lisa Kerr, referring to the end of the Mavor years, said that 'there was a very unwelcome hierarchy. For anybody involved in pastoral care, the slightest sniff of hierarchy in any boarding establishment is an early warning sign.'²⁵⁵

Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), arriving in 1990, understood that. He also found other problems requiring to be addressed in a school where the

Headmaster and Second Master have too much to do. Over twenty years the School has developed in numbers and in the complexity

and variety of what it is attempting to do. Too much of the responsibility for this has been assumed by the top two posts where it has been, let it be said, administered with great efficiency. However the volume of work involved has left no time for thinking, for talking and therefore for development, an essential element of contemporary education. We can only progress if those at the helm have the opportunity to dream and to plan.²⁵⁶

Boarding house brutality

The shortcomings described above meant that, depending on the particular atmosphere of the individual house, abuse could be avoided but, equally, it could be facilitated.

If a boarding house was managed well, children could, and some did, have positive experiences at Gordonstoun, and life was better for some than in their previous schools, including Aberlour. 'James' said:

I had a much better feeling about Gordonstoun ... it felt like a new beginning and that I could leave everything behind me from Aberlour, close the door and start afresh. Gordonstoun was very similar to Aberlour ... The only difference was that we were a bit older so we were treated as such and had more freedom. It was a much more enjoyable experience. It was far warmer and in general a more inviting place. I felt a part of something special rather than being institutionalised.²⁵⁷

254 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, pp.74-5.

255 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, pp.61-2.

256 Headmaster's Report to Governors, November 1990, at GOR-000002898, p.8.

257 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun, 1975-8), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.33-4.

The experiences of others, however, were far from positive. Pupils were well aware of the differences between houses but, remarkably, that knowledge failed to filter through to headmasters and governors alike. Altyre House was universally understood amongst pupils to be brutal, yet nothing changed during the tenures of Kempe and Mavor. 'Duncan' described it as 'feral' and found it to be 'the worst of the houses. The housemaster had no control over the house.'²⁵⁸ He was not the only former pupil to use the word 'feral' when describing boarding house life.

Altyre House was universally understood amongst pupils to be brutal.

To add to the problem, although there was a school rule book, the rules were not always followed. 'Annie' said: 'I don't remember any induction and I don't remember things being clear. There were ... the rules we were supposed to follow and then the rules we did follow. There were kind of two separate things going on.'²⁵⁹

The fact that house discipline was entrusted to older teenagers may explain that disconnect, particularly in those houses where the trust system had broken down. Punishment rather than encouragement was the approach of some senior pupils, and their actions were unrestrained and unsupervised. As 'Christian' said:

some of these older boys would mete out discipline in the form of penalty drills for up to two hours for offences as mundane as 'cheek', the mildest form of rudeness and not even close to insolence. As one fellow student once exclaimed, 'Cheek to a teenager? You must be joking!'²⁶⁰

It was, he remembered, 'as if the lunatics were running the asylum'.²⁶¹ 'Jane', a pupil at Windmill Lodge, a girls' boarding house situated opposite Altyre and Bruce houses, said: 'there were two boys' Nissen huts across the road and one of them was crazy, absolutely crazy. The amount of weapons found in that house was just insane. And it was down to the fact the housemaster was a very relaxed individual.'²⁶² She was describing Altyre, and it is striking that applicants spoke of it in the same way from the late 1960s through to the 1980s. As Gordonstoun acknowledged, and as was confirmed by evidence heard in relation to the other schools in this case study, allowing houses to become hierarchical and autonomous, without oversight, facilitates the perpetration of abuse.

'Paul' knew that:

There's almost a layer of authority within the older pupils in the school before you actually get to any of the staff ... a punishment that they would deal down, cold baths ... I could not tell you whether the teaching staff knew about it or not or whether they knew about it and let it happen or not. It was very much

258 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Duncan' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1971-6), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.2-3.

259 [Transcript, day 230](#): 'Annie' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1986-8), at TRN-8-000000021, p.74.

260 [Transcript, day 232](#): read-in statement of 'Christian' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1968-73; Gordonstoun, 1973-7), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.155-6.

261 [Transcript, day 232](#): read-in statement of 'Christian' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1968-73; Gordonstoun, 1973-7), at TRN-8-000000023, p.155.

262 [Transcript, day 233](#): 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, p.29.

there was no question by the older pupils ... It honestly didn't occur to me at the time to raise that with my housemaster.²⁶³

'Bob' acknowledged that 'being outside of the actual house was a bit of a relief because it was all just much more public ... So yeah, the fear ... was mainly contained to the house.'²⁶⁴

These were circumstances in which children could not trust the school to protect them from living in fear. No school should be able to claim ignorance of there being such a culture. It speaks volumes about the poor quality of the management at Gordonstoun and the level to which abusive practices had sunk that Mark Pyper was warned that he might find there was some unpleasantness at the school by three different people *before* he took up his role as headmaster in 1990. One, 'the then representative of the prep school body, the IAPS in Scotland',²⁶⁵ shared his concerns with Mark Pyper, who suggested to that person: "'Actually, there is a perfectly good headmaster there, why don't you tell him?'" The answer was that they 'didn't think it was worthwhile'.²⁶⁶ The second person was the head of another school who had heard something similar. The third was a person he knew through the Chair of Governors at the school in Sevenoaks where he had previously worked. He told Mark Pyper that he had heard bullying might be a problem at Gordonstoun and encouraged him to

tackle it when he became its headmaster.²⁶⁷ It seems clear that news of the bullying culture at Gordonstoun had spread far afield.

Spartan conditions

To make matters harder, living conditions in many boarding houses were harsh and austere. 'Duncan' recalled that

each house contained boys of all ages. The head boy had his own bedsit. The remainder lived in dormitories with 15 to 20 boys. Study rooms had six desks and were very cramped. Later in school life there were other study rooms used by just two or three boys in each. The larger study rooms and dormitories did not allow for any peace or privacy ... They later built more houses on the grounds and the study rooms for one person became more common, which was a huge improvement. The school had a linen room where ladies worked. Some of the boys would use the ladies as agony aunts. There were no other female staff giving pastoral care. I do not recall any cleaning staff and we would look after the dormitory houses and study rooms ourselves.²⁶⁸

'George' remembered 'it always being very cold at night due to the windows being open ... I had to do the morning runs. We ran about four or five hundred metres in all weathers. The only time we didn't do it was when it was blowing a blizzard.'²⁶⁹

263 Transcript, day 232: 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.111-12.

264 Transcript, day 230: 'Bob' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1990-2), at TRN-8-000000021, p.135.

265 Transcript, day 234: Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.125. 'IAPS' stands for the Independent Association of Prep Schools.

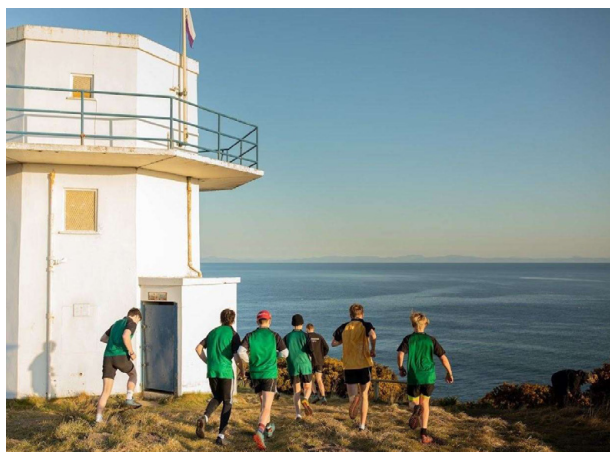
266 Transcript, day 234: Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.125.

267 Transcript, day 234: Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.125.

268 Transcript, day 231: read-in statement of 'Duncan' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1971-6), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.2-3.

269 Transcript, day 230: read-in statement of 'George' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1959-63), at TRN-8-000000021, p.160.

Of the girls' houses, 'Mary' said: 'By my recollection, the biggest girls' dormitory had 10 girls in it in bunk beds. We showered every day and were expected to jump in a cold bath after our showers.'²⁷⁰



Gordonstoun pupils on a morning run

'Jane' said: 'There were only two girls' houses ... Windmill was very ... spartan, there were mice in the dormitories.'²⁷¹ In contrast, 'Annie', a resident of the purpose-built Hopeman House, thought 'the living accommodation was good, hot water, that was new for me, regular hot water'.²⁷² Their recollections align with Mark Pyper's description of his arrival in 1990: 'The boarding houses were dark, poorly furnished and carpeted, lacking in privacy with very little decoration ... students' rooms were stark and impersonal, reminding me of boarding houses I knew of 25 years before.'²⁷³ Even in 1996, boarding house dormitories were found to be wanting. HM

Inspectorate of Education (HMIe) inspectors described Altyre as 'decoration dull; dorms very bare ... Little privacy for juniors'²⁷⁴ and Bruce as 'study facilities good, leisure spaces unattractive ... Very good standard of accommodation but not homely.'²⁷⁵

Staff failing to keep order

Another factor that facilitated abusive conduct was the failure of some housemasters to act despite having the authority to do so. That was, in turn, exacerbated by a lack of oversight from or engagement by headmasters. The result was that, in some houses, the respect that should have been shown by all pupils was lacking and order was not maintained. 'Duncan', who was moved, at his own request, from Altyre House because of the bullying there, saw the benefit that arose from a boarding house having a housemaster who was actively engaged after transferring to Cumming House. He 'was more involved when abuse was reported and would follow up on those incidents ... He could not solve all the issues but he did try to improve things.'²⁷⁶ However, it was far from perfect, as

in the main people did not use their authority. There were things reported to them but most of the issues were not acted upon. This would range from mild to extreme repetitive teasing, escalating to more serious assaults. I was aware of some of the incidents. I did report some of the abuse to the housemaster

270 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Mary' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.78.

271 [Transcript, day 233](#): 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, p.30.

272 [Transcript, day 230](#): 'Annie' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1986-8), at TRN-8-000000021, p.74.

273 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.119.

274 HMIs, Inspection of the Welfare of Residential Pupils, Gordonstoun School, 16 September 1996, at SGV-000007146, p.2.

275 HMIs, Inspection of the Welfare of Residential Pupils, Gordonstoun School, 16 September 1996, at SGV-000007146, p.3.

276 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Duncan' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1971-6), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.7-8.

‘At times I really felt that [the housemaster] was scared of the boys.’

at his house ... The staff were probably afraid of losing their role as there were no similar jobs locally.²⁷⁷

‘Dr Mann’ thought his housemaster chose not to intervene on one occasion, for

considering how much noise was being made by 25 boys ... screaming at the top of their voices in this appalling fashion as this boy was being beaten up, it is impossible for seniors or the housemaster not to have heard what was going on. It is absolutely impossible. They chose not to interfere when these things happened.²⁷⁸

His housemaster

was not the most charismatic man and at times I really felt that he was scared of the boys ... the boys mocked him a lot and ... he had authority ... but he very much gave us the impression of being keen to avoid trouble as much as possible and not get involved in issues.²⁷⁹

Even housemasters who were remembered kindly could be inconsistent. ‘Bob’ described his housemaster as

a nice man and never mean but in retrospect he turned a blind eye to everything he didn’t want to see ... my sense was that it was just left, like the kids were sort of allowed to do

whatever they did and I just don’t think people questioned it.²⁸⁰

Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989–93; 1998–2005; 2006–21; assistant housemistress, 1989–93; director of pastoral care, 2010–15) thought ‘there were some amazing house staff in 1989 and some very happy children’. She acknowledged that ‘being in a boarding house was really challenging for some children and is perhaps not right for every child ... As a whole school vision? Perhaps not.’²⁸¹ Much would depend on the character of a particular housemaster, especially given the autonomy granted by school management.

‘Dr Mann’ thought ‘tutors ... sort of appeared ... maybe once a month to just ask how you were doing and then they would leave. But otherwise there was no school presence in there whatsoever.’²⁸² ‘Sarah’ agreed boarding houses were really their own little worlds, saying: ‘Yes, that’s ... a good way of putting it.’²⁸³ ‘Jane’ thought the boarding houses were left to their own devices and differed from house to house. She recalled

one housemaster who I really, really liked ... but probably a bit of a drunk, and the amount of porn that was found in that house ... he just disappeared one morning because he was found drunk in the house and there was

277 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Duncan’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1971–6), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.7–8.

278 [Transcript, day 232](#): ‘Dr Mann’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975–9), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.68–9.

279 [Transcript, day 232](#): ‘Dr Mann’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975–9), at TRN-8-000000023, p.72.

280 [Transcript, day 230](#): ‘Bob’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1990–2), at TRN-8-000000021, pp.124–6.

281 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989–93; 1998–2005; 2006–21; assistant housemistress, 1989–93; director of pastoral care, 2010–15), at TRN-8-000000025, p.44.

282 [Transcript, day 232](#): ‘Dr Mann’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975–9), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.73–4.

283 [Transcript, day 230](#): ‘Sarah’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983–7; Gordonstoun, 1987–92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.45.

just enormous amounts of pornography ... whereas in Altyre I think it would be weapons. It really sort of shows ... that a whole society or a community would build up in one house and it's different from another.²⁸⁴

Lack of support for housemasters/mistresses

Another dimension to the school's failure to intervene was the lack of support afforded to housemasters/mistresses. Diana Monteith, appointed as teacher and living-out assistant housemistress from 1989, recalled how much still fell on the housemistress: 'I went in I think only one night a week from 7 in the evening until 10 or 10.30, and that was the only support she had. There was no matron.'²⁸⁵ She thought that was the norm in other houses and accepted that no one could sustain that pressure without delegating responsibility to the senior pupils, for good or ill.

I think there was a lot of dependence on the senior pupils getting it right to help and support junior pupils ... I think it would be true to say that the boarding houses had personalities which were very influenced by the housemaster or housemistress in charge of them ... Whilst some ... were loved and respected and tutored and trained their senior students to be marvellous leaders in the boarding house, I am sure that there are also examples of where that could and did go wrong ... there was enough talk of some houses being run in a very hands-off manner.²⁸⁶

Such talk must have included conversations about violence between pupils, and if conduct of that nature was obvious to pupils and a young teacher, it should have been seen and addressed by the school. Whether it was not seen or it was simply ignored is of little moment. Both amount to significant failures on the part of the school. Diana Monteith's commentary on Michael Mavor is telling: 'He was hugely respected ... there was a very strong feeling that he had done enormous good for the school ... had improved the school's standing and reputation and staffing ... but I don't remember him as a pastoral person.'²⁸⁷

Pastoral care should have been a priority. The fact it was not meant that children were much more likely to suffer abuse because those employed to look after them were not given the tools to do so properly.

Code of silence

The lack of oversight by the school and some housemasters was not helped by the code of silence that existed. Few people, if any, including staff, were reporting abuse. 'Dr Mann' explained:

we learned very much in the first term ... that omerta ruled ... without serious consequences of greater violence towards you, you could not go and tell anybody about what was going on ... If you did that, your life would be made absolute hell. You'd come in, your clothes would be thrown on the floor out of your locker or they would put shampoo all over

284 [Transcript, day 233](#): 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.40-1.

285 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, p.59.

286 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, p.16.

287 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, p.19.

'The culture of not telling and silence was so strong amongst pupils.'

your clothes ... the repercussions ... were just absolutely extreme.²⁸⁸

'Christian' echoed that, noting that 'if there was one consistent feature it was that any effort to quell the practice resulted in far more severe, albeit clandestine retaliation by those perpetrating the cowardly act in the first place'.²⁸⁹ 'Angelo' said: 'The culture of not telling and silence was so strong amongst pupils'.²⁹⁰ The only exception, as 'Jane' described, occurred when 'there was evidence on the body which couldn't be ignored'.²⁹¹

No fagging, but ...

Fagging was never part of the Gordonstoun routine but, as Lisa Kerr recognised, that was 'not to say there wasn't unkindness between older and younger pupils'.²⁹² Applicant evidence confirmed this. 'Sally' said: 'It was also accepted or expected that one of the benefits of being a senior was you could get a junior to go and get [things] for you. That was called "boggging"'.²⁹³ 'Sarah' remembered that boys' houses 'definitely had more of the sort of old-fashioned fagging system where ... junior boys had to basically be slaves for older boys and there was much more of a hierarchical system'.²⁹⁴

Internationalism and race

Much has been, and is, made of the international aspect of Gordonstoun, and of Kurt Hahn's desire for people of all races to mix and learn. That is plainly a laudable objective. However, children can be quick to target those who stand out as being different, particularly if that difference relates to race. Racism may flourish if not guarded against and checked. So it was that overt racism occurred at Gordonstoun. It seems to have been particularly bad in the 1970s and 1980s. Mark Pyper's November 1990 report to the board of governors incorporated an essay written by an A-level pupil entitled 'My first half term at Gordonstoun', which included these views:

the elitist nature of Gordonstoun's student body tends to produce a homogenous group which is quite racist and xenophobic. Such prejudices are clearly wrong and will inevitably harm the Gordonstoun pupil who harbours such emotions. I would like to see the School attempt to dispel these prejudices and to enrol more minority students.²⁹⁵

Alcohol

Ostensibly, alcohol was not allowed at the school at all, except as provided by the

288 [Transcript, day 232](#): 'Dr Mann' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.75-6.

289 [Transcript, day 232](#): read-in statement of 'Christian' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1968-73; Gordonstoun, 1973-7), at TRN-8-000000023, p.156.

290 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Angelo' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.94.

291 [Transcript, day 233](#): 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000023, p.33.

292 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.58.

293 [Written statement of 'Sally'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1985-90), at WIT-1-000001195, p.13, paragraph 41.

294 [Transcript, day 230](#): 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.55.

295 Appendix F to Headmaster's Report to Governors, November 1990, at GOR-000002905.

school to senior pupils.²⁹⁶ However, excessive and inappropriate alcohol consumption by pupils at Gordonstoun became common and it was aided by a lack of staff supervision and/or their turning a 'blind eye'. Of the late 1970s 'Sophie' said:

There was alcohol around. I remember one person who would get a table at a restaurant in Elgin. He would invite everyone for lunch and have drinks. They would spend the whole afternoon there ... There was also a pub in Lossiemouth. People would either cycle or get a taxi there. There was a taxi service that was sympathetic to Gordonstoun kids.²⁹⁷

This behaviour could only happen because Gordonstoun allowed it. It continued in the 1980s and into the early 1990s. 'Sally' said: 'there was definitely a drinking culture throughout the school ... I would do booze runs for the seniors',²⁹⁸ while 'Sarah' remembered 'us getting drunk in the bath. The housemistress never went into the bathrooms and we knew that.'²⁹⁹ Staff supervision was lax and pupils were able to take advantage of that.

Mark Pyper quickly recognised there was a problem and told the governors that 'our current record on matters relating to alcohol is not good'.³⁰⁰ When addressing the school in October 1990, he said:

I have received letters and telephone calls from some of your parents expressing concern about alcohol; the owners of local restaurants sadly cite instances of over indulgence by some of our pupils ... and our immediate neighbours take me round their property showing me the remains of drinking sprees - piles of bottles and cans. It has got to stop - and stop now.³⁰¹

Diana Monteith recognised that 'the amount of alcohol ... meant that disciplinary issues happened as a fallout' and 'issues where children were upset or hurt or abused in some way'.³⁰² Simon Reid (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011-17), Mark Pyper's successor, continued the battle, and Gordonstoun 'moved to only allowing alcohol at the bar to over 18s, and only when there was also food available'.³⁰³ The result was 'the atmosphere ... was more managed and the staff felt more comfortable with what was going on ... and I think that that was helpful for the school'.³⁰⁴

Positive aspects

Despite all the problems set out above, some applicants had positive experiences at Gordonstoun. Some had only positive experiences. Some thrived at school and beyond. They were fortunate to evade sexual predators and to avoid the brutality that terrorised others. 'Benjamin' said:

296 Written statement of 'Sophie' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1977-80), at WIT-1-000000986, p.17, paragraph 63.

297 Written statement of 'Sophie' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1977-80), at WIT-1-000000986, p.11, paragraph 41.

298 Written statement of 'Sally' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1985-90), at WIT-1-000001195, p.11, paragraph 34.

299 Transcript, day 230: 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.43.

300 Headmaster's Report to Governors, November 1990, at GOR-000002898, p.15.

301 Appendix G to Headmaster's Report to Governors, November 1990, at GOR-000002905, p.3.

302 Transcript, day 234: Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, p.55.

303 Transcript, day 234: Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, p.55.

304 Transcript, day 235: Simon Reid (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011-17), at TRN-8-000000026, p.15.

‘The boys’ houses had endemic, ritualistic initiation ceremonies and other physical bullying.’

It was a tough school and I could see how some children would find it hard. You were in the middle of nowhere and some children could not adapt as easily and missed their home life ... I was never subjected to or witnessed any abuse on any of the pupils during my five years at Gordonstoun.³⁰⁵

He added: ‘If you had any issues or concerns you could go to a senior pupil or your housemaster along with any other teacher that you got on well with ... I was never aware of any complaints system that was in place.’³⁰⁶ ‘Benjamin’ was a boarder in Round Square between 1980 and 1985. His experiences were, however, in marked contrast to those of ‘Angelo’, for example, who was a boarder in Altyre House and, over the same period, experienced and witnessed dreadful abuse being perpetrated by older boys.³⁰⁷

There could be positive aspects even for those who had suffered abuse. ‘Sophie’ thought the teachers were good and that ‘We learned how to push ourselves and how to grow, which was very creative. It really was a positive time until [the male pupil] assaulted me.’³⁰⁸ ‘Pauline’ said: ‘On the whole, I loved my time ... despite the perceived hardships and the bullying. I have many wonderful and happy memories.’³⁰⁹

John Findlay said:

I walked away a far better, stronger individual ... I can ... hold my head up high despite what happened to me. I think that strength was probably part of my education ... It taught me to stand up for what is right and to speak out when things are wrong.³¹⁰

The 1990s onwards: improvements in leadership

The school Mark Pyper inherited in 1990 was beset with problems; on his arrival, this is what he found:

I sensed almost immediately a student community run along hierarchical lines. This was not restricted to boys’ houses but was strong in girls’ houses too where my investigations, when I joined the school, showed that physical bullying was rare, but not unheard of. The boys’ houses had endemic, ritualistic initiation ceremonies and other physical bullying including punching, nipple tweaking and even branding. These were not new ... On the first day of the first term a parent who was new to the system was warmly welcomed by a senior pupil who led his son off in a very nice way only to take him elsewhere to be physically oppressed.³¹¹

305 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Benjamin’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979–80; Gordonstoun, 1980–5), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.64–5.

306 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Benjamin’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979–80; Gordonstoun, 1980–5), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.68–9.

307 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Angelo’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976–80; Gordonstoun 1980–5), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.85–98.

308 [Written statement of ‘Sophie’](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1977–80), at WIT-1-000000986, p.30, paragraph 108.

309 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Pauline’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1978–83; Gordonstoun, 1986–8), at TRN-8-000000022, p.55.

310 [Transcript, day 232](#): John Findlay (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985–91; Gordonstoun, 1991–6), at TRN-8-000000023, p.6.

311 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.120–1.

His response was frank and alarming:

At Sevenoaks, where I was immediately before going to Gordonstoun, there was an element of [physical bullying] ... and in the boarding house I ... tried and I hope did something about it, but then I got to Gordonstoun and, to be honest, found that things were a different league altogether ... Gordonstoun was in Victorian times, at least ... I was extremely shocked ... by what I found and saw and heard, and the difficulty was ... a lack of recognition of it by the staff.³¹²

‘I was extremely shocked by what I found and saw and heard.’

The Gordonstoun of 1990 had to change

Wholesale change was required, and Mark Pyper embarked on an ambitious programme.

Ten days after term started, he delivered a powerful speech to the entire school giving a blunt account of what he had found, which was, in short, that it was far from good and things needed to change. It is set out in full at [Appendix H](#). His speech was certainly appropriate given the state of affairs he inherited. It was a step in the right direction but, of itself, not nearly enough. As is evident from my findings, whilst he effected positive

changes through good leadership, at times he himself failed to do all that was required in terms of child protection.

The school’s problems were not resolved overnight – far from it – but what was achieved by him and his successors, Simon Reid and Lisa Kerr, demonstrates the critical importance of good and effective leadership in the school setting, particularly where the school is a residential one. They were committed, enlightened, and child-focused. As Lisa Kerr recognised: ‘from day one Mark was very clear ... that pastoral care was his priority. Now that also of course aligns with societal changes at the time.’³¹³ In practice, that refers to the changes across the boarding school sector with the coming into force of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.³¹⁴ In fairness, the Gordonstoun board already instinctively understood the need for change, for while Mark Pyper was not appointed with a specific remit to improve pastoral care, he thought ‘there was acknowledgement, because I was questioned quite closely on it, about my sort of pastoral experience’.³¹⁵

The school of 1990 looked good on the outside since it

was quite full, the academic results had gone up, the finances were quite sound, there was building going on, and all those things were important ... I was impressed by all of that, but I knew before I got there the negative side of

312 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.120–1.

313 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, pp.51–2.

314 Section 35 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 amended the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 by inserting a new section 125A which imposed a duty on the managers of residential schools to safeguard and promote the welfare of any children for whom they provided accommodation. Otherwise its provisions did not apply directly to boarding schools but, building on the knowledge and experience relating to child protection that had been growing since the late 1970s, made a considerable impact in raising awareness of children’s rights, the need to listen to children, and the need to understand that children may be at risk not only in the home but in wider society. For a fuller discussion of the legislation, see Kenneth McK. Norrie, Report to SCAI, [Legislative Background to the Treatment of Children and Young People Living Apart from their Parents](#) (November 2017).

315 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.108.

all of this would be the pastoral care and the life of some of the pupils within the school.

That negative side was the atmosphere in some of the houses and 'a staff that was not, and had not been, exposed to external challenge. In short, a school that was isolated both geographically and within the boarding sector.'³¹⁶

Andrew Keir, a prolific abuser, spoke of Mark Pyper having sought to introduce changes, saying he

set out a new protocol about staff and children keeping each other safe ... there was a certain amount of making sure that everything was clean behind the doors ... Up until then, I think it had been taken for granted, which is dangerous, I will admit ... he set out his stall to the staff and one of the things he referred to was making sure that not only were the children safe but they were seen to be safe ... it became something one thought of daily rather than one took for granted.³¹⁷

However, these protocols were not enough to prevent Keir from continuing to abuse children. Such documents and statements will never, of themselves, be enough to change an abusive culture to one in which children really are protected.

Change was not immediate. There was resistance from staff who were comfortable with their lot. Mark Pyper freely admitted to weakness on his part, namely that 'in those first five to seven years, my weakness was

in dealing with staff' and that he 'failed to persuade them and they were obstinate'.³¹⁸ He observed: 'you'll never get the real change of culture until you get at least a majority of the staff on your side'.³¹⁹ He presented a very detailed report to the governors on the strengths and weaknesses of the school at the end of his first year. He made interesting points on recruitment, noting that 'we have not attracted suitable young members of staff and we now have an extremely uneven distribution of age groups. Ideally we should have approximately 15 in each of four ten-year bands, with perhaps a slightly heavier weighting in the middle two bands.'³²⁰

As importantly, he included a section entitled 'THE DOWNSIDE', which acknowledged some good relationships between staff and pupils but pointed out that

unpleasant undercurrents and a minority of oppressed children must not be ignored ... The old system of physical punishments was being abused. There were too many instances of unofficial, unacceptable punishments ... It contributed to an atmosphere where compassion was, in some respects, a scarce commodity ... We shall continue to challenge the young mentally and physically and make tough demands and expectations of them as a preparation for life ... They will thus be hardened. But they must also be spared ... their environment - the surrounding countryside, their accommodation and the prevailing social atmosphere - should free them from unnecessary pressures and give them the opportunity to grow, to develop and

316 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.122-3.

317 [Transcript, day 233](#): Andrew Keir (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1983-94), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.120-1.

318 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.114-15.

319 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.128.

320 Headmaster's Report to Governors, November 1990, at GOR-000002898, p.7.

to flourish naturally. In personal terms this should mean freedom from unpleasantness, intolerance, image consciousness and stereotyping. This is the problem I am attempting to tackle.³²¹

That accords with Mark Pyper's oral evidence that when he arrived at the school, it was 'this island ... but not entirely what Kurt Hahn set it up as, an island of healing, as he called it'.³²² Rather, 'it was an island where it had some very good things but some not so good things happening as well ... with a staff who were blinkered' and that 'the students themselves, largely through no fault of their own, lacked moral guidance, a moral code, a moral compass'.³²³

Amongst the 'not so good things' he found were physical punishments being administered in the boarding houses, such as 'Run to the sea. Get a mouthful of saltwater and come back and kneel at my feet and spit it out'.³²⁴

Diana Monteith worked at Gordonstoun from 1989 until 1993, returning in 1998. She remembered some of Mark Pyper's early changes but spoke of being struck in 1998 that she had come 'back to somewhere very, very different'.³²⁵ HMle inspectors also noticed in 1997 that 'The school had

properly recognised the need to adapt to changing social values. An austere regime, supported by physical punishments, had been replaced by a more supportive culture, in which all pupils were valued equally'.³²⁶

The changes

Written policies

From the outset, Mark Pyper embarked on a process of formalisation of school policies and procedures, a process that continues today with school policy documents being viewed as living documents and subject to regular, if not annual, review. As importantly, he also ensured enforcement of existing policies and procedures.³²⁷ HMle inspectors commented in 2002 that Pyper 'provided good leadership ... Under his direction the school had developed and implemented a wide range of generally good policies and procedures relating to the improvement of residential pupils' care and welfare'.³²⁸

An example is the Gordonstoun Code of Conduct which sets out not only the rights of the pupils but also their 'responsibilities to each other and to the environment and to their education'.³²⁹ Diana Monteith said that this formalised

321 Headmaster's Report to Governors, November 1990, at GOR-000002898, p.15.

322 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011, principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.123.

323 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011, principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.123.

324 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011, principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.127.

325 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.22-3.

326 Report by HMle, 21 January 1997, at GOR-000003623, p.5.

327 For an example, see a message sent from Mark Pyper to Gordonstoun staff in advance of a staff meeting on 3 June 1996, at GOR-000003943, p.1: 'The main items on the Agenda will be a review of the Class Exclusion procedure and a discussion of other matters relating to classroom discipline.'

328 HMle Report, 17 September 2002, at GOR-000003636, p.10.

329 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, p.31.

how children were expected to behave and how we [the school] would respond if they didn't ... It was a very living document. It wasn't something that just was posted on a board and forgotten. And the students would talk about it too. You know, there would be debate about the way something was written and a student would come and say: 'Actually, we think we should change this ... because it affected their lives on a daily basis, so they wanted to be involved in discussion of change to it.'³³⁰

HMIe inspectors agreed, noting in 2002 that 'The school charter clearly defined pupils' rights and responsibilities and the school's code of conduct. There was a clearly defined and fair discipline policy that was communicated effectively to staff and pupils.'³³¹

By contrast, and acknowledged by Lisa Kerr, the 1970s and 1980s were periods when written policies regarding behaviour did exist but 'were not being followed through within some of the houses'.³³² Either they were not understood or they were ignored. Both are possible but, regardless, the school in those decades failed.

Staffing

Staffing imbalances and demographics were addressed. Staff-student ratios were increased. Matrons and resident assistant housemasters/mistresses were employed for all boarding houses to meaningfully lighten

the burden on the housemasters/mistresses. This made, as Diana Monteith described, 'a massive difference to the atmosphere in the houses',³³³ which was noticed by pupils like 'Chris':

Pastorally, staff in the boarding house and across the school strove to provide an environment that allowed personal development for all within an eclectic and multinational student population. Further, pupils were allocated a tutor providing an additional point of contact throughout one's time at the school to support holistic development.³³⁴

HMIe inspectors confirmed the changes in the houses and noted:

The level of staffing was very good ... Staff had a suitable range of experience and had undergone security checks before appointment. They had written remits which clearly defined their responsibilities, were well deployed to provide effective care for pupils, and were generally accessible when required.³³⁵

More widely, staffing was better managed. Minutes of a meeting of the Board of Directors held on 27 February 1995 state: 'The School was now set on a path of classroom development, improvements to IT facilities, staff appraisal, appointment of a Deputy Head and a resolution of management issues, a School Development Plan and development of the 6th Form

330 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.34-7.

331 HMIe Report, 17 September 2002, at GOR-000003636, p.8.

332 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.44.

333 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, p.27.

334 [Transcript, day 233](#): read-in statement of 'Chris' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1997-2002), at TRN-8-000000024, p.147.

335 HMIe Report, 17 September 2002, at GOR-000003636, p.7.

It was a very different world from the Gordonstoun of the previous decades.

life of the School.³³⁶ It was a very different world from the Gordonstoun of the previous decades. Applicants confirmed this.

'Alison', in Plewlands House, had two housemistresses:

The first did an excellent job of pretending she didn't have her finger on the pulse when in fact she was absolutely on the ball and seemed to know what we had got up to before we had even done it. A unique skill. When she retired, Mrs Parker took over, a much younger but no less observant housemistress. She was possibly stricter than the first housemistress, but also more relatable ... Maybe every housemaster wasn't quite as attentive, but we were certainly treated as individuals needing individual care and attention and I believe the housemasters did an excellent job as substitute parents.³³⁷

Year leaders were introduced soon after Diana Monteith became director of pastoral care in 2010 and reported to her, which 'allowed cross-school eyes on everything pastoral ... for me ... a significant step forward'.³³⁸ Security staff were also employed, who, as 'John' remembered, were 'people who we called "bashers" ... They were security staff who made sure we weren't

smoking in the woods at midnight and that kind of thing. They were good people.'³³⁹

Progress has continued. Simon Reid discussed the benefits of teacher appraisal, which was not simply about 'professional development and getting ahead and promotion ... it's also ... an opportunity for me to say where I think there are deficiencies [and to] assess an individual's commitment to an understanding of safeguarding practices and culture'.³⁴⁰

Discipline and punishment

Mark Pyper abolished all physical punishments in 1990, which did not go down well with some teachers, including 'Robert'.³⁴¹ This did not mean, however, that the school had abandoned all forms of firm discipline. 'Chris' recalled that

detention on a Saturday evening was a staple for those who had erred, persistent offenders subject to a blue card that required signing by class teachers at regular intervals throughout the day ... More significant misdemeanours were subject to a period of rustication. During my time, a very few serious disciplinary matters resulted in expulsion.³⁴²

336 Minutes of Board of Directors meeting, 27 February 1995, at GOR-000002809, p.5.

337 [Transcript, day 233](#): read-in statement of 'Alison' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1997-2002), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.152 and 160.

338 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, p.36.

339 [Written statement of 'John'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 2006-15), at WIT-1-000001044, p.16, paragraph 68.

340 [Transcript, day 235](#): Simon Reid (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011-17), at TRN-8-000000026, pp.26-7.

341 It was also noticed by HMIE inspectors in 1997; see Report by HMIE, 21 January 1997, at GOR-000003623, p.5.

342 [Transcript, day 233](#): read-in statement of 'Chris' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1997-2002), at TRN-8-000000024, p.149.

'Alison' said:

The most severe crimes or the repeat offenders were dealt with by the headmaster. Drugs meant immediate expulsion which we were all well aware of ... There was always a sombre air about the school in the days after someone was expelled ... an expulsion always felt like something had been amputated. Of discipline in general I would say that we were given a certain amount of freedom and independence, but we knew where the lines were drawn.³⁴³

The governors were kept informed and there was no attempt to hide problems when they were discovered.

The records of Gordonstoun in the period from 1990 onwards certainly demonstrate a willingness to rusticate and expel when considered necessary. The governors were kept informed and there was no attempt to hide problems when they were discovered.³⁴⁴ With ever-increasing record-keeping, the Part D responses provided by Gordonstoun demonstrate a clear link, and audit trail, between the use of discipline and pastoral care for both pupil victims and abusers.³⁴⁵ The level of available detail in Gordonstoun's records demonstrates how to keep good records, not something that was achieved by all schools in the case study.

Engagement with the board of governors

Mark Pyper sought, and ultimately achieved, a close working relationship with the board of governors. Michael Mavor had

liked to keep the board of governors at arm's length and that was quite traditional for boarding schools ... I took a very different view that governors should share responsibility, indeed in some cases assume responsibility for certain parts of the operation, and so I was keener from the outset that governors should be just more closely involved.³⁴⁶

As with teaching staff, he met resistance, but over time that shifted, as the membership of the board changed. When Mark Pyper was first appointed, the governors included

several former members of the school, old boys ... although one former female member of the school joined very soon after me, and ... people local to the school who were well-wishers ... The major change would have occurred in 1998 at the same time as the amalgamation ... with Aberlour House. There was a restructuring of the board of governors and it included, for instance, a proper education committee ... that brought about a sea change in saying: we have to have different skills on the board ... to do the job ... we're expected to do ... And under the next chairman, Jim Weatherall ... he established this sort of system of committees and every governor had a part to play in one or other ... the days of just the local well-wisher were numbered.³⁴⁷

343 [Transcript, day 233](#): read-in statement of 'Alison' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1997-2002), at TRN-8-000000024, p.161.

344 See, for example, Headmaster's Report, autumn 1995, at GOR-000002900, p.15, and Principal's Report, spring 2006, at GOR-000002964, p.19.

345 See Gordonstoun, Addendum to Part D response to section 21 notice, at GOR-000000019.

346 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.109.

347 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.111.

The board began to focus specifically on child protection. Lisa Kerr, a governor before she became principal in 2017, said:

initially we might have received more written reports, but towards the end we were receiving more in-person reports from the pastoral team and child protection team, and obviously the advent of formal training for governors in child protection was towards the end of my time as governor.³⁴⁸

Training and induction are now routine on becoming a governor.³⁴⁹

Engagement with school inspectors

Mark Pyper also sought the active involvement of school inspectors. He was astonished there had been no inspection since 1971. He requested an inspection in 1997, by which time he had been able to implement some changes. 'The inspectors came, and in the report ... was what I needed to get on with the job from there on.'³⁵⁰ Thereafter, inspections 'continued both regularly and reasonably frequently up until I finished in 2011 ... they were very thorough and I always found them most helpful and supportive'.³⁵¹ His attitude to inspections was wise, professional, and as is to be expected if a school is truly committed to pursuing excellence in all aspects of its provision for children.

Engagement with pupils

Mark Pyper swiftly reinstated Colour Bearers. In an address to the school in October 1990, he said he considered them as pupils who 'have been nominated – and therefore approved of – by their peers, supported by their HMs [housemasters] and then appointed by the Headmaster. They have the full backing of all sections of the School community.'³⁵² He went on to say that Colour Bearers 'have two types of responsibility. First, their specific duties ... and more generally, they carry responsibility for the smooth running of the School at all times ... If you do not do as you are told by them, that is therefore a serious business.'³⁵³

It was viewed as important that the sixth form played a positive role in school life. Older pupils were encouraged to look after younger ones, and there is evidence that this happened in the period from 2005. 'John' said of Cumming House: 'There was no initiation in our boarding house and the seniors did their best to get rid of it. They were the last year group to have initiation and they didn't make us do it.'³⁵⁴ Buddy systems were formalised in all boarding houses. Peer mentoring was introduced, 'for which there was considerable training, external as well as internal'.³⁵⁵

348 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.80.

349 [Transcript, day 235](#): Simon Reid (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011–17), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.22–4.

350 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.115.

351 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.115.

352 Appendix G to Headmaster's Report to Governors, November 1990, at GOR-000002905, p.3.

353 Appendix G to Headmaster's Report to Governors, November 1990, at GOR-000002905, p.3.

354 [Written statement of 'John'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 2006–15), at WIT-1-000001044, p.17, paragraph 72.

355 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989–93; 1998–2005; 2006–21; assistant housemistress, 1989–93; director of pastoral care, 2010–15), at TRN-8-000000025, p.30.

Gordonstoun began to make real efforts to help children confide in others if they had concerns.

Gordonstoun began to make real efforts to help children confide in others if they had concerns. Diana Monteith said that while pupils were

told that they could talk to their housemaster ... their matron ... their English teacher ... they were also told that the healthcare centre was there and that there was a degree of confidentiality that could be allowed there ... and that if ... children didn't feel they could talk to staff, they must talk to each other.³⁵⁶

In 2014, the school employed a clinical psychologist, which, she recalled, was 'one of the main things that I fought for'.³⁵⁷ Not only was it another avenue for students to use for reporting purposes and obtaining counselling, it also reflected the recognition that mental health issues were something the school had to deal with more regularly.³⁵⁸ Part of the rationale for the clinical psychologist was that 'waiting lists at CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services] were long and it wasn't meeting our needs ... she wasn't independent of the school, she was employed wby the school ... [but] she did keep confidential what the students told her'.³⁵⁹ Diana Monteith was positive about

the GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child) policy³⁶⁰ because it

highlighted the fact that if you could pick up on problems early, they often didn't turn into quite such big problems. And so the idea of waiting six weeks or eight weeks or things having to be really serious before you got to CAMHS was something that became intolerable to us and we needed ways to support children much earlier on.³⁶¹

'John' accessed the services of the person he refers to as the counsellor in his final year at school when he described himself as being 'on the verge', but he found them to be 'a bit useless'.³⁶²

The Wellbeing Information System

Diana Monteith was realistic that, even with such support in place, some pupils would not feel able to speak up about their concerns: 'I suppose what really did change ... is the awareness that ... there had to be nets to catch the children in.' That had been of interest from at least 2013, when the board recognised that there had 'been a shift in

356 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, p.41.

357 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.56-7.

358 Principal's Report to the Board, summer term 2013, at GOR-000002968, p.20.

359 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.56-7.

360 GIRFEC is a Scottish Government policy that seeks to improve outcomes for children and young people by placing the child at the centre. It was first introduced in 2006.

361 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.57-8.

362 [Written statement of 'John'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 2006-15), at WIT-1-000001044, p.22, paragraph 95.

emphasis from welfare to wellbeing', which included the idea of setting up 'a new IT "Wellbeing" system'.³⁶³ Gordonstoun's Part A response defines the Wellbeing Information System as follows:

a sector-leading step-change in record-keeping about student wellbeing, it is a bespoke, sophisticated online system for centralised tracking of pastoral care, including the recording, management and consequences of any problems within the student body. Every incident which raises any concern – either reported to any staff member or witnessed by any staff member – and which might affect the health and happiness of a child is recorded. The system thus maintains comprehensive electronic records of those reports and their consequences. The 'Wellbeing Information System' allows varying levels of access for specific members of staff, from widely shared information for all relevant staff to very restricted access, as in the case of child protection issues, to a very small group.³⁶⁴

Lisa Kerr explained:

We have a net, that means things don't slip through it. And the visibility of what is recorded on Wellbeing is bespoke to the role that a member of staff has ... it is great at connecting the little things ... change being the thing that you have to notice. So a teacher might notice that a child is unusually quiet or perhaps unusually disruptive in a lesson, and they would record that on Wellbeing. And then somebody might notice that that child hasn't been at lunch, so our refectory staff, who are child protection trained, they would

notice they hadn't seen so-and-so at lunch and they would record that. Then the housemaster or housemistress would be able to put these jigsaw pieces together and that might lead to a conversation.³⁶⁵

She emphasised that the system was under constant review, and after the oral hearings provided a history of its development.³⁶⁶ It has become apparent that all extant schools in the case study now operate similar systems, but Gordonstoun appears to have been the first to find and implement what has proved to be a valuable tool.

Response to evidence about the regime

The school did not challenge the accounts of abuse given by former pupils. Both Lisa Kerr and other witnesses who had been employed at the school very frankly accepted that abuse happened in the ways described. They also accepted that the school should have done more to protect children but had failed to do so.

That echoed the approach taken by Simon Reid from 2013 when suggestions of abuse first began to appear on online platforms, and again in 2015 when an *Observer* article focusing on abuse at Aberlour was published.³⁶⁷ He did not try to avoid the wider issues and within days of the article's publication, with the support of the school, he wrote to the former pupils en masse, advising them to go to the police if they felt they were victims of abuse and confirming that the school would provide the police with its full support. Inevitably, he also made

363 Minutes of meeting of Gordonstoun Schools Ltd Board, 17–18 February 2013, at GOR-000002857, p.3.

364 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.22.

365 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.94.

366 See 'Continual Improvement in Pastoral Care at Gordonstoun', at GOR-000004706.

367 www.theguardian.com/society/2015/apr/12/child-abuse-at-prince-charles-former-school-scotland

Former pupils continued to come forward and were responded to.

the point that the school had changed. Responses from those remembering abuse were mixed, with some grateful and others angry.³⁶⁸ To his credit, Simon Reid engaged with all and did not shy away from apologising. It had impact; former pupils continued to come forward and were responded to.³⁶⁹

That approach was repeated in Gordonstoun's commitment to try to understand and support those who had been abused. Lisa Kerr was, I am satisfied, genuine in her offer of

a very sincere apology to anyone who suffered abuse either at Gordonstoun or at Aberlour House because we have really learned over the last few years the deep impact that has on people. It's horrifying to us to imagine that that happened at Gordonstoun. We must acknowledge that it did. And if we don't acknowledge that it did and learn from it, then we won't do our very best in that most important endeavour of making sure that the children we look after today are as safe as they can be and that they achieve their full potential.³⁷⁰

A full timeline of Gordonstoun's efforts from 2013 onwards to address abuse and support victims, including significant

input from the board, was provided to the Inquiry.³⁷¹ Two of them are worth specific mention. First, Gordonstoun sought guidance from Professor Andrew Kendrick at the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS)³⁷² on how to respond properly to pupils who had been abused as well as giving them an opportunity to share their experiences confidentially.

Guidance from CELCIS was received in a 2018 report and resulted in

a whole range of areas where we seek to support survivors, one of which is simply listening, and there has been a considerable uptake of that. We have a trained team of administrators in the school who are trained on a regular basis in hearing survivor testimony. We've also put in place an arrangement with the Barnardo's Making Connections service to provide independent counselling and survivor support.³⁷³

Second, the school engaged with a group called Mandate Now.³⁷⁴ Having considered the group's views, the school adopted an approach whereby the contracts of employment of all Gordonstoun staff now 'make it an explicit gross misconduct offence for staff to fail to report child

368 See, for example, GOR-000004454 and GOR-000004449.

369 See Gordonstoun, Addendum to Part D response to section 21 notice, at GOR-000000022.

370 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.118.

371 Gordonstoun, Timeline of Gordonstoun's response to disclosures of historic abuse, at GOR-000000038.

372 CELCIS was set up in 2011 as the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland.

373 [Transcript, day 235](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000026, p.104.

374 Mandate Now describes itself as a pressure group that is calling for government to introduce law that requires personnel working in regulated activities to report suspected and known child sexual abuse to the local authority.

protection concerns'.³⁷⁵ As Lisa Kerr said: 'it's misconduct possibly leading to summary dismissal at Gordonstoun if you don't report a concern'.³⁷⁶

More broadly, she was clear that the staff, having been asked for their views on the 'values we all live and breathe every day ... have come up with safe, positive and improving, and safety – keeping children safe is the single most important thing that all of us do all the time'.³⁷⁷

Conclusions about the regime

There have been periods in Gordonstoun's history where an abusive regime established itself and was maintained for decades. It is clear, however, that since 1990 – when Mark Pyper was appointed – and more recently real efforts have been made by the school's heads, principals, and overall leadership team to address abuse, abusive practices, and the prioritisation of child protection. They needed to; it was long overdue.

375 Gordonstoun, [Part C response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0112, p.108.

376 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.109.

377 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.86.

6 Abuse at Gordonstoun

Summary

I find that children were abused at Gordonstoun. They were physically, sexually, and emotionally abused by other children. Abuse was also perpetrated by staff. The evidence of abuse was clear from the accounts of many applicants.

I understand the school accepts that there were serious failings in the past and that abuse did indeed occur. That is plain not only from the oral evidence I heard but also from Gordonstoun's responses to Part D of the Inquiry's section 21 notices.

Sexually abusive conduct by staff

Andrew Keir

Andrew Keir was a physics teacher at Gordonstoun from 1983 to 1994, and an assistant housemaster at Duffus House between 1983 and 1991. He was also a predatory and manipulative paedophile who took advantage of vulnerable children, using a variety of lures to ensnare them. In evidence to the Inquiry, he continued to deny his guilt, despite having been found guilty after trial of two charges of lewd, indecent, and libidinous practices and behaviour, one charge of indecent assault, and one charge of breach of the peace, all

from his time at Gordonstoun.³⁷⁸ His denials were evasive and unconvincing. He was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment which, because the case was prosecuted at summary level, was the maximum sentence open to the sheriff, who criticised the Crown's decision to prosecute the case at that level and said the sentence 'was woefully inadequate' for such calculated grooming.³⁷⁹



Duffus House

In evidence, Keir did – eventually – admit having had an interest in male children from a young age, although it was not entirely clear exactly when he realised he was not that interested in girls and that boys were more attractive to him.³⁸⁰ He also admitted having been convicted in England of possessing, making, and distributing indecent images of children between 2001

378 For full details of Andrew Keir's convictions, see [Appendix F](#).

379 'Former Moray teacher jailed for grooming three of his pupils', Press and Journal, 2 May 2018.

380 [Transcript, day 233](#): Andrew Keir (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1983-94), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.134-5 and 140-1.

and 2017, for which he received a 28-month prison sentence. The evidence uncovered by the police on his computer, in 2017, included five obscene stories involving boys. One was entitled 'Speedos', another 'School Showers'. The Gordonstoun swimming pool and showers were common locations for his abuse, though it also happened elsewhere, as applicant accounts, which I believed, set out.

There were applicants who, though not themselves abused, recalled aspects of Keir's behaviour which, for a teacher to engage in, seem to have been inappropriate. One former pupil, 'Seamus', who gave a statement after the hearings, reflected on Keir's behaviour in 1984 and said he was 'overfriendly to students ... and behaved more as a friend than a teacher. I wonder whether his overfriendliness was a means of grooming students.'³⁸¹ He recalled a conversation Keir had with boys in which he, Keir, reminisced about university where '[he] and other students would all be in the toilets washing out their condoms on Saturday nights'.³⁸² I have no doubt Keir was grooming children with a view to abusing them.

He undoubtedly looked out for lonely and shy children. He saw them in his physics classes, but was also highly engaged in extracurricular activities, running the canoe, judo, and radio ham clubs which he would encourage boys to join. He was ostensibly a kind confidant to children, as 'Paul' described:

My relationship with Mr Keir very much and very quickly became not a student/teacher

relationship. It was far more of an older friend relationship, and I specifically use the word 'relationship' in the grandest sense because there was a trust there, there was a confidence there. If you were ... to ask me who I would speak to if I had any particular issues at the school ... then he would have been the person I would speak to ... I just didn't see him as a teacher. It was a close friend who I would confide in ... I had two friends, but ... they were the other side of the school, so having someone who was a teacher and who I could trust and talk through things with was - I was in no way unhappy about that.³⁸³

With 'Bob', a child who was badly bullied and already vulnerable, the approach was similar, though nuanced to reflect his interest in model aeroplanes. He was invited to Keir's house and taken to the living room, though to his puzzlement he does not now remember there being any model aeroplanes:

He was just really nice to me. Like he was just kind, soft-spoken. He just seemed interested, which was at the time very unusual for anyone to be interested ... it was almost a relief for someone to be interested ... Growing up we had a railway set, we had model aeroplanes ... it was familiar enough that, you know, there was a connection over it.³⁸⁴

Having instigated such relationships, Andrew Keir would engineer situations to take matters further. 'Paul' kept a diary and recorded many 'ad hoc judo sessions' in the radio ham club which lacked the formality of a judo lesson but instead involved wrestling, 'where the touching was quite long and

381 Written statement of 'Seamus' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1985-8), at WIT-1-000001068, p.22, paragraph 117.

382 Written statement of 'Seamus' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1985-8), at WIT-1-000001068, p.22, paragraph 116.

383 Transcript, day 232: 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, p.117.

384 Transcript, day 230: 'Bob' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1990-2), at TRN-8-000000021, p.137.

'I knew what had happened was wrong. I was naive but not that naive.'

inappropriate'.³⁸⁵ After one such class he remembered that 'two of the other children said Mr Keir is a "bit handsy"'.³⁸⁶

'Bob's' experience was different. On another visit Keir invited him to the bedroom explaining that he was getting married and had bought massage oils to use on his wife-to-be, but wanted to practise on 'Bob' first:

He asked me to take off my clothes and I remember lying on the bed wondering what was happening and why. He was putting his hands below my waist and it was so obvious at that point that this was all wrong. He touched me with his oiled hands, briefly, in a sexual way. I have no memory of him asking me to touch him sexually. I don't know what I said or what I did but I remember leaving at that point in a deep panic because I was so eager to get out of there ... I knew what had happened was wrong. I was naive but not that naive.³⁸⁷

'Bob' was 12 years old.

'Paul', who gave evidence at Keir's trial in Elgin Sheriff Court, continued to experience abuse, including at the Gordonstoun swimming pool, a location where abuse was experienced by all three of the complainers:

I went to the swimming pool a number of times and he didn't turn up. It was an annoyance, but Bruce House is only just literally over the hill from the swimming pool, so ... irksome more than anything else. But

actually meeting him and then going into the swimming pool, what happened in the swimming pool, that only happened the once. Fortunately he allowed me to exit from that situation when I very clearly said to him, 'I'd like to go, please', and he didn't invite me again.³⁸⁸

'Paul' was asked to remove his swimming trunks after Keir had taken off his own trunks. Reflecting back, 'Paul' considered he was fortunate, for Keir 'was someone I trusted closely as a friend, he was still in a position of authority, so I did feel like I had to do what he said, and honestly if he'd forced me to, if he'd said, "No, you have to do this", I probably would have'.³⁸⁹

The abuse did not stop and once again Keir took advantage of the relationship when he asked 'Paul' if he

wanted to play some computer games in the physics lab ... The lab was locked, it was dark and no one was in there. The computer was set up for the games and he sat immediately next to me on my left. He put his arm around my shoulder and round my waist and undid my belt buckle and put his hand down there under my underwear and kept it there, moving for a few minutes. I had to pretend nothing was happening and focused on the computer game. Eventually I said: 'I want to go now'. He stopped and I remember very vividly, he took his arm back and he had massive sweat patches under both arms. The smell still affects me. I did up my belt and trousers

385 [Transcript, day 232](#): 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, p.122.

386 [Transcript, day 232](#): 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, p.122.

387 [Written statement of 'Bob'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1990-2), at WIT-1-000000757, p.9, paragraph 40.

388 [Transcript, day 232](#): 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, p.127.

389 [Transcript, day 232](#): 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, p.128.

and didn't speak about it and got up and left the building. It wasn't spoken of again and I wanted to forget it happened and block it out.³⁹⁰

Although 'Paul' moved from Gordonstoun to another school, Keir maintained contact up to 1993:

My relationship with Mr Keir while we were at Gordonstoun was that of a friend, a confidant, and I was not aware that what he did was wrong. I assumed it was a mistake, an error, something which if it's a friend you forgive. It just happened that one time: I'm very sorry, I didn't mean it to happen. It's no problem, we'll get past it. Because he was, like I say, a trusted friend ... But his hold on me, that relationship continued after I left the school. I kept in contact with him and he kept in contact with me, not regularly, only two or three occurrences, but still that contact remained and I actually went to see him.³⁹¹

They met at Hopeman harbour, three miles from Gordonstoun, where Keir kept a boat. 'Paul', on holiday from his new school

foolishly and innocently ... went to see him, he showed me a few things around his boat, around his house, I picked up a box of radio hamming gear from him ... I vividly remember it ... he put his arm around my shoulder, not at a distance but, you know, close so we were all touching down one side. I just got an instant flashback of the sweat and his closeness, the arm around me is exactly what he did just before he did the stuff in the physics lab, and I just ... I'm out, I'm done. You know, let's go, please.³⁹²

'Paul' was now 16, and Keir was clearly worried that he might be exposed, for he said:

'Let's keep this our little secret'. He spoke to me about how if I was to talk to anyone about this, it would, you know, not only hurt him but his wife, his children, and I ... obviously hope I'm a nice person and I didn't want to damage his, you know, relationship, his life, so I did.³⁹³

The impact of the abuse has been profound for 'Paul'. One reason he kept quiet was – as with some other boarding school applicants – to protect his parents:

This has always been the hardest thing for me about the whole thing. My parents sacrificed an awful lot to send me to Gordonstoun. It didn't financially cripple them, but I know that was their priority and they literally sent me to the best school that they could afford at all costs. And I didn't want my parents to know that that had happened to me there because I know that they would never forgive themselves for it. And it's not their fault. It was my fault at the time, but I understand it's not my fault.³⁹⁴

**'I didn't want my parents
to know that that had
happened to me there.'**

It was never 'Paul's' fault. He was abused in 1991, but Keir's behaviour had been ongoing for years prior to that, and the first charge he was convicted of related to abuse at the swimming pool in 1988-9, when complaints

390 [Written statement of 'Paul'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at WIT-1-000000804, p.25, paragraph 113.

391 [Transcript, day 232](#): 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, p.133.

392 [Transcript, day 232](#): 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.133-4.

393 [Transcript, day 232](#): 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, p.134.

394 [Transcript, day 232](#): 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.135-6.

‘For Gordonstoun to deny knowledge is not correct. There was a whitewash.’

were made to staff. The fault lies with the atrocious breaches of trust by Andrew Keir, allied with the institutional failings of Gordonstoun from 1989 onwards. ‘Paul’ neatly summed matters up when he said:

I’m aware of at least five victims personally ... The earliest known offence I’m aware of was in January of 1989 and other offences that happened after I was there. The most distressing and, honestly, I think a critical failure at the time was that Gordonstoun didn’t listen to someone who reported the abuse at the start of 1989. Two things from that. One is had they listened, potentially the abuse that happened to me would not have happened because they would have addressed the issue. Unfortunately, I know that practices at the time would have been to give Mr Keir a reference, a good review, and move him on to a different school and so potentially it could have happened to someone else anyway. I’m not particularly happy to say that, but it is what it is.³⁹⁵

His prediction proved to be accurate.

When news of Keir’s prosecution broke in 2015, some former pupils contacted the school. A former Duffus House boarder was critical:

While I was never directly subjected to any abuse by Mr Keir, it was widely known that ‘something wasn’t right’ and the incident in the pool was reported to my friends (the

house prefects) by junior pupils and ... they did advise our housemaster at the time. It was reported but never went anywhere. This was not the only incident. Maybe these were different days and these types of cases were not taken seriously, but they certainly happened and were reported. For Gordonstoun to deny knowledge is not correct - other staff were informed. There was a whitewash.³⁹⁶

From Gordonstoun’s own inquiries in 2015, it was discovered that prefects did make reports to the school chaplain, Canon Anthony Montgomery. In response, he interviewed four boys who revealed that they had been invited to swim naked by Keir, who, fully undressed, ‘encouraged a conversation which was sexual in nature in the showers’.³⁹⁷ A handwritten note was found, dated 6 February 1989, from the then deputy head, David Byatt, to Michael Mavor, the headmaster. It referred to a meeting between Byatt and Montgomery concerning an incident in the swimming pool, though it did not name the teacher involved.³⁹⁸ I infer that this can only have been Keir, and it demonstrates that at least some of his behaviour was known about at the highest levels of management. Yet nothing was done.

That is confirmed by Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), who acknowledged and apologised for Gordonstoun’s failings when giving evidence. The first failure was

395 Transcript, day 232: ‘Paul’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989–91), at TRN-8-000000023, p.140.

396 Gordonstoun, email correspondence with former pupils, at GOR-000004445, p.4.

397 Gordonstoun, email correspondence with former pupils, at GOR-000004445, p.7.

398 Gordonstoun, Part D response to section 21 notice, Appendix 4, section 5.9: Specific Complaints, at GOR.001.001.0284, p.1.

one of recording; the notes about Keir's behaviour were put in a pupil file and not, as they should have been, in his staff file. The second was a lack of openness by the then head, Michael Mavor, during his handover in 1990.

Mark Pyper remembered:

I first met Andrew Keir when I was visiting the school, one of the visits before I was appointed ... he was asked ... to show me the Fire Service of the school ... an aspect which he was very keen on. And I thought this was a nervous man. He stammered a bit. He had staring eyes, and I thought he was therefore an interesting person. I was reassured by my predecessor that he was a good physics teacher and indeed a committed school master.³⁹⁹

He reviewed all the staff with Mavor on his second visit, in May 1990:

[Mavor] asked if I would like to have a quick look through ... the school list of all the staff. So we actually went through the fullness of every member of staff in, I would think, one minute, possibly less on some, slightly more on others, a potted biography of what they were.⁴⁰⁰

Pyper repeated the process on arrival in post in August 1990, but found nothing adverse in Keir's file to cause him concern. As he said: 'But there was no records in Mr

Keir's file itself ... [which was] ... a colossal shortcoming and very sad on behalf of the school - nothing to do with me - one can only apologise.'⁴⁰¹ Had he known about the file note, his

approach in one regard would have been very different indeed. I would ... have been more alert, but I would specifically have been more alert because he remained for my first year as assistant housemaster in Duffus House, and during the course of that year, the new housemaster there ... came to me on two or three occasions and said that he would like to have a new assistant housemaster. Knowing nothing of this, I said, 'You need to wait a year ... Can you tell me why you might be concerned?' and he said, 'Well, he's sort of ... He's rather old-school', and he implied that his methods were a slight combination of being too familiar on the one hand and then very stern and turning on pupils in a rather old-fashioned way on the other ... I have since ... wondered sometimes (a) if [he] knew about the alleged incident, and (b) whether he assumed, although he never said anything, that I knew about the alleged incident and that he was coming to me with a sort of further chapter to the story, but I had seen nothing, unfortunately.⁴⁰²

That is true. However, Keir's worrying behaviour was in fact highlighted again in the course of Mark Pyper's first term at Gordonstoun. The same housemaster sent him a memo:

399 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.153.

400 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.154.

401 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.156.

402 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.157.

I have been keeping a quiet eye on AK for the last three or four weeks. There have been several occasions when boys have been in his room, but none of which have concerned me. This evening at 5.30 p.m. I heard some giggling in his room, knocked and walked in. Two third-form boys were in his room [so the door was closed]. One was on the floor with AK tickling him. Immediately before I walked in, I heard the other boy say: 'he'll go for your underpants'. After the boys had left the room, I saw one of the boys in my study and asked what had happened. He told me that he had heard a noise in AK's kitchen and suggested that there was a hamster there. Apparently AK has a nickname, 'Hammy the hamster'. Whereupon AK started to tickle him and according to the boy was about to give him a wedgie when the other boy walked in. Obviously I am not happy with this situation. Firstly, I don't enjoy watching over staff and the loss of trust and, secondly, the doubt of whether or not there is something in the rumour that I mentioned to you earlier in the term.⁴⁰³

This suggests that Keir had been a source of concern almost from the beginning of Mark Pyper's tenure, but he did not take adequate steps to address it. Instead, he wrote a memo for Keir's staff file:

unofficial conversation about Andrew Keir. Comments have been made about AK's private life and predilections which affect pupils ... Several members of staff have raised questions about AK's relationship with boys, especially junior boys in Duffus. BP [the housemaster] says (a) no evidence, not

even circumstantial. (b) AK's room is used as a junior common room but all is apparently healthy and above board. BP has entered on a number of occasions. (c) there was one occasion recently where there was a single boy in AK's room at midnight but when BP entered it was only chatting, et cetera. I said (c) is the danger, watch it. Follow up all leads discreetly. Must not prejudice or give ... a dog a bad name but warning may be necessary on [how] things might be perceived.⁴⁰⁴

Mark Pyper did not, in his oral evidence, depart from this stance; he insisted that assuming innocence was the right thing to do.⁴⁰⁵

But, in these circumstances, his primary responsibility was not to determine innocence or otherwise, but to assess risk – first and foremost the risks to children for whose protection he was responsible. That did not, however, happen, and it allowed Andrew Keir to continue abusing children while he remained at Gordonstoun. Most significantly, Michael Mavor had failed to respond properly to reports of actual abuse and compounded matters by not communicating his knowledge of these reports to his successor. There was then serious failure in the school's mishandling of critical information about Keir, by putting it in the wrong place. I appreciate Mark Pyper was trying hard to improve a harsh regime by introducing proper pastoral care but sadly, he also failed. His failure was that he did not carry out a risk assessment despite the multiple 'red flags' in relation to Keir that were being discussed in late 1990.

403 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.160–1.

404 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.162.

405 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011, principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.162–5.

Gordonstoun ultimately recognised all these shortcomings when it discovered Keir was to be prosecuted in 2015. Meetings were held to consider how to respond, and associated documents include a paper with the following commentary:

I don't think the facts speak very well for how Gordonstoun dealt with it at the time. At worst (certainly thinking about perception and how newspapers might portray this) there was a complaint made by several teachers about AK's conduct with junior boys, evidence from the House Master that he was tickling boys and allegations that 'he'll go for your underpants'. AK was never called to a meeting to discuss this ... no disciplinary process and no external investigation. Less than four years later Gordonstoun wrote him a glowing reference to get a job at another school with no mention of anything inappropriate having occurred.⁴⁰⁶

That last point is also of real moment, for while Mark Pyper did not support Keir's appointment as housemaster of Duffus – though remarkably Michael Mavor did, writing in support of it in 1993 – he wrote multiple positive references for other schools without any mention of the risks and concerns he was aware of. In evidence, Mark Pyper sought to rely on the fact that Keir moved to a job at a girls' school, but he had also written a positive reference for Oundle, a boys-only school until about 1990 and co-educational since then.⁴⁰⁷ Surprisingly, he still questioned whether that was a failing.⁴⁰⁸

In those circumstances, Mark Pyper provided references which masked the full picture, and if that happens then the reference prevents a prospective employer from making a proper assessment. Ultimately, Mark Pyper may have accepted that, although it was not entirely clear whether he did and he persisted in maintaining that his 'judgement at the time was that in ignorance and in error that it was not relevant'.⁴⁰⁹ The ignorance to which he referred was ignorance arising from the misfiling of relevant information about Keir, as referred to above. Whilst child protection in the 1990s was not what it became in later years, Mark Pyper did agree that rigorous and uncompromising enforcement of rules designed to protect children was necessary 'without any doubt at all'.⁴¹⁰ An example of that in Gordonstoun's current practices is that it is written into staff contracts of employment that a failure to report a concern that a child might be suffering abuse may be treated as gross misconduct and thus could lead to loss of employment.

Patrick Llewellyn-Davies

Patrick Llewellyn-Davies was employed by the school as a history teacher and also, for a while, as a housemaster. I am satisfied, on the evidence, that he abused at least two children and possibly more.

Within two weeks of starting at Gordonstoun, in 1984, 'James' heard boys talking about Llewellyn-Davies, who was his housemaster, abusing boys sexually, it being 'common

406 Gordonstoun, email correspondence with former pupils, at GOR-000004445, p.8.

407 Gordonstoun, email correspondence with former pupils, at GOR-000004445, pp.21-2 and [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.166.

408 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.167.

409 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.168.

410 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.171.

Courage was displayed by pupils but not by the school.

knowledge' that he had done so. When 'James' was called to Llewellyn-Davies' study, the man showed him a letter from Toby Coghill which stated that he, 'James', was 'probably a homosexual'. Llewellyn-Davies told 'James' that he would 'probably never tell anyone about this'. He caused 'James' to be uncomfortable and worried to the extent he felt sufficiently emboldened so as to tell Llewellyn-Davies that 'I knew who and what he was and that he wasn't to come near me and if he touched me I would make sure everyone got to know'.⁴¹¹

Gordonstoun received complaints concerning Patrick Llewellyn-Davies from the father of a boy, as explained in a letter written by the boy in adulthood to the school in February 2010.⁴¹² The boy had been a Gordonstoun pupil over a period that included the autumn term of 1977. The letter was in response to a request for information by Jill Hollis, a woman who was editing a book to mark the school's 75th anniversary.⁴¹³ His account was of the man's behaviour in 1977, when he was housemaster of Gordonstoun House and nicknamed 'Lulu'.⁴¹⁴ Llewellyn-Davies' behaviour was, as described, sexual abuse of the author of the letter and of another, more mature, pupil. He alternated between them. Llewellyn-Davies was described by the author of the letter as 'a man with catholic tastes in his teenage boys'.⁴¹⁵

The abuse was of a non-contact type, but involved having the boy regularly remove his pyjamas, parade up and down in front of him, striking poses and performing exercises all whilst naked. Meanwhile, Llewellyn-Davies sat dressed only in a sarong and holding a cigarette and a glass of whisky. Courage was displayed by pupils but not by the school. The author of the letter spoke at the time to a Colour Bearer. He confirmed matters with the older boy and told another housemaster, who took it to the headmaster, J.W.R. Kempe. He also told his father, who complained repeatedly to Kempe, demanding that Llewellyn-Davies be dismissed. The author of the letter understood that Kempe tried to play it down and was anxious that the school should not suffer adverse publicity, having already attracted negative publicity that year regarding the expulsion of some pupils following a drugs search. Kempe initially went only as far as demoting Llewellyn-Davies from the role of housemaster, but the man was allowed to remain at Gordonstoun. The boy's father persisted, threatening to make matters public if Llewellyn-Davies was not dismissed. Eventually, two terms later, Llewellyn-Davies left the school. He was not dismissed and went on to teach at Chatham House school in Kent. It is not known what references were provided but I infer that any references that were provided did not disclose what the headmaster knew, in the light of these reports and complaints, about

411 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun, 1975-8), at TRN-8-000000022, p.39.

412 Already mentioned by 'James' in the [Abuse at Aberlour](#) chapter.

413 Jill Hollis (ed.), *Gordonstoun: An Enduring Vision*, 2011, Third Millennium Publishing.

414 Gordonstoun, correspondence with former pupil, at GOR-000003167, p.2.

415 Gordonstoun, correspondence with former pupil, at GOR-000003167, p.2.

the man's proclivities. Further, the author of the letter, having spoken up, suffered for it. Llewellyn-Davies had been popular, and the pupil was criticised by other children for the part he had played in the loss of a teacher they had liked.

Patrick Llewellyn-Davies died in 2006. His obituary in the Exeter College Association Register of that year⁴¹⁶ describes him as having taken early retirement in 1997. I note that in that same year he was also convicted and fined £750 for possessing indecent video material of children under the age of 16.

Canon Anthony Montgomery

The school chaplain should be an obvious point of pastoral contact for pupils, and the late Canon Anthony Montgomery filled that post for 25 years until his retirement in 1993. He was well regarded by many, and he did share concerns about Keir, as set out above. As other case studies have shown, his religious status – in his case as a canon in the Scottish Episcopal Church – allowed him a certain latitude and freedom with children. It is likely to have been assumed that he could, as a canon, be trusted. However, he had a reputation for touching girls inappropriately. 'Thomas' said: 'It seemed to be well known that Canon Montgomery used to touch girls' bottoms ... my own girlfriend used to tell me that he had touched her up'.⁴¹⁷

'Annie' first met Canon Montgomery at the school fire service where he gave instruction. She found him disturbing, for under the guise of training he would touch and gently rub her back and bottom, as well as taking

her by the arms and kissing her on the forehead. She remembered being kissed between five and ten times like this. Later, he appointed her sacristan in the chapel which was a role she had not sought and did not want. She refused his requests to help him to robe for services.⁴¹⁸

Whilst she described his conduct as 'touching and chaste kissing', it was clearly a form of abuse by a man who was in a position to exert considerable control over her. She described it as 'wrong':

I had never been taught exclusively by a male teacher before and I had no reference points to understanding the kind of hierarchy that existed at Gordonstoun. It was 1986 to 1988 and in the context of that time, it was, and is, hard to understand what this touching and chaste kissing was. A nod to an outdated notion of the weaker female sex, an opportunity for some inappropriate covert authority figure sexual harassment or something we would now in fact call grooming.⁴¹⁹

What she could say was that

it was definitely wrong and definitely inappropriate, and even by that ... time ... would not be appropriate. I can't actually tell you beyond reasonable doubt what his motive was. What I can tell you is I did not want to be kissed ... chaste kissing ... by a male staff member as I went about my daily life.⁴²⁰

It was more than wrong. It was abuse of 'Annie' and it was abuse of the trust that had been placed in him.

416 www.exeter.ox.ac.uk/inc/uploads/2017/07/register-06.pdf, p.23.

417 Written statement of 'Thomas' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1982-7), at WIT-1-000001244, p.32, paragraph 158.

418 Written statement of 'Annie' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1986-8), at WIT-1-000000594, pp.26-8, paragraphs 136-48.

419 Transcript, day 230: 'Annie' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1986-8), at TRN-8-000000021, p.88.

420 Transcript, day 230: 'Annie' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1986-8), at TRN-8-000000021, p.88.

At the time she was sufficiently concerned to report what was happening to a female member of staff about the canon's conduct and was told that 'everyone knew he was tricky or difficult and I needed just to try to avoid him. Nothing came of our conversation.'⁴²¹ That was a wholly inadequate response. The 'red flags' were obvious and why the school did nothing to address them is unfathomable.

Kevin Lomas

Kevin Lomas was a maths teacher at Gordonstoun from 1989 to 1996 when he was between the ages of 29 and 36 years old. 'Sarah' remembered when he arrived at the school there were rumours that he had come to Gordonstoun because he had been 'kicked out' of another teaching job. She then had direct experience of him, as did others, at her leavers' ball in the early 1990s. 'He tried to put his tongue down my throat' and had 'gone round the leavers' ball trying to snog a load of girls'.⁴²²

Whether that was known by staff or not cannot be established with certainty for, as 'Sarah' fairly recognised, 'I don't think he was doing it openly so that he could be seen by anyone.'⁴²³ She certainly did not tell anyone, perhaps because of 'a mixture of the fact that we were leaving or that he was a teacher and who would you tell and who would believe you and I certainly - from my previous experiences I'd always thought no one would believe me'.⁴²⁴

A school ball was also the occasion of some of the abuse perpetrated by 'Martin',

a teacher at Loretto School - for which he was disciplined - and it is hard to believe that staff at Gordonstoun did not have some awareness of how Kevin Lomas was behaving towards girls. They should have done. His staff file suggests that at times he could be difficult and wayward. The notes in it included that

he left classes unsupervised ... disturbing other classes by playing music ... five periods of teaching lost because he had gone to a rugby match ... taking classes to his flat for 'a brew' ... late with papers, taking class for 'a brew' and leaving another unattended ... refusal to move rooms ... Appraisal 1991: 'does not accept criticism and dislikes conforming to a regime not of his making'⁴²⁵

Why were the schools not more vigilant? Why did they not allow for the possibility that children could be at risk?

The conduct described there was remarkably similar to how 'Martin' behaved at Loretto. These men were outliers as compared to the norm; the obvious questions include: why did neither school keep a closer eye on them? Why were the schools not more vigilant? Why did they not allow for the possibility that children could be at risk?

Kevin Lomas moved on to Cranleigh School in Surrey and the school's request for a reference sent to his head of department at Gordonstoun stated: 'it is essential that the

421 Transcript, day 230: 'Annie' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1986-8), at TRN-8-000000021, p.89.

422 Transcript, day 230: 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.52.

423 Transcript, day 230: 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.52.

424 Transcript, day 230: 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.53.

425 Gordonstoun, Staff file, Kevin Lomas, at GOR-000004514.

School should know if there are any grounds for thinking that he might not be suitable to work closely with children and young people'.⁴²⁶ The reply from Gordonstoun failed to share the obvious causes for concern about him, as evidenced by the notes on his file and as staff should, from the way he had conducted himself at the leavers' ball, have been aware. It stated – wrongly – that there were 'no grounds for questioning his suitability to work with children'.⁴²⁷ There was plainly good reason to have concerns about his suitability to work with children and young people.

'Sarah's' reticence to talk may have been shared by staff, notwithstanding the changes Mark Pyper was seeking to introduce. It seems that there must have been 'red flags' to which staff turned a blind eye. In 2008, Kevin Lomas appeared at Oxford Crown Court and was sentenced to two and a half years in prison after pleading guilty to four charges of sexual activity with a child and one of indecent exposure. He admitted having harboured desires for children for years.⁴²⁸

Other staff

Evidence has been provided to the Inquiry about allegations regarding some other members of staff. I do not, on the available evidence, find those allegations to have been established, applying the standard of proof explained above. However, the fact of them having been made is relevant.

A history teacher

A former pupil contacted the police in the early 2000s and reported abuse by his history teacher during handwriting skills tuition in 1976. He reported that the abuse began with the teacher putting his hand on the child's knee and moving it up towards his shorts, and that in one lesson it went further with the teacher undoing the boy's shorts, masturbating him, and encouraging the boy to do the same to the teacher. Police inquiries confirmed the teacher was dead.⁴²⁹

The exchange teacher

In an addendum to its Part D response, Gordonstoun added seven new allegations. They included a report from a former pupil to Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24) in 2018. He told her that he had been raped once or twice each week in 1965 by a maths teacher who was on exchange from abroad. On the advice of the school in 2018, he reported it to the police.⁴³⁰

Other members of staff

Appendix 4, section 5.9 of Gordonstoun's Part D response details other allegations of sexual abuse by staff at the school.⁴³¹

One allegation, received in 2015, is of unspecified sexual abuse by a teacher on a single occasion in the 1960s whilst the pupil was briefly living with that teacher and his wife at the start of a summer holiday.

426 Request to Gordonstoun School for a reference for Kevin Lomas, 7 November 1995, at GOR-000004514, p.9.

427 Reference from Gordonstoun School for Kevin Lomas, 10 November 1995, at GOR-000004514, p.11.

428 'Teacher jailed over sex abuse', Oxford Mail, 27 October 2008.

429 Police Scotland report, at PSS-000005944.

430 Gordonstoun, Addendum to Part D response to section 21 notice, at GOR-000000019.

431 Gordonstoun, Part D response to section 21 notice, Appendix 4, section 5.9: Specific Complaints, at GOR.001.001.0284, p.1.

The teacher apologised the day after and arranged to move the boy out of his class the next term.⁴³² Given the apology, it seems likely that something must have occurred that should not have done.

Three allegations involve inappropriate contact between staff and pupils, between 1999 and 2001. They ranged from what is referred to as 'horseplay' at a beach and socialising with student teachers, contrary to advice, and alleged misconduct by a member of staff when on a music tour. Gordonstoun carried out inquiries at the time and kept records of them. They did not find the allegations to be established but did give advice to the staff involved about the risks of socialising with pupils. They also warned them of the potential impact on their careers.

On the available evidence, I cannot find these allegations of abuse to have been established. I do, however, particularly note the use of the description 'horseplay' as I have encountered it being used in records or in evidence in other case studies in circumstances where, on the evidence as a whole, it is clear that what was really happening was physical and/or sexual abuse and/or grooming. What may seem 'horseplay' to one person can, in fact, amount to abuse of a child. 'Horseplay' may seem to be just fun, but it may be used as a cover for something which, for a child, is far from being fun.

Finally, Board papers from 2005 set out the school's response to the discovery of pornography on its IT system. One member of staff was reported to the Chairman

and issued with a final warning. He was also 'informed that he would not be able to hold any pastoral positions or senior responsibilities in the future'.⁴³³

Sexually abusive conduct by pupils

In the years before Gordonstoun became co-educational, sexual abuse of younger boys by older boys was, on the evidence, limited.

'George' heard about an occasion when an older boy sexually abused a younger one:

an older boy from Round Square had a crush on a younger pupil ... [who] worked in the quartermaster's store ... The older boy locked [him] in the store and made a sexual advance on him. The boy managed to get out of the room and reported it to the staff.⁴³⁴

The older boy was punished:

Mr Chew [the headmaster] told the father that if he beat his son with the cane then he might be allowed to stay. After the father had caned his son Mr Chew said the school didn't tolerate the sort of behaviour the son had been involved in. The pupil was then told to leave the school.⁴³⁵

In the 1970s and 1980s, there was talk of there being a 'rape den' in the undercroft of Bruce House: 'It was alleged that there were ring bolts fastened to the walls. Some of the boys taken there were 13 or 14 years old.'⁴³⁶

Rapes of boys were also mentioned by two other applicants. 'Sarah' recalled there being an online forum in the mid-2010s for former

432 Gordonstoun, letter of complaint from former pupil, at GOR-000003590, p.1.

433 Minutes of the Gordonstoun School Ltd Board, 6-7 November 2005, at GOR-000002840, p.9.

434 Transcript, day 230: read-in statement of 'George', (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1959-63), at TRN-8-000000021, p.159.

435 Transcript, day 230: read-in statement of 'George', (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1959-63), at TRN-8-000000021, p.159.

436 Transcript, day 231: read-in statement of 'Duncan' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1971-6), at TRN-8-000000022, p.12.

‘There was certainly no culture of respect and keeping your hands to yourself.’

Gordonstoun pupils where male pupils complained of being ‘raped by fellow pupils, urinated on’.⁴³⁷ ‘Angelo’ said he was ‘aware that one or two boy pupils were being raped by other boys. Many of us were well aware in the sense we heard rumours or gossip. I know how a kid who has been raped walks. I am ashamed that I didn’t speak up or understand this.’⁴³⁸

I am satisfied that these accounts at the very least suggest sexual abuse by older boys was happening at Gordonstoun at that time.

Following the introduction of co-education in 1972, it was not at all uncommon for girls to suffer sexual abuse. That abuse included rape. ‘Jane’ felt that ‘for us girls, whatever was happening to the boys would bleed out over us because we were ... easy targets’.⁴³⁹ The result was ‘a lot of girls went out with much older boys, considerably older boys in order to be able to have protection. And so were having probably quite sexual relationships quite early and young, but it was a way of keeping themselves safe’ from male pupils.⁴⁴⁰

‘Sophie’ concluded that:

There was an element of grooming of the young girls by older boys. I think that was a fairly common thing and I certainly experienced it myself. They had a way

of manipulating girls. Now I know about grooming, I see that was what it was ... I think the boys kind of taught each other to do that. It was the environment that they were in ... They managed to put pressure on girls and manipulate them. You feel so alone in an environment where there are no adults to talk to.⁴⁴¹

‘Sally’ added:

When I was at school there was definitely a lack of respect about a person’s body, with some boys routinely feeling free to give girls wedgies and other physical acts. If you tried to call it out you were picked on and ridiculed, with the behaviour towards you being worse. There was one girl who tried to stand up to the lads and she was given a really hard time, with them giving her wedgies, twisting her bra and so on. This sent a message to the rest of us just to stay silent. There was certainly no culture of respect and keeping your hands to yourself.⁴⁴²

‘Jane’ said: ‘There was a lot of shame around our gender and around sex’⁴⁴³ and referred to there being an air of unchecked sexual menace in a particular class:

I remember going into the maths class. There was a drawing on the blackboard of me with spread legs and a huge forest of red pubic hair ... The teacher must have noticed ... but

437 [Transcript, day 230](#): ‘Sarah’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.54.

438 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Angelo’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.94.

439 [Transcript, day 233](#): ‘Jane’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.31-2.

440 [Transcript, day 233](#): ‘Jane’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, p.39.

441 [Written statement of ‘Sophie’](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1977-80), at WIT-1-000000986, pp.17-18, paragraphs 65 and 67.

442 [Written statement of ‘Sally’](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1985-90), at WIT-1-000001195, p.25, paragraph 77.

443 [Written statement of ‘Jane’](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at WIT.001.001.7327, p.23, paragraph 102.

I can't remember any action being taken. My chair was chalked in red ... I always had the sense that the boys would take off my skirt or try to strip me or overwhelm me. There were no boundaries and it was really scary because it felt like anything could happen. It suited the adult staff not to intervene.⁴⁴⁴

This was dreadful. And it seems clear that it attracted no action, criticism, support, or guidance from any member of staff.

If pupils were caught engaging in sexual intercourse, the sanction was expulsion but no steps were taken to instil a culture in which it did not happen in the first place. 'Jane' said: 'I think changing the culture takes an enormous effort and engagement, and perhaps expense, and I'm not sure that any of those were available.'⁴⁴⁵ The upshot was that many female pupils existed in a state of fear and anxiety.

Female adult guests or staff could also be made to feel uncomfortable. Andrew Keir, recalling the experience of the housemaster's wife, explained that, as a boys' boarding school, it

was not one which was totally welcoming of ladies. They did try once to bring a female visiting tutor on site and the boys didn't make life very easy for her. They had their own personal expectations that a tutor in the boys' boarding house would be male ... There was a lack of respect ... including people coming back from the showers and accidentally dropping their towels and such like. That only happened for a very short time.

Mr Bridgeland, I think it was, had a strong word with the house at the time, but the boys were not shy about letting their opinions be known.⁴⁴⁶

Andrew Keir was referring to his experience in Duffus House, which, on the evidence, was one of the less violent male boarding houses. Gordonstoun could not have been unaware of this state of affairs. It certainly should have been. Such behaviour was still being tolerated as late as 1996 and 2002, as demonstrated by HMIe reports from those years. Inspectors in 1996 welcomed the fact that pupils in boarding houses had been permitted to personalise their rooms with wall hangings and posters but observed that some were in poor taste, including posters of 'female figures possibly too scantily clad'.⁴⁴⁷

Such behaviour was still being tolerated as late as 1996 and 2002.

They recommended that the housemaster 'establish his standards and insist on them'.⁴⁴⁸ In 2002, the point had to be reinforced: 'Some posters on display in some of the boys' houses were not in keeping with girls being treated as equals.'⁴⁴⁹

That mindset of inequality led to the commission of serious crimes, including within the girls' boarding houses, where security was inadequate. 'Annie' described how sixth-form boys would climb through unlocked windows into the girls' boarding

444 [Written statement of 'Jane'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at WIT.001.001.7327, p.23, paragraph 104.

445 [Transcript, day 233](#): 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-000000024, p.41.

446 [Transcript, day 233](#): Andrew Keir (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1983-94), at TRN-8-000000024, p.122.

447 HMIs, Inspection of the Welfare of Residential Pupils, Gordonstoun School, 16 September 1996, at SGV-000007146, p.2.

448 HMIs, Inspection of the Welfare of Residential Pupils, Gordonstoun School, 16 September 1996, at SGV-000007146, p.2.

449 HMIe, Inspection of the Care and Welfare of Residential Pupils, Gordonstoun School and Aberlour House, at GOR-000003636, p.5.

‘They sexually assaulted me, taking turns on different parts of my body.’

houses and that never changed in her time at Gordonstoun.⁴⁵⁰

When ‘Sophie’ was 16 years old and asleep in her first-floor dorm, her recollection is that she

woke up ... and there was someone on top of me ... he was 18, a Colour Bearer and in the oldest year group. I was 16. I had barely spoken to him and had said hello to him once ... He was in no way a friend ... [he] smelled of beer. He had evidently come back from some rugby match or other. His face was very scratchy and it was horrible. He was groping me. I had nothing but a sheet to protect me ... I don’t think he raped me, but I’ve blanked out from my memory most of what happened. He did touch me all over. It was a struggle and it was horrible. He was a big guy and very heavy and I really tried to fight to resist. I was really pinned down.⁴⁵¹

‘He was groping me ... I don’t think he raped me, but I’ve blanked out from my memory most of what happened.’

‘Sophie’ tried to report what had happened to the headmaster, Michael Mavor. He wanted to know the name of the boy, but she felt unable to tell him. That made him cross. The outcome was that the matter was not reported to the police, she was

gated, and she felt trapped and unable to remain at Gordonstoun. Shortly after that, she moved to another school. ‘Sophie’ also referred to being very aware that everything that happened within the school had to stay within the school; nobody was to talk to the press or anyone else on the outside.⁴⁵²

‘Sally’ suffered a vicious indecent assault when in her first term at the school. She was walking through a common room

when two senior boys approached me. They were kind of like ‘the lads’ ... They asked me if I wanted to go for a cigarette. I was a little 13-year-old newbie at school. I was flattered to be asked so I went with them. We went down into these woods [which] were out of bounds so I knew it was naughty, smoking and going into the woods ... we were sitting down. I think they’d been drinking. One of them was kissing me and I was pushed onto the ground and held down, while the other one had pulled my pants down. They sexually assaulted me, taking turns on different parts of my body. It was not pleasant, quite terrifying. I was trying to get them off me, but they had pinned my arms down by kneeling on them. It was too hard. I was also scared to shout out because I wasn’t supposed to be there. I didn’t manage to extract myself – I just felt helpless. After a while they just left.⁴⁵³

The effect on ‘Sally’ was profound:

It was a bit of a nightmare. It had big repercussions. I took to drinking. There was a

450 Transcript, day 230: ‘Annie’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1986–8), at TRN-8-000000021, p.82.

451 Written statement of ‘Sophie’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1977–80), at WIT-1-000000986, p.19, paragraphs 70–1.

452 Written statement of ‘Sophie’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1977–80), at WIT-1-000000986, p.19, paragraph 80.

453 Written statement of ‘Sally’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1985–90), at WIT-1-000001195, pp.13–14, paragraphs 43–4.

drinking culture that's cool anyway, but for me it was definitely to try and numb me; to obliterate what had happened out of my head; I drank excessively to 'get out of it' as that took me away from the present which was a struggle. I was self-harming as well, but it wasn't enough to warrant medical treatment. I tried to take an overdose in year four, the year after the sexual assault ... I took a heap of paracetamol, but then I vomited ... I think all of that action was me crying out for help. But nobody ever seemed to notice or didn't ask any questions to check in on me. The behaviour resulted in me being rusticated. I just feel that side of me was not the person I was, but it tarred my report and people's perception of me. I took on a persona that wasn't really me. It was a way just to survive and get through things. I had to see the boys who had sexually assaulted me around the school for the next three years.⁴⁵⁴

'I think all of that action was me crying out for help. But nobody ever seemed to notice.'

'Sally' contacted Gordonstoun in 2015 after receiving Simon Reid's (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011-17) email to former pupils. She was not entirely content with the way matters unfolded at that time. However, she was a beneficiary of the more enlightened approach the school has adopted since about 2010 when responding to such communications and was grateful to Lisa Kerr for having recently given her a heartfelt apology for past abuse.

That does not mean, however, that sexual abuse has been eradicated. Appendix 4 in Gordonstoun's Part D response⁴⁵⁵ mentions multiple episodes of sexual abuse of pupils by older boys, including two in 1990. They were disclosed by former staff members after the school contacted them asking for assistance with its response to the inquiry. One involved an incident similar to 'Sophie's' experience a decade earlier and the other involved abuse of younger boys by an older male pupil. Unlike what happened in the 1980s, both abusers were, however, expelled. Since then, further complaints have been investigated, recorded, and responded to.

Further, 'John' contacted the Inquiry after the hearings. The evidence provided in his written statement⁴⁵⁶ includes a graphic account of a sexual assault by other boys when on a school expedition, and of his having suffered years of bullying at Aberlour House, the new junior school, and at Gordonstoun. His experiences were dreadful, but it is also clear that the school regularly engaged with him and his parents. His wellbeing record is long and detailed, and separate correspondence to the parents of one of his abusers, who was rusticated, is remarkably firm. This is good and is in marked contrast to what used to happen.

Physical abuse

Discipline - abuse by a member of staff

There was no evidence of physical abuse by way of inappropriate and/or excessive punishment. However, in its Part D response, the school provided details relating to a

454 Written statement of 'Sally' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1985-90), at WIT-1-000001195, p.15, paragraphs 47-9.

455 Gordonstoun, Part D response to section 21 notice, at GOR.001.001.0284, p.3.

456 Written statement of 'John' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 2006-15), at WIT-1-000001044.

complaint made in September 1997 about the head of seamanship, 'Robert', who also captained its sail-training vessel, *Sea Spirit*.

'Robert' had established and maintained a 'zero tolerance' rule in relation to smoking on board the vessel. The reasons for this included that gas bottles were stowed on deck in a wooden locker and that much of the internal fit-out of the vessel was made of wood. Any pupil caught smoking on board would normally be taken straight off the vessel and immediately transported back to the school. The costs of doing so - which could be considerable - would be charged to their parents, which he felt acted as an added deterrent. His approach to other breaches of discipline was similarly very strict.

After Mark Pyper became headmaster in 1990, 'Robert' became increasingly concerned that discipline in the school was, as he saw it, becoming more lax and that that was not a good thing as standards of pupil behaviour were deteriorating. He felt it could get to the stage that he could not safely take young people out on the sail-training vessel. Given his increasing concern about behavioural standards, he sought to make it clear to pupils that no disobedience would be tolerated on the *Sea Spirit*.⁴⁵⁷ He had conversations with the head about these matters, including in 1996 when he was told by Mark Pyper that if he didn't like his approach to discipline, then he, 'Robert', was 'free to leave'.⁴⁵⁸ 'Robert' was, however, strong willed and firm in his own views.

Their differences appear never to have been resolved, and the evidence provided

by 'Robert' in his written statement appears to show him having become increasingly frustrated that, in his view, the head was not getting his message that, at sea, discipline had to be strict and that was being put at risk by the head's approach to disciplinary matters.

Responding to 'Robert' in the way he did was never going to bring 'Robert' round to Mark Pyper's way of thinking nor was it going to assist the growth of any degree of mutual understanding between them. It fuelled the persistence of a real risk of 'Robert' punishing pupils in a way that, whilst he would see it as justifiable chastisement, in fact amounted to abuse. That is what happened.

'Robert' had disciplined a female pupil in September 1997 for smoking. He considered it a breach not only of school rules but also of a 'cardinal law of the sea'.⁴⁵⁹ The normal punishment for smoking on board was that the pupil would be taken back to shore and returned to school by taxi, but that did not happen on this occasion. Instead, 'Robert' punished the girl by hoisting her 7.5 metres up the mainmast in a bosun's chair and leaving her until she was, in his judgment, 'suitably contrite',⁴⁶⁰ which was two and a half hours later. He decided on that punishment because he wanted not only to punish that particular pupil but also send out a warning to others.

The girl was medically examined after the event and a report of that examination noted that her thighs were bruised. She complained to her parents who, in turn,

457 Written statement of 'Robert' (former head of seamanship, Gordonstoun, 1984-98), at WIT-1-000000572, p.7, paragraphs 35 and 36.

458 Written statement of 'Robert' (former head of seamanship, Gordonstoun, 1984-98), at WIT-1-000000572, p.5, paragraph 28.

459 Written statement of 'Robert' (former head of seamanship, Gordonstoun, 1984-98), at WIT-1-000000572, p.10, paragraph 52.

460 Written statement of 'Robert' (former head of seamanship, Gordonstoun, 1984-98), at WIT-1-000000572, p.5, paragraph 51.

‘Housemasters were made aware of the abuse and bullying but did very little about it.’

complained to the school. The school accepted that she was distressed by what had happened to her. Mark Pyper considered that the way that ‘Robert’ had responded to the girl was wrong and amounted to gross misconduct, and I can well understand why. Disciplinary proceedings followed. Mark Pyper was clear that ‘a judgment of gross misconduct was correct, and I was very sorry and disapproved of the way it was dealt with thereafter.’⁴⁶¹

The ‘thereafter’ to which he referred was that a confidential compromise agreement was reached under which a sum of money was to be paid to ‘Robert’, who then left the school.

It seems that, ultimately, the question of a reference did not arise as the board was satisfied he would not be involved in such work again; he would be retiring on grounds of ill-health and was not, in any event, considered by the school to be at all physically fit.⁴⁶²

As regards his fitness, ‘Robert’ had been unwell prior to the trip and Mark Pyper had in fact been ‘doubtful whether he should be in command of the voyage’.⁴⁶³ If the trip had not gone ahead, the female pupil would not have suffered the abuse I have described. However, ‘Robert’ obtained a doctor’s note stating he was fit, raising the

question of whether or not a head should, in such circumstances, allow his doubts about a member of staff to be swayed. Probably not. I acknowledge that Mark Pyper did insist on another member of staff also going on the vessel in case ‘Robert’ could not carry on – which seems indicative of him still harbouring concerns – but he was nonetheless going to be in charge and, as it turned out, in a position to impose what I accept was a clearly excessive punishment and excessive to the extent of amounting to physical abuse.

Abuse by pupils

On evidence, which I accept, it is clear that physical abuse was at times rife in certain houses, whereas in others there might be none. Abuse went unchallenged in an environment where, too often, there was no adult supervision. The nature of the abuse varied but it is not difficult to accept that it would have been frightening for those who suffered it.

In the earlier periods, physical abuse seems to have been more limited. ‘George’ recalled that when he came out of the shower he

would be flicked with a wet towel ... It didn’t leave a mark or a bruise on me but I didn’t like it. This happened numerous times to me ... There were also twins who bullied me. When I

461 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011, principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.175.

462 [Written statement of Mark Pyper](#) (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at WIT-1-0000000607, p.24, paragraphs 85–6.

463 [Written statement of Mark Pyper](#) (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at WIT-1-0000000607, p.23, paragraph 83.

was in the showers they would come in behind me with their hockey sticks and pull it back through my legs, hitting my testicles. This happened more than once.⁴⁶⁴

However, evidence which I have accepted shows that Altyre House was well known within the school as being a violent place. 'Duncan' described a world where

prefects did not control the general nastiness between the boys. There was very little guidance on how you should behave ... I moved to Cumming House because of bullying issues in Altyre House. It took almost two years because my housemaster was hardly interested ... Some boys became involved in bullying cliques and thereby managed to avoid being bullied. Housemasters were made aware of the abuse and bullying but did very little about it.⁴⁶⁵

'Dr Mann' lived in Bruce House which

had the ... reputation of being the second toughest and violent house in the school. The most violent by a significant stretch was ... Altyre House which was linked to Bruce through a corridor ... I had friends there ... you would always hear about ... somebody's head being put through a wall, because that was a favourite pastime because the walls were so thin ... You would have incidents all the time, fights, and the housemaster was ... actually a very nice man, a Latin teacher, quite soft spoken ... not the authoritarian that Altyre House needed ... People took pride in the fact that they went to Altyre and they survived Altyre ... There was a sort of machismo element by association.⁴⁶⁶

'Angelo' experienced that lack of supervision and brutality from his very first night in Altyre:

It became apparent that new kids needed to be 'taught a lesson' and our weaknesses probed. The door would be kicked open and four or five seniors would come in and bully us. For years we had our nipples twisted and it would have been a very unusual day if you didn't see black and blue nipples of least one kid in the showers. It was a perennial thing for us. Beds would be tipped over with us under the sheets, dead arms and legs given, and just outright beatings. Finally the door would close and you would hear the sobbing of the other boys in the darkness. It was as if we were part of a sport. It was well known and accepted bullying was taking place amongst the pupils ... There was a long tradition ... and ... It was considered a senior's right.

**'Finally the door would close
and you would hear the sobbing
of the other boys in
the darkness.'**

Typical events for me personally and others on a weekly basis would be wedgies. Bullies would grab a kid and pull his underpants up until they were ripped off over the head. Obviously this would leave welts on the legs from the friction and is exceedingly painful. I, like many others, would be lifted up and hung from the coat pegs in the hall in Altyre by my underwear. This is something you would see weekly. These are not one-off events. Shreds of underpants were a common sight.

464 Transcript, day 230: read-in statement of 'George' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1959-63), at TRN-8-000000021, p.161.

465 Transcript, day 231: read-in statement of 'Duncan' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1971-6), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.7-8.

466 Transcript, day 232: 'Dr Mann' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.74-5.

Kangaroo Court: again another bullying fun event was to convene 'Kangaroo Court' in the main room of the house. This shows you the publicly accepted nature of the bullying. It was an excuse to find some junior guilty of some imaginary crime and punish them for it. There were hot water heating pipes that ran through the ceiling. In my case, with a friend, we were made to strip naked or hang from these pipes in front of the crowd. Even though the pipes burned, the first person to let go would be punished further.

My brother was tied to a chair and thrown out of a window, maybe an 8-foot drop. Seniors fired a crossbow through the study walls (plasterboard) while kids were in the room during study time. These things are typical and went on for years. Darts were thrown down the corridors where kids were. It was considered a sport to see if you could hit kids in the legs. Personally I received a black eye when I pointed out that a boy had stolen my scarf from my locker. I walked around for weeks with a black eye. No teacher ever asked. Mr Whippies were given out. A Mr Whippy is when you force a kid's head down the toilet and flush so his wet hair then resembles a Mr Whippy ice cream. Just a normal day.

A teacher came into the common room to announce that a pupil had been expelled late in 1985. He had been caught twisting a kid's nipples with pliers. We were supposed to be shocked. He told us if we ever see anything like that we should report it. These kind of things had been happening daily for us kids for years and now, after five years, they were telling us this was wrong. It was considered a right to bully and it was looked forward [to] by each successive year, the privilege of beating up the new sprogs. I later became a senior at

Altyre and announced a zero tolerance towards bullying, for which I was condemned by other pupils. After I left the school, I heard the kids returned to bullying.

'It was considered a right to bully and it was looked forward [to] by each successive year.'

There was a shared delight in creative bullying. Kids would have a noughts-and-crosses board drawn on their back and be sent to find a specific senior at the other end of the school to add a cross and then have to return for the original senior to add a cross, and so the game would continue with the hapless 'board' running to and fro. These were not official punishments, just whims of older kids.

People were locked in laundry baskets and placed under a cold shower on their birthday. A typical game. Typical event: being thrown into a drainage ditch on the way to supper. Bullying was just part of daily life. I got off easier than many others.⁴⁶⁷

Evidence provided by 'Jane' confirms that bullies used pliers on boys' nipples, not that that was the sum total of the ways in which one victim of nipple-twisting was abused:

One child had his nipple ripped off by a pair of pliers and was forced to drink a litre of concentrated orange juice. He was a new sixth-form entrant and got there on a scholarship and somehow that was worse than anything. It was scary not to have a title or money. The people there on scholarships were utterly demolished. The boys responsible were expelled in that case.⁴⁶⁸

467 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Angelo' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.90-3.

468 [Written statement of 'Jane'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at WIT.001.001.7327, p.22, paragraph 98.

More widely, it is remarkable how little seems to have been done despite Altyre's school-wide notoriety.

The same is also true of Bruce House which, on the evidence, I find to have been as bad throughout the 1970s and into the late 1980s. 'Dr Mann' described being abused every day he was at Gordonstoun. As a child who had come from Pakistan and who did not have English as a first language, he was an easy target. He described life as 'very reminiscent of Lord of the Flies'.⁴⁶⁹ He went on: 'Physical abuse was a very much accepted part of our existence there ... it was such a feral society that I think the physical abuse, especially by the more senior boys, was a way of corralling or reining in the younger boys. But culturally it was completely accepted.'⁴⁷⁰

'Physical abuse was a very much accepted part of our existence there ... it was such a feral society.'

The abuse included:

head tonks, dead arms, dead legs ... They had bog flushing ... the thing was ... you never knew when it was going to happen and from where it was going to happen, so you would be walking down to your dinner and suddenly somebody [would] come up and just give you the worst dead arm, dead leg ... because they enjoyed it, they thought it was fun. So there was no moment

in the day when you didn't walk from A to B to C when you didn't somehow suspect somebody could or would come up to you from some angle to verbally abuse you, physically abuse you. That was the real stress. You couldn't see it coming and there was no catalyst that you could see that would allow you to predict or protect yourself at any time. It would just happen. It was considered sport. It was sport. It was fun to those who would impose it on others.⁴⁷¹

'Dr Mann' experienced significant racism, but status mattered too:

If ... one of the cool or popular guys decided against you, then your life was made hell because all of his sycophants and his followers would be expected to replicate this person's animosity towards you, and so you suddenly went from one person wanting to abuse you to ... a dozen people wanting to replicate that for no reasons of their own apart from sucking up to the big guy.⁴⁷²

Such abuse was still happening in Bruce House a decade later, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as both 'Paul' and 'Bob' experienced. 'Bob' described himself as 'a very shy, awkward kid'⁴⁷³ who

was bullied almost every single day I was there. The fifth-formers punched me, giving me a dead arm, and they kneed me in the thigh. I had bruises on my body for almost a year and a half. Part of the reason I showered by myself and I tried to avoid changing with others was so that my bruises would not be seen. It was awful. I think they knew I wouldn't

469 Transcript, day 232: 'Dr Mann' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at TRN-8-000000023, p.65.

470 Transcript, day 232: 'Dr Mann' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at TRN-8-000000023, p.67.

471 Transcript, day 232: 'Dr Mann' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.77-8.

472 Transcript, day 232: 'Dr Mann' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at TRN-8-000000023, p.80.

473 Transcript, day 230: 'Bob' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1990-2), at TRN-8-000000021, p.131.

do anything and I didn't. This was horrible stuff and no one cared.⁴⁷⁴

He remembered a particular senior who singled him out for shocking abuse, including making him hang from hot water pipes, whilst he, the senior, held a knife to his genitals so he would not drop. The same boy

would ask me to put my hand – I had a Scottish rug just to cover the surface of the table and I just had to leave my hand with my fingers spread and he would just put his knife in between my fingers at faster and faster paces and on occasion it would actually go into my finger. And he thought this was hysterical.⁴⁷⁵

From 'Bob's' perspective, in a damning indictment of the Gordonstoun of his time, life was 'a culture of fear' and he felt 'terrified and worthless'.⁴⁷⁶

'Paul' remembers one of the same episodes but it had a better ending. The housemaster had heard rumours of pupils being made to hold onto pipes with a knife underneath them and held an impromptu house meeting where he said: 'I have heard this happening and I want it to stop'.⁴⁷⁷

I very, very clearly remember that because I was just glad that it wasn't me and I assumed that that was a rumour that had reached him, not something that had actually happened because it seems quite extreme ... It did have an effect. I think there was a bit of a calm

period after that, for me personally. I get the feeling that everything calmed down a little bit after that. I think everyone was a little bit conscientious and didn't want to be caught doing anything close to that.⁴⁷⁸

That did not prevent 'Paul' experiencing abusive knife treatment, albeit occurring away from the house. He had come along a path near the refectory when another boy 'put a knife to my throat, made some joke, thought it was funny, then took it off and I very quickly got out of there'.⁴⁷⁹ He did not report it at the time because the last thing he wanted to do was attract attention to himself, such was the culture in which he had to exist.

I acknowledge that some efforts were made to stop bullying. 'Mary', who moved on from Gordonstoun in the mid-1980s, explained:

I am aware that there was bullying in the boys' boarding houses and that it could be brutal for the younger members of the house. I also believe that in my time at school this changed, and that by the time I left bullying was not the problem it had been in the early 1980s. I distinctly remember one instance, which is reported to the Inquiry, where the headmaster read a letter to the entire school from parents who had just removed their son from third form because he had been bullied, and the real shock that it caused everyone.⁴⁸⁰

'Benjamin', describing Round Square where the housemaster was viewed positively for being proactive and encouraging, said:

474 Transcript, day 230: 'Bob' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1990-2), at TRN-8-000000021, pp.129-30.

475 Transcript, day 230: 'Bob' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1990-2), at TRN-8-000000021, pp.134-5.

476 Transcript, day 230: 'Bob' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1990-2), at TRN-8-000000021, p.135.

477 Transcript, day 232: 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, p.115.

478 Transcript, day 232: 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.115-16.

479 Transcript, day 232: 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.116-17.

480 Transcript, day 231: read-in statement of 'Mary' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.84.

There was a zero tolerance to bullying and this was reinforced by Mr Mavor and Mr Miller. The only incident of bullying that I recall was one boy who was bullied by two other boys. This was dealt with very quickly and both the boys, whose names I can't recall, did not return after a Christmas school holiday. It happened in my house and my housemaster had to deal with it.⁴⁸¹

Whilst admirable, that was not, on the evidence, the experience in other houses, where disengaged staff, unsupervised by the school management, allowed brutality to be the norm.

'Jane' saw that first hand, including when visiting her brother at Bruce House:

There were no adults in the dorms. There would be somebody on duty, but he or she would just monitor prep or come round and check that lights were off ... For the boys I felt the regime of self-governance was catastrophic. The boys were cruel ... I remember going to [my brother's] house. I saw all the juniors hanging from boiler pipes. The plumbing was high up. A senior was sitting with an aerosol can and a lighter and burning them. They were trying to see who could hang on the longest. There were a lot of shooting incidents. In my first term an older boy shot [a boy] in my year. He had put his bin in the wrong place and the senior boy tripped over it. He was shot six times at close range. Matron had to pick the pellets out. He was only rusticated for a couple of weeks. I found that

very scary. I think these things were happening all the time, so I don't always remember them. They became normal.⁴⁸²

'I saw all the juniors hanging from boiler pipes. A senior was sitting with an aerosol can and a lighter and burning them.'

Emotional abuse

The abuse already described is bound also to have involved a significant emotional element, including the instilling of permanently heightened anxiety and fear in those who were dreading the next attack. Name calling and non-physical bullying seem to have been endemic amongst pupils, and there was very much a culture of exposing and exploiting differences.

As 'Christian' said, looking back to the 1970s, 'My recollections of Gordonstoun life, if I might be so bold as to invoke comparisons to the works of J.K. Rowling, were far more of the Slytherin variety than those of Gryffindor.'⁴⁸³

That was still true in the 1980s. 'Angelo', as well as experiencing much physical abuse in Altyre, remembered a culture that was simply cruel and dishonest:

Personal property hardly existed. Your locker, your food, your bike, your duffle coat; at any

481 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Benjamin' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.70.

482 [Written statement of 'Jane'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at WIT.001.001.7327, p.21, paragraphs 93-6.

483 [Transcript, day 232](#): read-in statement of 'Christian' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1968-73; Gordonstoun, 1973-7), at TRN-8-000000023, p.159. 'Christian' was referring to two of the houses in Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, a fictional construct written about by J.K. Rowling in the Harry Potter novels. Slytherins can, according to some, be characterised as ambitious, cunning, and likely to prioritise ambition over morality. Gryffindors can, it is said, be characterised as typically courageous, daring, and not afraid to stand up for what they believe in, valuing honour as well as greatness, unlike Slytherins.

‘They were having such a desperate time themselves, so I expect it felt great to be able to let off some steam on me.’

point any or all of these items would be stolen. You would see seniors wearing your duffle coat, as they had the names on the shoulder, but you couldn’t ask for it back. You would find your bike in the bike shed stripped – no wheels, no brake pads. Your tuck box would be routinely raided to search for food, your locker emptied for clean clothes. There was no consequence for stealing.⁴⁸⁴

While bullying was commonplace in the boys’ houses, it also happened, though to a much lesser extent on the evidence, in the girls’. ‘Jane’ remembered that ‘There wasn’t so much active bullying amongst the girls. I took myself out rather than allow them to push me out. There were lots of girls who were ignored, 24 hours a day.’⁴⁸⁵

Misogyny was tolerated. Girls experienced abuse driven by it over and above the simple lack of respect already mentioned. ‘Jane’ described it with remarkable and charitable insight:

I was spat on and assaulted by the boys, especially in the first few years. I remember being shouted out because of the way I looked in the swimming pool, because I was heavy. I was being baited all the time like a bear. It was often older boys, but the boys in my year were cruel as well. They were having such a desperate time themselves, so I expect it felt great to be able to let off some steam on me. I didn’t count it as bullying and it didn’t

govern everything for me because I didn’t have to live with them.⁴⁸⁶

Problems with ethos

Some of the abuse experienced by some pupils may have stemmed from an unwavering application of the school’s ethos of self-reliance and the ability to cope. While such an ethos may work for some, it will never work for every child. Gordonstoun should have realised there might be a tension between strict application of its ethos and the needs of individual pupils long before the changes of the 1990s began to take effect.

As ‘Jane’ said:

The idea that any child needed support just wasn’t ... part of the story and had it been part of the story, then of course you would hope that the head of house would be told to really look out for people who needed it. But nobody needed support. I think that was the general ethos.⁴⁸⁷

She noticed it again when she was made a head of house:

I really wanted to be listening ... but I wish we had been given some guidance about what a head of house needed to be doing, and there wasn’t. We were just sort of told and we were supposed to be pleased with that, but I would

484 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Angelo’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.90-3.

485 [Written statement of ‘Jane’](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at WIT.001.001.7327, p.21, paragraph 93.

486 [Written statement of ‘Jane’](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at WIT.001.001.7327, p.21, paragraph 94.

487 [Transcript, day 233](#): ‘Jane’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, p.37.

have loved some guidance about how I might have reached and done something useful for others.⁴⁸⁸

Assumption that all was well and would be well was repeated.

Some pupils tried to help by means of force, but that did not work for all. 'Paul' remembered:

someone ... literally told me, 'I'm trying to toughen you up for the outside world', which was for me the core belief behind the whole of Gordonstoun: toughen you up for the outside world, and I specifically remember responding to him and saying, 'I don't want to be toughened up, I want you just to leave me alone, please'.

A failure to appreciate that a particular child required support was inherent in what happened to 'Sarah' shortly after Mark Pyper arrived in 1990. While her mother was abroad, her father was killed in an aircraft accident. She learnt of his death from the housemistress she liked, who did say 'if I ever wanted a chat I could go into her office, but that was all I was ever offered in terms of support'.⁴⁸⁹ Unable to cope, 'Sarah' ran away from school and her whereabouts were unknown for at least 48 hours, yet there was no attempt to find and console her. On her return, nothing was said and 'Sarah' 'was expected to - well, get on with it. It was a couple of weeks before we sat GCSEs'.⁴⁹⁰ A new housemistress, appointed a term later, told her: 'we're not giving you any special treatment because your father died'.⁴⁹¹

Unsurprisingly, 'Sarah' found the experience very isolating, and even her schoolfriends, who knew her father, found it difficult to process the event. It does suggest that, in accordance with its established ethos, an expectation of unrealistic resilience subsisted at Gordonstoun, one that failed to take account that the pupils of the school were not only children but often vulnerable children with individual needs.

It is clear that racism was, for some children, a prominent feature of their Gordonstoun experience.

Racism

Despite the international flavour that Kurt Hahn introduced in an attempt to broaden horizons and allow pupils to appreciate differences, it is clear that racism was, for some children, a prominent feature of their Gordonstoun experience. 'Dr Mann' believed the abuse he endured was based on race '95 per cent of the time'⁴⁹² and was triggered

because my English was not very good but the English that I did speak, I spoke with a very heavy Pakistani accent, so ... various individuals who had issues with people of a Pakistani heritage, and so ... the words I was called are in the document ... in front of you ... but it was - I mean, it was fairly brutal. It hit me like a wave. Initially I had no idea why, and not being of Pakistani heritage, I was also, 'Why are you calling me these things?' As mentioned also, this was the time when the TV

488 Transcript, day 233: 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, p.37.

489 Transcript, day 230: 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.46.

490 Transcript, day 230: 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.48.

491 Transcript, day 230: 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.49.

492 Transcript, day 232: 'Dr Mann' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at TRN-8-000000023, p.74.

series *Roots* came out and they didn't make a great distinction between what ethnicity you came from as long as they could abuse you, find a term of abuse. This to me was new because I didn't know any of the words that they were using to insult me, to abuse me. I had to literally go and ask what they meant ... it just went from there.⁴⁹³

His abuse never stopped and was never effectively addressed by the school.

'Dr Mann' also described the treatment of a Saudi Arabian pupil in Bruce House who was called 'Kunta Kinte', a reference to a black slave in the book and TV series *Roots*. On one occasion he was abused by a large group of boys in the house:

Think about a fair-sized room with about 25 to 30 boys of all different ages standing around whilst this chap was being made to do a headstand in a bin and one ... hitting him in the legs every time his legs sort of came down because of gravity, obviously. He was trying to get away and they would hit him in order to get him to do a headstand again in the bin ... you know, in a dirty bin surrounded by this Lord of the Flies sort of manic presence of all these boys around. It was just appalling.⁴⁹⁴

'Dr Mann' could not believe house staff were unaware of what was happening given the noise in a house that was a collection of thin-walled Nissen huts. They must, he felt, have been choosing to ignore it.

His evidence of unchecked dreadful racism was included in his clear recollection of the inter-house swimming competition:

The head boy from my house organised our swimming teams. He made all us 'darkies' swim in the same team. We were made to wear black swimming trunks and we were called the 'All Blacks' ... It was so humiliating. I don't think the housemaster was aware ... It wasn't marketed to the entire school as such, it was an in-house thing and obviously a few people realised what was going on.⁴⁹⁵

Only on one occasion in five years, in his last term, was anything done to address racism, but even that was half-hearted. 'Dr Mann's' housemaster walked in when

one chap ... called me an f-ing, you know, something racist ... He obviously heard it and he was really quite embarrassed and he ... told the person who had been doing it, for years, not to do it again and gave him penalty drill, made him go and run around outside for 30 minutes.⁴⁹⁶

It had no effect, though – the other boy 'took it as a joke, he ran around ... the back of the house for about an hour cracking jokes. His friends were there. It was not seen as a punishment ... it had no consequence whatsoever.'⁴⁹⁷

The lack of awareness by staff and management is remarkable, and I agree with 'Dr Mann's' assessment that there

was no critical thinking. There was no sort of analysis like perhaps we do more these days ... It was not their thing ... It just wasn't seen as a problem ... the whole ethos of the place was that ... they didn't look for trouble and ... no one thought violence or racial verbal abuse

493 Transcript, day 232: 'Dr Mann' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.66-7.

494 Transcript, day 232: 'Dr Mann' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at TRN-8-000000023, p.69.

495 Transcript, day 232: 'Dr Mann' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at TRN-8-000000023, p.81.

496 Transcript, day 232: 'Dr Mann' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.72-3.

497 Transcript, day 232: 'Dr Mann' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at TRN-8-000000023, p.73.

or all these manifestations that we talked about were really problems. It was like part of growing up as far as they were concerned.⁴⁹⁸

That laissez-faire approach was still present in the 1980s. 'Jane' spoke of abuse on the grounds of race, and her accounts echoed 'Dr Mann's': 'I think to humiliate others was part of the culture and one way is through racism for sure'.⁴⁹⁹ She spoke of boys having a 'Jew hunt' and of

two girls in Windmill Lodge, they were from Nigeria and were very, very isolated, and I feel sad that I didn't do anything about that. But they would definitely say that the racism was unliveable with, really, and their behaviour was incredibly anorexic, bulimic, their behaviour showed how under stress they were.⁵⁰⁰

Yet nothing was done to address this behaviour either in the boarding houses or at school level. 'Jane' acknowledged that the school might say they were unaware of such conduct, but perceptively added: 'I don't think they were seeking to find that out'.⁵⁰¹ I would agree that she seems to be right that that was the position at least until the 1990s.

Impact

The impact of abuse on applicants has been varied but all of it is significant. There has been considerable negative impact on the mental wellbeing of a number of the applicants. 'Jane' said: 'In retrospect, there

were quite a lot of damaged children there, children who had been expelled or parents who didn't mind what happened because there was enough money'.⁵⁰² The lack of boundaries meant that 'the impact on the rest of us, I think, was - we were feral and we weren't safe from one another'.⁵⁰³ As a result she 'felt ruined. Yeah. And ... I think that loss of moral compass meant that I just accepted everything that followed and that's - that's been hard'.⁵⁰⁴

'We were feral and we weren't safe from one another.'

'Duncan' said: 'There was a general deterioration with the relationship with my peers and I was having a hard time. There was abuse from many directions. I became very defensive whenever I was under pressure and this impacted throughout my adult life'.⁵⁰⁵

After explaining that he has been successful in his career, 'Angelo' said:

At Gordonstoun I achieved fairly good academic results and, once I became a senior, was active in school life. Yet at the age of 53 years, I am still wrestling with what happened, seeking therapy for and trying to modify my behaviour to the standard of a normal person. My intent here is not to expose one individual or seek convictions but to show you what life

498 Transcript, day 232: 'Dr Mann' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.82-3.

499 Transcript, day 233: 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, p.42.

500 Transcript, day 233: 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, p.42.

501 Transcript, day 233: 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, p.42.

502 Transcript, day 233: 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, p.27.

503 Transcript, day 233: 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, p.28.

504 Transcript, day 233: 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, pp.44-5.

505 Transcript, day 231: read-in statement of 'Duncan' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1971-6), at TRN-8-000000022, p.6.

‘I should feel like I’m privileged and be thankful but I came out broken and destroyed.’

was like for us. Essentially, the school failed in their duty of care and protection to us. Gordonstoun was worse than Aberlour.⁵⁰⁶

He went on:

Later in life, I have had issues where I either accept relationships that are not safe for me or people treat me in ways that are not physically safe for me. No one can understand why I don’t leave or change locks or call the police, and I believe this is why. Over ten years you become habituated to this unsafe world and accept it as normal.⁵⁰⁷

‘Sally’ said:

During these times, I was having a lot of dark thoughts hidden beneath the bubbly exterior. Its only now that I can see I had mental health issues I was grappling with but living in a situation where there was no one to talk to, no support available. So I put up barriers around myself as a self-preservation tool.⁵⁰⁸

‘John’ said:

They talk about privileged white boys but I was sexually assaulted ... and bullied by girls ... I went to private school with all the opportunities there ... I should feel like I’m privileged and be thankful but I came out

broken and destroyed ... A lot of my mental health and stresses came from my experiences in environment of Gordonstoun.⁵⁰⁹

The abuse inflicted on some children had a negative impact on their education. ‘Duncan’ said: ‘My O-levels were disastrous, as were my A-levels. This was not uncommon at Gordonstoun as the education standard was not great. My achievements were definitely impacted by bullying issues. They did not breed achievers.’⁵¹⁰

Gordonstoun’s school motto is *plus est en vous* (‘there is more in you’); for a time at least, this was taken too literally by the school leaders. ‘Sally’ summed it up well:

Reaching out for support felt like a failing – we were meant to get on and deal with things in accordance with the school motto ... It was only later that I realised how mucked up it was to have such a lack of support ... We were dealing with teenage stuff, all of that, in addition to navigating a hierarchical system amongst peers with unwritten and unspoken rules and traditions, where Senior students meted out punishment to the Juniors. There were all these difficult aspects of life at a boarding school coupled with being away from home and the issues teenagers face and yet we had nobody to talk to about it all, about

506 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Angelo’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976–80; Gordonstoun, 1980–5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.87.

507 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Angelo’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976–80; Gordonstoun, 1980–5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.92.

508 [Written statement of ‘Sally’](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1985–90), at WIT-1-000001195, p.9, paragraph 25.

509 [Written statement of ‘John’](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 2006–15), at WIT-1-000001044, p.33, paragraph 148 and p.34, paragraph 154.

510 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Duncan’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1971–6), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.5–6.

how we were feeling, moods ... We were all living together, 24/7 and all dealing with our own stuff ... Looking back I feel like we were all just keeping our heads above water ... The school provided an education, with unique outdoor learning experiences, but it did not play a parental role at all and there was no sense of pastoral support ... My whole sense looking back then is that we had nobody to talk to.⁵¹¹

The impact of increased pastoral care

Even with increasing pastoral care from 1990 onwards, emotional and physical abuse continued. The risk of it happening and its existence was, however, better acknowledged and addressed. 'John' experienced abuse in the 2000s whilst at the junior school, Aberlour House, with name calling, bullying about his weight, and his food being spoiled.⁵¹² It eventually subsided, but began again once he was at Gordonstoun itself, this time escalating to include racist behaviour too. 'John' is not Jewish but was called 'a filthy Jew' by a number of boys, abuse that was picked up and repeated by others,⁵¹³ and which even recurred on one occasion after he had left school.⁵¹⁴ The school did respond, and 'John' understood one boy may have been expelled. Documentation available to the Inquiry reveals that a strong line was taken, including with parents who had tried to dismiss bullying behaviour by their child.

It is also clear from Gordonstoun's Part D response, Appendix 4, that the reporting and

recording of physical and emotional abuse significantly increased in the two decades prior to its submission to the Inquiry being made in 2017.⁵¹⁵

Response to evidence of abuse

A former pupil whose feelings about his time at the school were markedly positive wrote:

Gordonstoun was a hugely positive experience for me. I began as fairly shy and uninterested and left with a wealth of incredible experiences under my belt, which led me to university and onwards into the workplace. I loved school and it breaks my heart that clearly there are some people who had a very unhappy experience at Gordonstoun and other boarding schools in Scotland. My heart goes out to them and I extend my utmost sympathies to anyone who is a survivor of abuse.⁵¹⁶

It suggests that the school's pastoral care in the period between 1999 and 2004 might – had it been implemented earlier – have made a real difference to some whose time at the schools predated his, but they never had the chance to experience it.

Lisa Kerr attended every day of the hearings and listened to all the evidence. To the parents and families of children who were abused she had this to say:

I think the first thing I would want to say is that they have been heard. We really have listened to everything they've said

511 [Written statement of 'Sally'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1985–90), at WIT-1-000001195, p.8, paragraphs 21, 22, and 24.

512 [Written statement of 'John'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 2006–15), at WIT-1-000001044, pp.11–12, paragraphs 47–51.

513 [Written statement of 'John'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 2006–15), at WIT-1-000001044, p.24, paragraph 104.

514 [Written statement of 'John'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 2006–15), at WIT-1-000001044, p.28, paragraph 125.

515 Gordonstoun, Part D response to section 21 notice, Appendix 4, section 5.9: Specific Complaints, at GOR.001.001.0284, pp.4–6.

516 [Transcript, day 234](#): read-in statement of 'Brian' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1999–2004), at TRN-8-000000025, p.65.

incredibly attentively, and have been – I think I used the word ‘devastated’ earlier – I think devastated to see the impact that their abuse at Gordonstoun has had on them. If it’s been hard for me to hear it once, I just can’t imagine how awful it must be for them to live with these experiences every day and I am deeply sorry and apologise to them unreservedly for what they experienced and for the fact that they were failed by Gordonstoun and by those charged with their care. I think the other thing is that with all due respect to this Inquiry, we won’t wait until the outcome of what you report to continue to seek to do everything we can to improve how we support them, but also our commitment to continual improvement in the way we look after children today.⁵¹⁷

She added:

I suppose if I was just to sort of draw themes together, it would be to underline how impacted everybody who has worked at Gordonstoun has been by everything that we have heard. And, as I say, if it’s impacted us from being involved in the Inquiry, it’s really helped us to understand more deeply

the impact of abuse and the lack of care that children received in the past. And I am, I suppose – I feel a great sense of regret, of sadness that I am principal of a school where those things happened. ... because having heard the impact of getting it wrong, we know the importance of getting it right.⁵¹⁸

I am satisfied that the apologies and regrets that she articulated were genuine.

Conclusions about abuse

There have been periods in Gordonstoun’s history where the vision and ethos that formed the basis of Kurt Hahn’s founding of the school was allowed to wither. Abuse resulted and was allowed to be normalised over decades. It seems clear, however, that for the last 30 years or so, some good leaders have sought to recover the position. The risk of children being abused will, however, always be present. I recognise that Gordonstoun has now made real efforts to be aware of the risk of abuse, to protect against it, and, if abuse occurs, to respond appropriately, but the school must never become complacent.

517 [Transcript, day 235](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000026, p.106.

518 [Transcript, day 235](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000026, p.109.

7

Reporting

Before the early 1990s

Many children at Aberlour and Gordonstoun chose not to report abuse at the time. Some did not appreciate that what was being done to them was abusive; some did not wish to upset their parents who, in some cases, they knew were making sacrifices to send them to the schools; some simply had no one to confide in or did not know how to do so in the absence of formal processes. Many feared – with good cause – they would not be believed, or that reporting would have detrimental consequences.

Some children did report abuse, with varying consequences and outcomes. On occasion, it made matters worse for them.

Every Monday morning in the first period the form teacher would make us all write letters home to our parents. In ... my first year there, if we wrote a good letter and our parents replied saying it was a good letter we would get a Crunchie or a Mars Bar. This meant they would have to read the letter. I suppose it was their way of reading what we were saying.⁵¹⁹

The only letter 'James' wrote that expressed unhappiness was one he managed to post to his parents himself. Otherwise, they wrote nothing in their letters about being abused. Children such as 'Angelo' appreciated that they could not mention it: 'We copy our weekly letters home from the blackboard. A teacher has to approve what we've written before it's sent. I use cartoons on my mails to try and communicate with my parents.'⁵²⁰

Reporting to parents by letter

Aberlour House

Weekly letter-writing was a feature of life at Aberlour House, but children did not mention abuse in their letters home. Boarders had little opportunity to engage in private correspondence since letters were read and censored by house staff, certainly in the 1970s. Positive letters were actively encouraged, as 'James' described:

Gordonstoun

Children in the senior school had more freedom to communicate with their parents, as 'Angelo' discovered: 'At Gordonstoun, post was also delivered every day, we could write and ring home whenever we wanted but had to queue for the boarding house call boxes.'⁵²¹ However, few chose to mention abuse. 'Sophie' remembered 'the feeling of not being able to get in

519 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun, 1975-8), at TRN-8-000000022, p.25.

520 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Angelo' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.88-9.

521 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'Mary' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.81.

Some children did not disclose their abuse to their parents because they lived in fear of doing so.

touch with [home]. Contact with parents was neither encouraged nor discouraged. Students whose parents were in the UK could phone home but there was no provision for international students.⁵²²

Reporting directly to parents

Some children did not disclose their abuse to their parents because they lived in fear of doing so. 'James' explained that he 'never told anyone what the English teacher was doing to me when I was at Aberlour ... I was very afraid, although he never said anything to make me fear him'.⁵²³ Others, like 'Paul', felt the one person they could have spoken to was their abuser. 'Honestly, the only person I would have told at Gordonstoun unfortunately was my abuser, Mr Keir. He was the person who had put himself in a position-of-trust relationship ... that essentially removed any avenue for me to go to'.⁵²⁴

The abuse could, of itself, prevent the child reporting it. 'Sarah' was 'so traumatised by what had happened that ... my perception of what was going on around me was different because I think I was so focused internally, if that makes some sense'.⁵²⁵

Other children did not disclose what was happening because they did not think their parents would listen. 'Bob' 'had internalised,

fair or not, the idea that an adult wouldn't listen, because I saw my parents not listening when I made what I thought was my only attempt to communicate that I didn't want to go to this school'.⁵²⁶ Some children, such as 'Paul', wanted to protect their parents as they were conscious of the financial burden of having sent them to a fee-paying school: 'My parents sacrificed an awful lot to send me to Gordonstoun. It didn't financially cripple them, but I know that was their priority and they literally sent me to the best school they could afford at all costs'.⁵²⁷

When children did tell parents or other family members, outcomes varied. Some parents then reported the abuse to the school. 'James' did not report the abuse by his teacher, John Conroy, but another pupil did complain about being abused, with the result that both Aberlour and Gordonstoun became aware of the allegations against Conroy. Conroy was interviewed and denied them. Inquiries of other pupils confirmed the conduct complained of and he was dismissed. The police were not, however, informed, neither staff nor pupils were told the reason for his departure, and he went on to teach elsewhere. The same happened following John Findlay's disclosure of Derek Jones's abusive conduct towards him. The indications are that Aberlour and Gordonstoun both prioritised reputation.

522 [Written statement of 'Sophie'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1977-80), at WIT-1-000000986, p.15, paragraph 56.

523 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun, 1975-8), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.31-2.

524 [Transcript, day 232](#): 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.135-6.

525 [Transcript, day 230](#): 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.34.

526 [Transcript, day 230](#): 'Bob' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1990-2), at TRN-8-000000021, p.130.

527 [Transcript, day 232](#): 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, p.135.

The police were, in his case, involved, but Jones was not prosecuted – he went on to teach and, it appears, to abuse other children elsewhere.

Gordonstoun failed to respond appropriately when allegations made against Patrick Llewellyn-Davies⁵²⁸ were reported by a child to his father who then complained, repeatedly, to the head (J.W.R. Kempe). The child had also reported the teacher's conduct to a Colour Bearer. Llewellyn-Davies was not dismissed. As one pupil put it when he wrote to the school:

The Gordonstoun authorities failed in their primary duty to the children under their care and compounded it by dealing with it with an utter lack of moral integrity ... there are many good people who do the right thing, but they are more often than not betrayed by the very people who should be supporting them. The Colour Bearer did the right thing. The housemaster [of Round Square] did the right thing. But by keeping Llewellyn-Davies on, and thereby demonstrating that his behaviour was not worthy of greater opprobrium, Kempe betrayed them and their courageous actions.⁵²⁹

Reporting to the school

Aberlour House

The culture at Aberlour House was one where pupils were not confident that reporting would help. There were also no processes in place, especially under the leadership of Toby Coghill, to encourage

reporting or give clarity about whom a child could talk to. As 'James' said:

Had the environment ... been more warm, loving, caring, and open then I would have been more willing to go to an adult and share what had happened to me. It was cold and too disciplined, for example making us run outside first thing every morning and the cold shower afterwards, and with every minute of every day accounted for. It wasn't a loving environment conducive to sharing any information like that.⁵³⁰

Gordonstoun

Within Gordonstoun, there were few people the children felt they could confide in. That is hardly surprising. Take, for example, that it took a father's threat to go public before the school terminated the employment of Patrick Llewellyn-Davies. His son, writing to the school in 2010, explained why he had not reported the matter when he was a pupil. 'I was slow to mention it to anyone and in any case there wasn't anyone at Gordonstoun in a position of authority I felt I could naturally trust or confide in.'⁵³¹

'Bob', likewise, felt unable to report. He was abused by Andrew Keir. Whilst his housemaster was liked and respected, he was a man who turned a blind eye to misconduct in the houses. In consequence, there seemed no point in talking to him, and 'there was a fear in talking anyway. I remember thinking there's no way this is going to make any [difference]. I feared the fact that it would make it somehow [worse] ...

528 Gordonstoun, correspondence with former pupil, at GOR-000003167, p.2.

529 Email from former pupil to Gordonstoun School, 15 February 2010, at GOR-000004448, p.3.

530 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun, 1975-8), at TRN-8-000000022, p.46.

531 Email from former pupil to Gordonstoun School, 15 February 2010, at GOR-000004448, p.3.

Because then you're the snitch.'⁵³² As 'Angelo' said: 'The culture of not telling and silence was so strong amongst pupils.'⁵³³

Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24) said that Gordonstoun now has 'a culture of upstander, not bystander', and it is to be hoped that she is right about that.⁵³⁴ She accepted that there were periods when such a description did not apply. That was, on evidence I accept that extended from the 1960s to the 1990s, certainly the case even as Mark Pyper was trying to introduce change.⁵³⁵ For far too long Gordonstoun was run by, as Lisa Kerr put it, 'bystanders'.

When children did report, as seen already it was often to little effect. This was true of complaints to Colour Bearers as well as of those to teachers. 'Dr Mann' repeatedly reported abuse to such senior pupils, including those who had witnessed the abuse, yet nothing changed; the mentality seems to have been 'this is the way it is and always has been, so toughen up':

They might say something like, 'Oh, stop it', and the guy would stop for 20 seconds, the prefect would walk away, and they'd start all over again. There was no real conviction ... in stopping any of this violence going around ... it was kind of: look, I suffered this when I was a young boy in this place, you should suffer this coming up the ranks and you shall do it to the others as they come up the food chain. So 'I survived it, it made me tough, you can go

through the same thing'. That was the thinking behind it.⁵³⁶

Others reported only when the risk of being identified as the source of information was removed. 'Annie' told of abuse of a boy she knew, but only because 'I felt that ... nobody in the school would have been able to make the link between me and that boy and that housemaster ... so it wouldn't have been attributed back to me. There was a very strong culture of not telling on people, not telling tales.'⁵³⁷ In evidence 'Annie' was asked whether, had such conduct occurred in her own house, she would have reported it. Her reply was clear: 'I wouldn't imagine that it would have happened in my own house, but ... I wasn't able to do anything about my own experience because I knew that that would be attributed to me. So there's the answer, I guess.'⁵³⁸

From the mid-1990s

Reporting to parents

Technology has improved the ease with which pupils can communicate with their parents, as 'Alison' and 'Brian' made clear. Alison said: 'We had three landlines in our boarding house. I had an account which allowed me to call home whenever I wanted. The fee for the calls was charged back to my parents at the end of term. We could also receive calls on those phones.'⁵³⁹ Brian stated:

532 Transcript, day 230: 'Bob' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1990-2), at TRN-8-000000021, pp.130-1.

533 Transcript, day 231: read-in statement of 'Angelo' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.94.

534 Transcript, day 216: Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-000000007, p.23.

535 Transcript, day 235: Simon Reid (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011-17), at TRN-8-000000026, p.7.

536 Transcript, day 232: 'Dr Mann' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at TRN-8-000000023, p.71.

537 Transcript, day 230: 'Annie' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1986-8), at TRN-8-000000021, pp.86-7.

538 Transcript, day 230: 'Annie' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1986-8), at TRN-8-000000021, p.87.

539 Transcript, day 233: read-in statement of 'Alison' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1997-2002), at TRN-8-000000024, p.158.

I had a mobile for the duration of my time at school. I don't remember speaking to my parents every day, probably more like two or three times a week. There was also a phone booth in the house that you could receive calls to and computers with internet access for emails as there was no social media in those days.⁵⁴⁰

Reporting to the school

Aberlour

Conditions at Aberlour House in the period 1990–4 were still not conducive to reporting, and despite new leadership, the school's culture appears to have been slow to change as regards pastoral care. For example, when 'Donald' tried to share concerns with a teacher, this is what happened: 'Towards the end of my first year, I plucked up the courage to admit to a teacher that I was not particularly happy. Their response was to encourage me to read and appreciate Shakespeare.'⁵⁴¹

Gordonstoun

From 1990 onwards, pupil complaints or reports of abuse by fellow pupils and in relation to teachers increased. That is not to suggest that abusive behaviour or conduct itself increased; the evidence did not indicate that. However, it does show that the changes introduced in seeking a kinder and more caring society along with better processes and recording systems increased the confidence that pupils had

in their complaints being appropriately responded to if they shared them with staff. Gordonstoun's Part D responses, the many pupil files, and records of specific complaints provided to SCAI⁵⁴² demonstrate the extent of these changes. Documentation was recovered that also indicates there was regular reporting of abuse at Aberlour and Gordonstoun to school governors from at least 1995⁵⁴³ and shows that, from at least 2000, teachers became willing to report fellow staff members when their behaviour was viewed as potentially inappropriate from a child protection perspective.⁵⁴⁴

2013–15

In the period 2013 to 2015,⁵⁴⁵ numerous allegations of historic or non-recent incidents of abuse at both Aberlour and Gordonstoun were reported to Simon Reid, Gordonstoun's then principal. The impact was school-wide, as his successor, Lisa Kerr, then a governor, recalled: 'I can actually still remember where I was when I received the phone call from our Vice-Chair of Governors at the time to tell me what had been disclosed.'⁵⁴⁶

Separately, former pupils also used technology to talk to each other about past abuse, as 'Duncan' described:

A new Facebook page was set up under the title of Independent Gordonstoun Alumni Global Support Network, G2. Within a week the group amassed around 120 members. I did not know many of those in the group.

540 [Transcript, day 234](#): read-in statement of 'Brian' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1999–2004), at TRN-8-000000025, p.63.

541 [Written statement of 'Donald'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1990–2), at WIT-1-000001252, p.15, paragraph 73.

542 See, for example, GOR-000003671 [2006]; GOR-000003675 [2003]; GOR-000003677 [2004]; GOR-000003683 [2005]; GOR-000003690 [2011]; GOR-000003693 [2010]; GOR-000003813 [2014].

543 GOR-000002900; GOR-000002901; GOR-000003943; GOR-000002961; GOR-000002962.

544 GOR-000004463.

545 GOR-000003813, section 17; GOR-000003590, sections 18 and 19; GOR-000004449, section 22.

546 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.18.

‘We were there, all suffering in our own way, but nobody knew.’

There was such an outpouring of different issues we put some restrictions on what could be discussed on the open forum. This included no publishing of staff names. People had to adhere to confidentiality or leave the group immediately.⁵⁴⁷

The complaints related, in the main, to the period from the 1970s to the early 1990s. They covered a broad range, including allegations of rape, and included a number of the accounts of abuse given by applicants in the evidence they provided to the Inquiry.

In or about 2013, ‘Duncan’ sought advice from NAPAC (National Association for People Abused in Childhood), Boarding Concern, and Tom Perry of Mandate Now about reporting. At a meeting that he, Tom Perry, Simon Reid, and some of the governors attended, he raised with the school the need for a system to be introduced that would encourage whistleblowers and enable abuse to be reported not just within the school but also externally. Such a policy, he suggested, should be embedded in staff employment contracts.⁵⁴⁸ Although that has now happened, it appears not to have been implemented until some time after that meeting.

The revelations made in 2013–15 were upsetting for many, including ‘Annie’, because ‘the things that they were talking about were so awful that I hadn’t realised in

the school when I was there that it was that serious or that bad, and I also understood it from professional eyes of what that actually meant to people’.⁵⁴⁹ ‘Sally’ said: ‘I’ve been really shocked by it. We were there, all suffering in our own way, but nobody knew. We didn’t even know amongst each other. I was really surprised to read some of the experiences that some of my peers had in their houses with teachers.’⁵⁵⁰

‘Duncan’ from the G2 group contacted Simon Reid (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011–17), who recalled:

Deputed by the governors to do so, I led the school’s response to these allegations. There was no internal opposition to the approach taken as far as I’m aware. The school’s response was to make the police aware of the allegations, communicate, if possible, with the alleged victims or survivors to advise them to engage with the police, and, when appropriate, to offer counselling support and reassurance that the modern school was very different from the one they experienced, one that put child protection at the centre of all it did.⁵⁵¹

Lisa Kerr confirmed that ‘It was a very conscious decision on behalf of the board of governors and the school leadership to respond openly and proactively at that time, because what had been reported was so against the ethos of the school.’⁵⁵²

547 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Duncan’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1971–6), at TRN-8-000000022, p.9.

548 [Written statement of ‘Duncan’](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1971–6), at WIT.001.001.7571, p.10, paragraphs 46–9.

549 [Transcript, day 230](#): ‘Annie’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1986–8), at TRN-8-000000021, p.97.

550 [Written statement of ‘Sally’](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1985–90), at WIT-1-000001195, p.21, paragraph 65.

551 [Transcript, day 235](#): Simon Reid (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011–17), at TRN-8-000000026, p.71.

552 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, pp.18–19.

I accept that Gordonstoun was trying to respond properly, but the way in which it did was not appropriately trauma-informed. 'Sally' explained:

I wanted to give information to the school to help with closure, but my sense is that the school hadn't thought about what they would then do with it ... there didn't appear to be a clear process for handling such information ... my sense is that, when the school was first dealing with it, they had little awareness of what it might mean to send out emails that could trigger people. Suddenly, in your inbox comes an email from the school alerting us to historic abuse and asking people who may have information to contact the school if they wished to do so. There didn't seem to be an awareness that the opening line might trigger somebody. That was something that I felt really strongly about. The school was trying to do the right thing but ... they didn't really seem to have awareness about ... the re-trauma that may arise from contacting the school ... without perhaps having staff properly trained or, in the absence of trained staff, bringing in consultants to set up a system at the school.⁵⁵³

She 'was reliving what happened'.⁵⁵⁴

It should, however, be noted that, at the time, Gordonstoun seems to have been ahead of other schools in the case study in its recognition of the need to avoid putting its head in the sand, to acknowledge the reality of past abuse, and to respond.

Simon Reid was candid and reflective in relation to his approach in 2015. For

example, he had exercised discretion and not reported abuse to the police when a former pupil urged him not to. In retrospect, he thought that this may have been a mistake, and that he should have been more active in seeking advice, because he had 'in a sense, colluded to make sure that information isn't more widely known'.⁵⁵⁵ He was, I agree, right about that.

One witness described Simon Reid's response to him as 'filled with compassion and understanding',⁵⁵⁶ but Reid himself accepted that others disagreed:

I think Gordonstoun looked after its people ... really quite well. I don't think many of them would say that, though, because they'd just say, 'It's not for you to judge that, friend. We are hurt and you're the cause of it'. So I completely understand how any comment about the quality of Gordonstoun's response is actually flawed from the outset.⁵⁵⁷

That careful reflection captures a number of the qualities required of those in positions of leadership in boarding schools, including the ability to understand and model the importance of putting child protection at the forefront when responding to the discovery of any abuse, whether past or present.

Response to evidence about reporting

In its Part B response, the school wrote: 'In undertaking the review for this response, we have identified that the sector's historic reporting, record-keeping, and referencing practices ... were not of the

553 [Written statement of 'Sally'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1985-90), at WIT-1-000001195, p.20, paragraph 61.

554 [Written statement of 'Sally'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1985-90), at WIT-1-000001195, p.22, paragraph 69.

555 [Transcript, day 235](#): Simon Reid (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011-17), at TRN-8-000000026, p.74.

556 [Transcript, day 230](#): 'Bob' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1990-2), at TRN-8-000000021, p.143.

557 [Transcript, day 235](#): Simon Reid (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011-17), at TRN-8-000000026, pp.80-1.

rigorous type required today.⁵⁵⁸ With these acknowledgements, Lisa Kerr spoke about the work Gordonstoun has been doing to foster and maintain the 'upstander not bystander' culture she referred to in evidence: 'Gordonstoun have put in place arrangements to facilitate the recording of anything of significance about a child, one being a bespoke IT system called Wellbeing.'⁵⁵⁹ She went on:

It is subjective, but that is why it's important that there is not just one person in charge of the care of a child. So every student will have their tutor, they will have an HM [housemaster], an assistant HM, a matron, their key stage leader, deputy head pastoral, two assistant heads pastoral, the chaplain, a whole range of people that they can talk to ... and obviously their teachers and coaches and so on. There is a whole range of people looking after children, so it's not just about one person.⁵⁶⁰

She emphasised that 'Just because you put something on Wellbeing, it doesn't mean that is your responsibility discharged. Your responsibility is to look after the child, particularly if it is a serious matter.' She appropriately added that those discharging such a responsibility cannot rest on their laurels – that applies to the whole boarding school sector, as all the current heads do now appear to understand.

Gordonstoun's contracts of employment for all staff now contain what could be termed a 'mandatory reporting' provision; a failure to report suspected abuse may amount

to gross misconduct. That responsibility at Gordonstoun also now extends to governors.

The ability to have someone to report to is fundamental. Lisa Kerr was confident that Gordonstoun was now a school where children could and would report. She recognised that it was a significant challenge to create what she called a 'telling culture amongst young people' where there is 'great danger in saying, "This is the person to whom you should report."' So:

What we've done as part of a process of ... 30 years of sustained systematic continual improvement is to recognise that what you need to do is to make young people have a network of people around them to whom they can report ... a child might just not have that super close relationship and might not find it easy to find a houseparent, just like they might not find it easy to talk to their mum. I think Diana Monteith said she doesn't believe there's a child in the school that doesn't have someone to whom they can connect ... I know it's a bold statement to make, but I would agree with that.⁵⁶¹

Additionally, she emphasised 'the structured use of children helping other children ... We've now moved to something called wellbeing watchers, [who] are older students who undergo days of training in listening skills and supporting skills and being available for each other'.⁵⁶² Importantly, 'they know ... it's not their role to solve the problems of their fellow pupils. It's to hear them and to help them report it on, and they

558 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, pp.112–13.

559 See The [Gordonstoun regime](#) and [Records](#) chapters.

560 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.99.

561 [Transcript, day 235](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-000000026, p.99.

562 [Transcript, day 235](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-000000026, p.100.

know they have an obligation that if safety is at risk, they need to report it on.’⁵⁶³

These were bold statements, and I very much hope they are well founded.

Conclusions about reporting

In the years before the early 1990s, many of the children abused at Aberlour and Gordonstoun did not report it. That was for various reasons including a culture of ‘no clipping’, a stoic expectation of simply facing up to adversity, the absence of systems to encourage reporting, all allied with disinterest from the schools and their staff alike, and an understandable desire

not to upset parents. Such reports as were made were often not taken seriously or investigated as they should have been. Action, when taken, was reluctant and discouraging. These failures to respond appropriately to allegations or known instances of abuse exposed further children to abuse and represent serious failures in care. To its credit, Gordonstoun has since sought to address such issues properly, and many systems now exist that ought to enable children to share concerns, to enable staff to monitor children’s wellbeing, and to change the overall culture. Such work is, however, never finished – the ‘job’ of child protection is never ‘done’, and all such initiatives must be kept under review.

563 [Transcript, day 235](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-000000026, p.102.

8 Reflections

This case study produced many thoughtful and insightful reflections, a selection of which are set out below.

Reflections by applicants

Childhood vulnerability and a lack of trust

There being no adult you could trust, and a lack of compassion, were common themes. Significant institutional failure in these aspects was recognised by Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), Mark Pyper (headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), and Simon Reid (principal, Gordonstoun, 2011–17).

Mark Pyper said: ‘trust is an important element and can be a very beneficial thing, but if trust goes wrong at any point in the scale, then you have difficulties’.⁵⁶⁴ That is an understatement. Once lost, trust may never be restored. I heard many accounts of adverse long-term impact attributed to having been unable to trust adults at the schools. For example, the impact on ‘Duncan’ was this: ‘My career has been marked by mistrust of authority’,⁵⁶⁵ and ‘I have a good group of friends. I understand myself better now than I did as a younger man. Gordonstoun made me self-reliant

but distrusting of authority’.⁵⁶⁶ ‘Annie’, very fairly, reflected that much of her life at Gordonstoun was ‘good and happy’ but there were, nonetheless, negative aspects such as that there ‘weren’t enough visible staff and no one staff member I felt I could trust’.⁵⁶⁷

Lifelong distrust of authority was a recurring theme across the whole of the boarding schools case study, as it has been in all other case studies explored by the Inquiry.

‘Dr Mann’ spoke of a number of difficulties he had faced in his adult life, including with self-confidence and relationships, and having ‘huge issues with authority’, to the extent he had not ‘been able to function as an employee’.⁵⁶⁸ He said:

I’ve achieved certain things and I’ve got academic degrees ... but, you know, very often I don’t have the self-confidence to back it ... one of the tools I’ve used is to create an external, sort of more extrovert personality, almost like role-playing, in order to be able to get through things ... I’m very, extremely self-critical as a result ... I have not been able to hold down a job since – I just can’t deal with having an authority figure above me telling me what to do, which is not ... optimal ... So I’ve had to sort of invent things, sort of companies

564 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.130.

565 [Transcript, day 231](#): ‘Duncan’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1971–6), at TRN-8-000000022, p.8.

566 [Transcript, day 231](#): ‘Duncan’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1971–6), at TRN-8-000000022, p.14.

567 [Written statement of ‘Annie’](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1986–8), at WIT-1-000000594, p.35, paragraphs 187 and 188.

568 [Written statement of ‘Dr Mann’](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975–9), at WIT.001.001.8878, p.13, paragraph 69.

‘This period of my life should have been fun but it wasn’t.’

and different consulting thingies ... just to get through life or fix up houses from time to time and try to sell those on ... I’ve had a very disjointed career.⁵⁶⁹

‘James’ should have been happy at school but wasn’t because of the impact of a letter written about him by Toby Coghill (headmaster, Aberlour, 1964–89) in which Coghill had expressed views about ‘James’s’ sexuality. The letter had been written to his housemaster. Moreover, unfathomably, it was shown to ‘James’ and he was left feeling his housemaster would somehow use it against him:

I think it was horrific that [he] wrote such a letter to the housemaster but even more horrific that the housemaster would present that letter to me at only 13 years old. This period of my life should have been fun but it wasn’t. I felt I had something to hide and I had built up a wall to protect myself and I couldn’t let anybody in ... I left in 1978 when I was 17. I was not sad to leave.⁵⁷⁰

‘Angelo’ spoke of failed relationships and of an inability to work alongside others:

I am a successful musician ... At Gordonstoun I achieved fairly good academic results and, once I became a senior, was active in school life. Yet at the age of 53 years, I am still wrestling with what happened, seeking therapy for and trying to modify my behaviour to the standard of a normal person ...

Essentially, the school failed in their duty of care and protection to us.⁵⁷¹

He went on:

Of the four closest friends I had at school, none of us has been able to sustain a marriage or have a boss ... I suspect our trust in authority was devastated. Personally, I have had problems with poor boundaries, having grown up in a world where boundaries were not respected. I was unable in life to speak up for my needs, having spent a decade in a place where to speak your need was only a clue to bullies as to how they could further torment you ... I am trying to illustrate [that] at Gordonstoun there was a wide and well-accepted culture and tradition of bullying. The school failed us by not only not identifying this, but failing to protect us from this behaviour and exposing us to long-term mental health damage. This was not what we deserved and my intent here is to contribute this account for the record so that future pupils may avoid this chaos that still haunts me decades later.⁵⁷²

John Findlay, sexually abused when a pupil at Aberlour, spoke of the impact on his senior schooling. While he found he could start with a clean slate at Gordonstoun in the mid-1990s, the emotional harm persisted:

I loved Gordonstoun. In hindsight ... I wish actually I’d taken more of the opportunities that were presented to me, but because of my mental attitude that I don’t want to get

569 [Transcript, day 232](#): ‘Dr Mann’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975–9), at TRN-8-000000023, p.90.

570 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘James’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971–4; Gordonstoun, 1975–8), at TRN-8-000000022, p.40.

571 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Angelo’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976–80; Gordonstoun, 1980–5), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.86–7.

572 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Angelo’ (former pupil, Aberlour, 1976–80; Gordonstoun, 1980–5), at TRN-8-000000022, p.95.

involved, I'm scared of something terrible happening again ... I know it sounds really silly, perhaps, but you just don't want to put yourself forward ... and that means ... that I personally ... did not take and reap the rewards that Gordonstoun actually offered me.⁵⁷³

He could not trust anybody because of the abuse he suffered.

Some children who were abused are, as adults, able to consider themselves relatively unaffected by that abuse. They are the lucky ones.

Other children experienced not only the long-term impact on themselves of having been abused but the impact it had on others, such as their parents, on learning of the abuse. 'James's' mother, for instance, sent a letter to the teacher who abused him in which she wrote of 'the massive impact his abusive actions had on both ['James'] and [her] family, especially breaking [her] heart'.⁵⁷⁴ Further, 'James' explained:

My mother was annoyed at my father for sending me to boarding school to be abused. They both felt guilty that they had sent me away from a loving family home to somewhere that I was obviously unhappy and subsequently sexually and emotionally abused. My mother could have had a far more extravagant lifestyle had she not sent her children to boarding school. Her life was changed when she heard about my abuse.⁵⁷⁵

Likewise, 'Sophie' explained: 'The impact I really do regret is the impact it had on my parents ... [it] was pretty massive.'⁵⁷⁶

Parental expectations

Some former pupils spoke of the regret they and their parents suffered after the high expectations they had had, having been able to place their children into what they believed was a healthy environment at Aberlour or Gordonstoun and where they would receive a good education. 'James' knew 'that it was very important to my father that I was given every opportunity to be as successful in life as he was',⁵⁷⁷ while 'Bob' remembered 'trying every way I could not to go ... but ... I also understand ultimately why my parents thought that it would make sense ... they believed that I was being given an amazing opportunity'.⁵⁷⁸ Like other former pupils, what was in fact experienced by both 'James' and 'Bob' left them feeling distinctly short-changed.

'Dr Mann' described how he felt on discovering that not all schools were the same:

I think a lot of us ... thought this is what boarding school is like ... It wasn't until I left and went to university and ran into other people, met other people who went to boarding schools and actually had a really good time that I really realised the extent to which I'd been subjected to something which was avoidable.⁵⁷⁹

573 [Transcript, day 232](#): John Findlay (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985-91; Gordonstoun, 1991-6), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.39-40.

574 [Written statement of 'James'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun, 1975-8), at WIT-1-0000000374, p.25, paragraph 109.

575 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun 1975-8), at TRN-8-000000022, pp.44-5.

576 [Written statement of 'Sophie'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1977-80), at WIT-1-000000986, p.29, paragraph 105.

577 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of 'James' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun, 1975-8), at TRN-8-000000022, p.16.

578 [Transcript, day 230](#): 'Bob' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1990-2), at TRN-8-000000021, p.123.

579 [Transcript, day 232](#): 'Dr Mann' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at TRN-8-000000023, p.76.

'I would very much like the Inquiry to give people a voice.'

On the findings of abuse I have made, there is considerable justification for his feeling that it was avoidable.

A sense of shame

Sadly, I heard evidence that adults who, as children, were abused at school still somehow feel responsible for or ashamed of what happened to them. 'Sophie' was sexually assaulted by a fellow pupil:

For a long time, I cut what happened out of my memory. I didn't go there and I didn't think about it ... I just moved on. What did happen was that I completely cut myself off from all my close friends and everyone that I knew at school ... I felt such shame.⁵⁸⁰

'Sally' referred to 'that silly voice in my head that makes me feel shame for what happened. The rational mind knows that I'm not to blame, but it's hard.'⁵⁸¹

John Findlay said:

I think people should have no shame whatsoever with regards to speaking out of this - with regards to these things. It just occurred to me, but people speaking out about things is - it is so important, but people still don't. It's apparently embarrassing ... It sounds like a terrible thing but it's - yes, I'm still to this day embarrassed that this happened to me as a child. Obviously it's not something that anybody can be proud of, of course not. But we - we shouldn't feel ashamed. It's unfair.⁵⁸²

Feelings of shame and embarrassment, whilst genuine and powerful, are misplaced. The Gordonstoun applicants are not, however, alone. In all case studies, there have been applicants who, having suffered abuse, have felt long-term shame and embarrassment or that, somehow, it was their fault. These are adverse impacts and are keenly felt. However, fault does not and could not lie with those who were abused. It is unjust that for so many, it is not only a matter of having to cope with the immediate impact of abuse at the time it happens.

When child protection systems are being devised and put in place, those responsible for doing so need to bear in mind that they have a duty to protect children not only from suffering the immediate impact of being abused or having themselves abused others, but from what, for many, manifest themselves as long-term harmful effects.

The voice of the child

It is often said that children need to be heard. The need to afford them opportunities to speak is at last now being recognised. That is, however, but one aspect of giving children a voice. They also need to be listened to. 'Paul' said:

I would very much like the Inquiry to give people a voice. So for people who have gone through this just to know it's okay ... it wasn't your fault, and someone to acknowledge the fact that what happened to them was wrong,

580 Written statement of 'Sophie' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1977-80), at WIT-1-000000986, p.74, paragraph 101.

581 Written statement of 'Sally' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1985-90), at WIT-1-000001195, p.22, paragraph 69.

582 Transcript, day 232: John Findlay (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985-91; Gordonstoun, 1991-6), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.50-1.

and if they want to do anything about it, to try and get help, that that help exists and ... is available ... I've since gone through Gordonstoun's child protection procedures and I like the idea of the fact that there is a named person. I was not aware of that when I initially made my statement, but that fits in with one of the things I would like to see, someone outside of the disciplinary procedures of Gordonstoun, someone safe to talk to who you can bring to them any issues which you have, whether that be abuse or otherwise. I don't necessarily know whether they've managed to do that because I believe the named person in their reports is someone who is in a position within the school and has disciplinary powers, so nothing's perfect, but if there was just someone that pupils could talk to and say, 'I can talk to you, I trust you, you're not going to take this away and say that I've done something wrong', a safe space to talk. I didn't have that, my abuser took that away from me, and a recognition that that can happen would definitely help in the future.⁵⁸³

Moreover, it is increasingly understood that children communicate through behaviour. Listening to a child is not only an aural exercise. They also need to be observed, as their behaviour might be communicating important messages. 'Sarah', drawing on her own experience as a teacher, provided good advice about needing to 'look out for our teenagers and know them well enough that we see changes in behaviour'⁵⁸⁴ and then report it to an appropriate person because 'that's a really important first step ... even if there's nothing'.⁵⁸⁵

'Sally's' description of her experience in 1990 made a similar point:

There was never any attempt to understand the behaviour – just punishment for the wrong behaviour. My behaviour was definitely a cry for help and nobody asked what was going on ... People don't just act for no reason ... They need to dive deep into that and ask the questions. Schools need to have the appropriate staff who are trained to do that.⁵⁸⁶

Getting it right for every child

Children are individuals. When responding to what children communicate, that needs to be taken into account. As 'Paul' said, there needs to be 'some way of recognising the various different personalities of young people as they go through schools so that they can get the best out of that experience, rather than if you do not fit the mould, you are ... left to one side'.⁵⁸⁷ For him and any others like him, that would have involved a different approach from what he experienced:

for someone like myself, especially at the time I was quite shy and retiring, if they had taken an effort to understand my motivations and introduce me a little bit to different things, I'm sure I would have gone, 'Well, actually, that's something that I quite like doing and there's other people who like doing that' and I would have engaged in that. But that didn't happen for me. No one really particularly paid attention to the gentleman that was happy staying quiet in the corner.⁵⁸⁸

583 Transcript, day 232: 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.144-5.

584 Transcript, day 230: 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.57.

585 Transcript, day 230: 'Sarah' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at TRN-8-000000021, p.57.

586 Written statement of 'Sally' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1985-90), at WIT-1-000001195, p.24, paragraph 74.

587 Transcript, day 232: 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, p.144.

588 Transcript, day 232: 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, p.104.

Even after Mark Pyper was in post, well-intended pastoral efforts to help 'Paul' were not successful, demonstrating the need for a truly subjective and considered approach to all children:

My housemaster ... volunteered me to do some work for the headteacher, Mr Pyper ... I can understand exactly why he did that, he was trying to get me involved in the running of the school, give me a view of the bigger picture of what was going on. Unfortunately, that didn't work for me. I was essentially put into ... quite a stressful situation with a figure of authority who I'd never met before, so much like the rest of my school experience, I just said, 'Yes, absolutely, I'll do that', did it as quietly as possible, ticked all the boxes, handed over the paperwork and then disappeared again.⁵⁸⁹

While this was well intended,

they were trying to bring me into the fold and instil some of the Kurt Hahn beliefs, the core ethics of the school by doing that, and if that was somebody who just needed a chivvy, who was like, 'You need to try harder, let's go', that probably would have worked, but for an insular introvert, it was quite a significantly daunting experience at the time.⁵⁹⁰

'Donald', a former pupil of Aberlour and now a teacher himself, told me of how he tries to put his own reflections on his life at Aberlour into his teaching practice:

If you didn't do well in sports, you didn't get on in Aberlour House. You were considered

weak and feeble, and that was by the staff far less your contemporaries. As a teacher now, I try to keep an eye out for those who I call the Mathletes. Those who have no sporting inclination whatsoever, but they are great at chess, or can write an amazing essay, or love science experiments and playing with robotics. Even though I have no interest or understanding in half of those things I try to support those pupils because the sporty pupils already get support.⁵⁹¹

His final comment is particularly perceptive.

Mark Pyper understood this:

Everyone has to be looked after ... Everyone has rights, but it is also the case that some people need more looking after than others ... That's achieved by recognising the strengths and weaknesses of every pupil, building their strengths, which is the positive aspect of [what] I say, and having systems and people to support them in their weaknesses.⁵⁹²

Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15) agreed and was a supporter of the Scottish Government's GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child) policy, the statement of its approach to working with children, young people, and their families.⁵⁹³ She made the point that

we had been trying to do GIRFEC for 20 years with Mark Pyper ... but I think it formalised and gave structure to something that we were trying to do anyway, which was look

589 [Transcript, day 232](#): 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, p.106.

590 [Transcript, day 232](#): 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, pp.108-9.

591 [Written statement of 'Donald'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1990-2), at WIT-1-000001252, pp.17-18, paragraph 84.

592 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.140-1.

593 [GIRFEC](#) is a Scottish Government policy that seeks to improve outcomes for children and young people by placing the child at the centre. It was first introduced in 2006.

at the whole well-being of the child ... and Gordonstoun is – has that holistic education absolutely at its core. You know, school is not just about being in the classroom, it's about so many other things.⁵⁹⁴

Words of caution

To 'get it right for every child', a boarding school and/or the child's parents may have to recognise that the particular school environment may simply not be the right one for the individual child. For example, the Gordonstoun ethos was one that Kurt Hahn tried to capture in his adoption for the school of the motto *plus est en vous*. The use of that motto can be traced back to medieval Flanders where, in the 15th century, it was used to signify an unwavering commitment to outstanding achievement.⁵⁹⁵ The firm, disciplined, and harsh approach it connotes may work well for some children. But others may crumble. For example, Gordonstoun was probably the wrong school for 'Paul', who said:

The school ethos is: take part, participate, enjoy your activities there. It was quite a physically orientated school at the time ... That definitely did not suit me ... I didn't fit that particular mould, which probably made my life there a little harder and I had to rely on myself a lot more.⁵⁹⁶

'Jane' was a shy child and struggled to cope:
'The only way to survive would be to be

entertaining ... I really struggled to know how to – to fit in.'⁵⁹⁷ 'Alison' acknowledged that 'Gordonstoun is not a school for everyone. There haven't been cold showers since my father's day but it's still a place which requires a fair dose of mucking in and taking part. Where some public schools major in pomp, ceremony, and privilege, Gordonstoun majors in rolling up sleeves.'⁵⁹⁸

This reflection has wider application. In order to do the best for every child, boarding schools may need to have difficult conversations, including with parents. This was recognised by Diana Monteith, who said: 'I couldn't agree more. I think there are some children for whom ... being in a boarding house is really challenging ... and [it] is not perhaps right for every child. And sometimes I might have said that to a parent.'⁵⁹⁹

Good advice

'Christian' offered some good advice:

I was fortunate enough not to suffer too badly, and certainly did not engage in the practice [of bullying] myself, but I did witness a fair amount. Bullies will invariably gang up on the weakest, and any attempt by the latter to fight back ... will result in the former closing ranks. It is perhaps a reflection on the failure of early education and/or parent[ing] to instil the most important rule of all: never to do or say to another what is hateful unto oneself. If this message were to be the first one heard

594 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.42-3.

595 *Plus est en vous* was the heraldic motto of the Van Gruuthuse family, the head of which, Louis van Gruuthuse, flourished during the Renaissance and excelled in a multitude of respects. For him the motto appropriately signified a commitment of the family to digging deeper within themselves to unearth abilities of which they were hitherto unaware.

596 [Transcript, day 232](#): 'Paul' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at TRN-8-000000023, p.104.

597 [Transcript, day 233](#): 'Jane' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-81; Gordonstoun, 1981-5), at TRN-8-000000024, p.7.

598 [Transcript, day 233](#): read-in statement of 'Alison' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1997-2002), at TRN-8-000000024, p.165.

599 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at TRN-8-000000025, p.44.

by every student at every school, perhaps the hypocrisy of bullying could be stamped out.⁶⁰⁰

Reflections by other witnesses

Being geographically remote may have attractions but it can lead to inward-looking habits and a lack of awareness of developments elsewhere. Gordonstoun's geographical remoteness from other schools was certainly unhelpful in the past, as Mark Pyper discovered in 1990:

apart from going away on sports fixtures – and that was quite a major occasion, in fact – there was virtually no travelling at all, and although in those days there were far fewer courses and in-service training, it was almost unheard of because it was distant and expensive and so on ... You have this island, as it were, but not entirely what Kurt Hahn set it up as, an island of healing, as he called it, but it was an island where it had some very good things but some not so good things happening as well, but with a staff who were blinkered.⁶⁰¹

On arrival at the school, he found that 'things were a different league altogether' as regards bullying and that 'Gordonstoun was in Victorian times, at least'⁶⁰² so far as the boarding houses were concerned.

Lisa Kerr spoke of the need for schools to realise that, rather than carry on living in the past, they need to have a

real belief that unless you have in your mind it could happen here, then it might. And by thinking that it could happen here, you do

everything you possibly can all the time to make sure that it doesn't ... a couple of years ago there was a really horrific video published on social media of initiation ceremonies at a boarding school down south for young boarders going into a boarding house and I made every one of our HMs [housemasters] come and sit in a room and listen to and watch the video. Because when these things first come out, there is a moment you think, 'Gosh, I am glad that is not here'. But unless you sit and listen and think, 'What do we have that stops that happening here?', then it might. And it is that culture of never resting, things never being enough, you can never do enough to make sure every child achieves their full potential, you can never do enough to make sure every child is safe. So you need to be on it the whole time as a school, an inspection regime, a government – police, whatever. No level of scrutiny can be too much.⁶⁰³

'No level of scrutiny can be too much.'

What constitutes 'good'?

Former principals of Gordonstoun provided some thoughtful reflections, drawing on their own past experiences as well as looking to the future.

One was Mark Pyper, who said:

we can only say the situation is really good if that atmosphere reaches all people in the school in all places at all times, including

600 [Transcript, day 232](#): read-in statement of 'Christian' (former pupil, Aberlour, 1968–73; Gordonstoun, 1973–7), at TRN-8-000000023, p.156.

601 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.122–3.

602 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.120.

603 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.92.

when you're in your own rooms, when you know that there are no members of staff in the vicinity. If there is one person unnecessarily unhappy and certainly if that person isn't happy because of something which has been said or done by another, then we have failed and the atmosphere cannot really be said to be good.⁶⁰⁴

Honest communications

There is a clear need for openness and candour within schools. Mark Pyper's approach was a good example. He thought there should be increased emphasis on

senior management being honest with governors, and I don't think that happens ... you may have read, for instance, some of my reports to governors ... I put in a new section from my predecessor called 'THE DOWNSIDE', i.e. what is wrong, and the governors questioned this ... And I said I regarded that as absolutely essential and I kept it going for 21 years, that they were told what was wrong with their school, and that link I think in some schools is still not strong enough.⁶⁰⁵

He also described the right approach to inspections:

No one likes a poor inspection report and so people quite understandably say when the inspectors come: 'We are a marvellous school, everything here is wonderful.' They'll find out, good inspectors, that it may not be. But how much better if someone says, 'We are a very good school, we have got these seven or eight

things right, here are two which aren't right, will you help us?' That is what I would wish for the future.⁶⁰⁶

A willingness to listen, as well as a willingness to learn, including from what has not gone well, is one of the hallmarks of a school that is truly invested in getting it right for every child.

Training staff to watch for changes in children

There were some reflections on the importance of understanding that children speak through their behaviour.

For example, Lisa Kerr said:

good regulation doesn't keep children safe, PVG [Protecting Vulnerable Groups] alone doesn't keep children safe, good staffing. There is great complexity and a whole range of things need to work together. The telling culture is very important, but staff training is really important, and I think one of the most helpful changes has been training staff to notice what are the signs when something is wrong. Obviously I have been watching the evidence the Inquiry has heard in recent days and I know you have asked about quiet children. Actually the greatest area of risk is a change in a child ... It's the change in the child that one needs to look out for.⁶⁰⁷

And 'Sally' said:

I felt differently immediately after being sexually assaulted, but nobody else noticed.

604 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.124–5.

605 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, p.181.

606 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.181–2.

607 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, pp.65–6.

That's the thing with all sexual abuse. If you get beaten up and you have a black eye or something, it's obvious that you've been hurt and people reach out to see if you're ok. The less visible injury or pain is a lot harder. There needs to be an awareness that people may be carrying their own trauma or some other unresolved issue that is impacting them on one level or another. People need to take time and have that awareness, particularly if they're in charge of students.⁶⁰⁸

A virtuous cycle of improvement

Written policies are not sufficient. Lisa Kerr recognised that '[they] don't keep children safe. It's good practice, good training, it's ... the combination of factors.'⁶⁰⁹ She also felt that having an effective interplay between society, schools, and regulators was vital:

when those three things work together you create a virtuous cycle of improvement, and I think it is quite hard to say, 'Well, what was it? Was it that inspection that prompted something, or was it the Children Act, or was it that particular head?' Actually what really makes things better is when all of those things are aligned, and ... you end up with a culture of self-evaluation ... and self-evaluation and reflection is incredibly important.⁶¹⁰

Eddie Frizzell, who has extensive experience of governance in education, including in relation to residential establishments for children (though not those in the independent sector), provided evidence in a different case study.⁶¹¹ Whilst observing

that 'it is quite important to have systems and policies', he stressed that 'just having them doesn't do it',⁶¹² because what matters

is getting the people to do what's required of them in terms of the purpose of the organisation they work for, their role in it, what the values are, what the standards are that are expected of them, again a lead has to be set from the top on that. Setting standards is very important.

And working within the overall direction. There has to be some direction and some vision for the organisation that people buy into. Ideally they buy into it when they want to apply for a job there. It is already developed, then they should have been involved in developing it and then they need to be constantly encouraged to live it. And if you are new to the organisation, then the induction is very important and what will be expected of you and how you do your job is very important. That gets backed up with a proper performance management system.⁶¹³

He referred to this advice as 'the shortest management book you have probably ever heard' and added that 'vision and leadership from the top really is where it has to start'.⁶¹⁴

I could not take issue with any of what he recommended in that 'shortest management book'⁶¹⁵ and, on the evidence in this and other parts of the boarding schools case study, consider that it could be applied equally to the whole of the boarding school sector.

608 Written statement of 'Sally' (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1985-90), at WIT-1-000001195, pp.25-6, paragraph 78.

609 Transcript, day 216: Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.89.

610 Transcript, day 216: Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.52.

611 Transcript, day 425: Eddie Frizzell, at TRN-12-000000057.

612 Transcript, day 425: Eddie Frizzell, at TRN-12-000000057, p.186.

613 Transcript, day 425: Eddie Frizzell, at TRN-12-000000057, p.187-8.

614 Transcript, day 425: Eddie Frizzell, at TRN-12-000000057, p.188.

615 Transcript, day 425: Eddie Frizzell, at TRN-12-000000057, p.188.

An independent advisory service

Lisa Kerr agreed with other heads who had experience of working in England that the lack of local authority designated officers (LADOs) was 'a notable absence in the systems we have in Scotland':⁶¹⁶

What we don't have ... is any kind of centrally coordinated advisory service in relation to child protection, and in this sense I am not just talking about schools ... I have talked on several occasions about where I think Scotland is really leading in its approach. I think this might be an area where we might learn something from England and the LADO ... who is an expert in child protection that sits within each Local Authority who you can phone for advice, guidance, a check. We have heard some schools talking about having to hire a consultant. These are really complex issues and the person on the end of the phone on Police Scotland might not be an expert in this area. But if you have a system akin to the LADO ... you would have someone who was an expert in this area to whom you could turn to for advice ... I don't think the LADO in itself is a silver bullet, I think it is about thinking about how that LADO might then engage with the police so one is not simply working with whoever happens to be on duty at the time, who might not have the experience or expertise, and might be put in a position that, for them, is also deeply uncomfortable.⁶¹⁷

In short, it is about creating a structure where a person has been specifically appointed to be responsible for coordinating the response to any concerns raised that an adult who works with children may have caused or

could cause them harm. The LADO works within local children's services and also provides advice to employers, organisations, and any others who have concerns about such an adult. I can understand why Lisa Kerr feels that the failure to have appointed any person to such a role in Scotland is a problem, for the reasons she explained.

Reflections by the school

Lisa Kerr captured something that was a real shortcoming in the management of the school up until the 1990s: 'It is clear that for decades one thought that if a member of staff was an adequate teacher and a good chap, then they could be in charge of a boarding house. That is so different from our understanding of how things are today.'⁶¹⁸

She went on: 'just assuming that everything is okay is no longer acceptable. One has to check that everything is okay.'⁶¹⁹ Assumptions are a dangerous basis on which to operate a boarding school. They may lead to children being abused. Looking to the future, she thought that

leadership is absolutely essential and it is not just about one person. I think if we look back in the sector it will significantly have been about the culture set by one person, but good leadership of a school depends upon a strong leadership team ... And I think what I have seen from the records, particularly from the early 1990s onwards, there was a real recognition that a complex organisation, and a boarding school is an incredibly complex organisation, requires a good team of leaders.⁶²⁰

616 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.105.

617 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, pp.104-6.

618 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.46.

619 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.53.

620 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.48.

Institutional reputation was allowed to take priority over unmasking abuse.

She continued:

those of us working in Gordonstoun today ... have been deeply affected by what they have read, and it has been very upsetting to read of the experiences that pupils who were in our care have had, whether as a result of staff or peer-on-peer bullying. I was thinking about this last night and thinking: if I find this hard to read, how must it be for the survivors who had to experience it?⁶²¹

‘If I find this hard to read, how must it be for the survivors who had to experience it?’

Her comments were both genuine and sincere. Gordonstoun has also, since around 2010, made real efforts to respond to and assist former pupils who suffered abuse. The school has acknowledged the wide-ranging and lifelong consequences, and has taken forward measures such as engaging with CELCIS in 2016 to discuss possible options for support.⁶²²

Simon Reid was asked what, with the benefit of hindsight, he would have done differently and, very appropriately, he answered:

I think I may find a way in which to try and communicate the empathy, the sympathy, more effectively. That may, ironically, be not offering it at all verbally but doing things. And

so the instinct to go for a completely removed framework – and I’m talking about going to a university, for instance, to establish a platform for voices to be heard – may have done that quicker ... if a school came to me and said, ‘What do you do in this situation?’, I think just set up something completely removed from the school and give your alumni a platform really quickly, really quickly, and appoint somebody who is not going to be against the school, but ... is detached, who’s going to be balanced, there’s going to be an objectivity in the way in which they manage it, to run that, to manage it. And if you have to pay for that, do it.⁶²³

For far too long, institutional reputation was allowed to take priority over unmasking abuse. Yet, as institutions such as Gordonstoun are now recognising, openness, honesty about what has gone wrong, and the adoption of a growth mindset are likely to enhance reputation. In his closing words, in a spirit of openness, Simon Reid said this:

I think people may have got bored of a voice like mine, a headteacher saying this stuff, but I am enormously saddened and apologetic like – let’s keep it simple. I am sorry that people were hurt in a school that I had responsibility for, and that – being involved in an Inquiry like this is part whipping, frankly, for a period which we cannot ... really detach ourselves from completely and say it was nothing to do with us. And in our picking up the pieces afterwards, we have responsibilities ... I didn’t

621 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, pp.111–12.

622 University of Strathclyde and CELCIS, Consultation on Gordonstoun’s Response to Survivors of Historic Abuse, Final Report, January 2018, at GOR-000000034.

623 [Transcript, day 235](#): Simon Reid (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011–17), at TRN-8-000000026, p.80.

do this stuff, but I feel so keenly what victims, what survivors have felt ...

And, you know, just one thing which I hope may come of the Inquiry is this point about barriers. Ninety-five per cent, 99 maybe, maybe 98 per cent of teachers, people, are probably when they end up in a school really rather good. They're probably not bad. But there must be really clear barriers, hurdles, so

... if there's somebody who manages to get around the barriers, there's just another one and there's another ... so there's almost no possibility that a child is going to be subject to the whims of the most devious characters, of which I think there are very few in our world ... So I hope what might emerge even more than the business ... is just making absolutely sure that those barriers are rock solid and multiple.⁶²⁴

624 [Transcript, day 235](#): Simon Reid (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011-17), at TRN-8-000000026, pp.82-3.

Introduction

As part of the Inquiry's investigations, I requested and recovered documents from a number of sources. I am grateful to Gordonstoun for the work undertaken by them in this regard and to others who were issued with notices under section 21 of the Inquiries Act 2005.

Gordonstoun: records available

For most of the period under consideration, Gordonstoun had neither a record-keeping nor a record-destruction policy. From the evidence available to the Inquiry, it seems that until recently it was left to individual staff to decide what information should be recorded, and where and how that should be done. Gordonstoun recognises that 'the historic reporting, record-keeping, and referencing practices ... were not of the rigorous types required today',⁶²⁵ and that

'in the past different areas of the School operated different practices'.⁶²⁶ As a result, there are substantial gaps in knowledge and discrepancies in record retention, especially in the period 1960-90.

The available records were reviewed by Gordonstoun during its preparation of its section 21 response to SCAl, between February 2017 and July 2017.⁶²⁷ Copies of these documents were made available to the Inquiry and included minutes of the Board of Directors' meetings (1934-80);⁶²⁸ minutes of the Executive Committee of Governors meetings (1934-6);⁶²⁹ minutes of the Gordonstoun School Ltd Board meetings (1938-2014);⁶³⁰ minutes of staff meetings (1990-2014);⁶³¹ headmaster's reports (1971-99);⁶³² student files (from the late 1970s onwards, although Gordonstoun mentioned that it holds records in its archives from 1934 to the present day);⁶³³ records of incidents concerning child wellbeing

625 Gordonstoun, [Part B response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0103, pp.2-3.

626 Gordonstoun, [Part C response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0112, p.5.

627 Gordonstoun, [Part C response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0112, p.115.

628 Gordonstoun, Minutes of the Board of Directors' meetings, at GOR-000002686 to GOR-000002892 and GOR-000002940 to GOR-000002957.

629 Gordonstoun, Minutes of the Executive Committee of Governors, at GOR-000002677 to GOR-000002685.

630 Gordonstoun, Minutes of the Board of Directors and Minutes of the Gordonstoun School Ltd Board, at GOR-000002686 to GOR-000002895.

631 Gordonstoun, Staff Minutes, at GOR-000003878 to GOR-000003995; GOR-000004022 to GOR-000004133; and GOR-000004161 to GOR-000004188.

632 Gordonstoun, Headmaster's Report, at GOR-000004206 to GOR-000004222 and GOR-000002906 to GOR-000002919.

633 Gordonstoun, School file, at GOR-000003428 to GOR-000003565 and GOR-000004235 to GOR-000004252; Gordonstoun, [Part C response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0112, p.115.

and welfare, staff files, and complaints (2003–14);⁶³⁴ staff, parents', and students' handbooks; policies and procedures;⁶³⁵ inspection reports;⁶³⁶ the school's correspondence; and published records.⁶³⁷

Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24) added:

we also used other methods of assessing the extent of abuse, most notably reaching out very proactively to our alumni directly and through the press ... There are actually only two of my predecessors who are still alive, both principals, but a number of other staff were spoken to, and our research team have worked incredibly hard over the last few years on it ... We have an archivist, and we have had a dedicated researcher on this project, if I may call it that.⁶³⁸

She also recognised that historically the school did not have a formalised record-keeping policy and that 'there doesn't really seem to be a pattern as to what was kept and why'.⁶³⁹

Aberlour

In 1999, Aberlour House was brought under the management and control of Gordonstoun. Unfortunately few pre-1999 records of Aberlour House remain in existence. Some extant Aberlour House records were made available to the Inquiry, including minutes of the Aberlour Board,⁶⁴⁰ minutes of annual general meetings,⁶⁴¹ headmaster's reports,⁶⁴² codes of conduct,⁶⁴³ and handbooks.⁶⁴⁴

In its Part C response, Gordonstoun explained that:

When Aberlour House changed location and moved onto the Gordonstoun campus [in 2004], files were destroyed. There are some historical records of Aberlour House retained in the School archives, and the other papers relating to 1999–2004 referenced in this Inquiry response were retained amongst the private papers of the current Headmaster of the Junior School (and former staff member and headmaster of Aberlour House).⁶⁴⁵

634 For example, Gordonstoun, Complaint, at GOR-000003662 to GOR-000003701.

635 Gordonstoun, Handbooks – students, at GOR-000004037 and GOR-000004157, and Handbooks – parents, at GOR-000003659 and GOR-000003660.

636 For example, Gordonstoun, Inspection Reports, at GOR-000003621 to GOR-000003639.

637 These include the Gordonstoun Records, at GOR-000004560 to GOR-000004681; The history of Gordonstoun, at GOR-000003194, GOR-000003617, and GOR-000004564; and articles from newspapers at GOR-000003788, GOR-000004412, GOR-000004414, GOR-000004581, GOR-000004616, and GOR-000004677.

638 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.17.

639 [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, pp.19–20.

640 Gordonstoun, Minutes of Aberlour Board, at GOR-000004519 to GOR-000004538.

641 Gordonstoun, Minutes of Aberlour Annual General Meeting, at GOR-000004521 to GOR-000004665.

642 Gordonstoun, Headmaster's Reports – Aberlour, at GOR-000004522 to GOR-000004673.

643 Gordonstoun, Code of Conduct – Aberlour, at GOR-000003753, GOR-000003850, GOR-000003879, GOR-000003944, GOR-000004003, GOR-000004028, GOR-000004032, and GOR-000004034.

644 Gordonstoun, Handbooks – students, at GOR-000004037 and GOR-000004157, and Handbooks – parents, at GOR-000003659 and GOR-000003660.

645 Gordonstoun, [Part C response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0112, p.110. Aberlour records can mainly be found at GOR-000004519 to GOR-000004676.

Gordonstoun's decision to destroy these documents did not accord with best practice at the time.

Retention of records

The retention of school records was not regulated until the early 2000s. The Pupils' Educational Records (Scotland) Regulations 2003 require that educational records 'shall be preserved by the responsible body for a period of five years following the pupil having ceased receiving school education'.⁶⁴⁶ Educational records are defined as records of information that:

- (a) are processed by or on behalf of the responsible body;
- (b) relate to any person who is or has been a pupil at the school;
- (c) relate to the school education of that person; and
- (d) originated from or was supplied by any of the persons specified in paragraph (2).⁶⁴⁷

Persons specified in paragraph (2) are teachers; other school staff; the pupil; and his or her parent. There are no similar regulations governing the retention of child protection records in schools. However, in 2011 the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) informed its members that 'The Scottish Child Law Centre has advised that child protection records should be kept until the 26th birthday of the individual concerned in line with NHS guidance.'⁶⁴⁸

In 2014, SCIS confirmed this was still its recommendation. SCIS also considered the length of time that records relating to allegations against staff should be kept. After reviewing advice on the retention of documents issued by the Scottish Council on Archives and its equivalent in England (the Information and Records Management Society), SCIS concluded that, where justified, schools should keep staff records 'until the person's normal retirement age, or 10 years from the date of the allegation, whichever is the longer'.⁶⁴⁹

As noted, Gordonstoun's historic record-keeping practices were at times far from ideal:

With regard to record retention, in the past different areas of the School operated different practices. All student files were retained, although it is understood that, at various times in the School's history, these were routinely 'thinned' to retain only what was felt necessary and appropriate. The files of teaching staff in employment by the School have been retained since 1990. Financial records are retained for seven years. Child protection and wellbeing records are retained from 1997 onwards and the School archives retain an extensive but incomplete set of school records, correspondence and paperwork from its foundation to the present day.⁶⁵⁰

As the second half of the previous quotation reveals, however, there is evidence of a more

⁶⁴⁶ The Pupils' Educational Records (Scotland) Regulations 2003, reg.4.

⁶⁴⁷ The Pupils' Educational Records (Scotland) Regulations 2003, reg.3.

⁶⁴⁸ SCIS, Child Protection Guidance (October 2011), quoted in SCIS, Retention of Child Protection Records in Schools (December 2013, revised October 2014), at LOR-000000112, p.1.

⁶⁴⁹ The Information and Records Management Society, Toolkit for Schools, quoted in SCIS, Retention of Child Protection Records in Schools (December 2013, revised October 2014), at LOR-000000112, p.2.

⁶⁵⁰ Gordonstoun, Part C response to section 21 notice, at GOR.001.001.0112, p.6.

rigorous approach having been adopted from the 1990s onwards. Gordonstoun has complied with the legislation on record retention and has taken some additional steps which ought to serve the interests of children who are or were their pupils. For example, whilst the Pupils' Educational Records (Scotland) Regulations 2003 require that educational records be preserved for five years after the pupil has left the school, Gordonstoun decided in 2007 to extend this period and retain educational records for 25 years: 'Allegations of child abuse can be made, and often are made, several years after the incident or alleged incident occurred. Due to the nature of historic abuse, child protection records will be retained for 25 rather than 5 years after the pupil has left the school.'⁶⁵¹

Gordonstoun has acknowledged the legal basis for its current record-retention policy⁶⁵² and stated that 'in relation to record retention, the School is working towards operating in compliance with changes in the Data Protection Act which are coming into force on 25 May 2018, in order that its record retention and data protection is entirely consistent with up-to-date legislation and guidelines'.⁶⁵³

In 2021, Lisa Kerr said:

It is now our policy under the General Data Protection Regulation that all pupil records are kept forever ... That is our published policy which is part of our parent contract,

not at least because one of the many things the Inquiry has taught us is the importance of being able to demonstrate the level of care that was or was not given to children, and with the lifting of the Statute of Limitations it is really important the school is in a position to be able to demonstrate how it has looked after children.⁶⁵⁴

Lisa Kerr's mention of 'the Statute of Limitations' is understood not to be a reference to any legislation bearing that name but to the Prescription and Limitation (Scotland) Act 1973 which was amended in 2017 so as to lift the three-year time limit for bringing actions for damages for personal injury where the injuries in question were attributable to abuse in childhood.⁶⁵⁵ My findings in relation to the background history of the change in government policy that led to lifting the time bar for such claims, and its implementation are set out in Chapter 4 of [Case Study no. 6](#) relating to Scottish Government's response to Petition PE535.⁶⁵⁶

Record-keeping systems

In 2005, Gordonstoun opened its own archive, which acts as a 'depository of the papers, correspondence, minutes, photographs, artefacts and publications relating to the history of the school and associated bodies connected with the School, buildings and estate management' and has been managed by a school archivist since its inception.⁶⁵⁷ An archives

651 Gordonstoun, Child Protection Policy and Procedures, revised June 2017, at GOR-000003999, p.37.

652 Gordonstoun, [Part C response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0112, p.3.

653 Gordonstoun, [Part C response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0112, p.7.

654 [Transcript, day, 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017-24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.21.

655 See [Limitation \(Childhood Abuse\) \(Scotland\) Act 2017](#), and [Prescription and Limitation \(Scotland\) Act 1973](#), sections 17 and 17A.

656 Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, [Case Study no. 6](#), Chapter 4 (September 2021).

657 Gordonstoun, [Part C response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0112, p.110.

For most of the period under consideration, the recording of complaints and wellbeing issues was not organised.

retention policy was then put in place, with the following mission statement: 'All staff charged with disposing of papers should be made aware, before the disposal of materials, that the archivist should be contacted with a view to identifying important papers worthy of being placed in the School archive.'⁶⁵⁸

For most of the period under consideration, the recording of complaints and wellbeing issues was not organised. Before the 1990s, logbooks were used for the recording of punishments, penalty drills, incidents occurring within individual boarding houses, complaints, and child welfare concerns. However, the retention of these documents was inconsistent.

There is evidence that punishments were recorded, at least from the 1960s onwards. An undated document containing penalty drill rules – probably from the mid-1960s – states:

any master may give Penalty Drill. It must be recorded in the Punishment Book, kept in Gordonstoun House next to the Master's Dining Room, within 24 hours. It must be recorded correctly, e.g. Name and Initials, or at least some distinguishing mark, correct date. A boy has a right to appeal to his

Housemaster if the punishment is incorrectly entered ... In addition to these recognised Punishments, a master is entitled to give his own punishments.⁶⁵⁹

Evidence of these rules being followed over at least two decades is found in three punishment books from the 1960s and 70s.⁶⁶⁰ From the 1990s, mention of punishments and sanctions is also to be found in the headmaster's reports to the Board within the category 'THE DOWNSIDE'.⁶⁶¹ They provide an insight into the school culture and management of students' behaviour. From the mid-1990s, the recording of punishments and sanctions seems to have been integrated into individual pupil files.

Logbooks of incidents occurring within boarding houses are missing. Gordonstoun explained:

Prior to 1997, each Housemaster and Housemistress kept a logbook – careful record of any matters arising within the boarding houses. These were maintained on a nightly basis and referred to as necessary when considering the welfare of children in their care. These logbooks have not, however, been retained. The practice was to keep records but not to retain them.⁶⁶²

658 Gordonstoun, [Part C response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0112, p.112; and Gordonstoun, Archives and File Retention, at GOR-000003934.

659 Gordonstoun, Penalty Drill and Punishments (c.1965–6), at GOR-000003773, p.1.

660 Gordonstoun, Scans of ledger book in which penalty drills are recorded, at GOR-000003747, GOR-000003748, and GOR-000003750.

661 Gordonstoun, Headmaster's Report to the Board, at GOR-000002906 to GOR-000002919.

662 Gordonstoun, [Part C response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0112, p.111.

It is therefore unclear whether logbooks were diligently kept and updated at the time; whether incidents or other matters were dealt with within the boarding house itself, and, if they were, whether there was any follow-up by other members of staff. Gordonstoun asserts that 'records of wellbeing issues, recorded on paper, are available comprehensively from 1997'.⁶⁶³

In a 2002 inspection report, HMle found that the school had to clarify its policy and procedures for dealing with any child protection issues.⁶⁶⁴ Gordonstoun's child protection policy of 2002 emphasised that, when a child discloses abuse to staff, staff should 'observe, record and report'.⁶⁶⁵ It further advised staff to 'keep contemporaneous notes and make a record of them on the same working day',⁶⁶⁶ and to record, 'preferably quoting words actually used, as soon as possible after the comment has been made'.⁶⁶⁷

The child protection policy was reviewed and updated in March 2003. The updated policy provides further guidance to staff on how to respond to suspicions of allegations of abuse by following the steps covered by the acronym 'RECORD':⁶⁶⁸

R – respond without showing signs of disbelief or disquiet (do not interrogate)

E – enquire casually about any injuries or distress

C – confidentiality should not be promised

O – observe the demeanour of the child carefully but unobtrusively

R – record immediately in detail what was seen and heard first hand

D – do not take any action yourself or share concerns with other members of staff.

In 2004, Gordonstoun introduced a form to standardise the information staff provided to the child protection coordinator whenever there was a concern.⁶⁶⁹ HMle carried out a follow-up inspection in 2004 and reported that record-keeping in relation to child protection issues had improved since 2002.⁶⁷⁰

In 2006, an inspection carried out jointly by HMle and the Care Commission identified the need for 'more systematic approaches to record-keeping to ensure staff effectively

⁶⁶³ Gordonstoun, [Part B response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0103, p.6.

⁶⁶⁴ HMle, *Inspection of the Care and Welfare of Residential Pupils, Gordonstoun School, Moray*, 17 September 2002, at SGV-000007307.

⁶⁶⁵ Gordonstoun School, *Child Protection Policy/Procedures*, 2002, at GOR-000004099, p.8. The first child protection policy was issued in 1995, according to Lisa Kerr, or 1997, according to Mark Pyper. See [Transcript, day 216](#): Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24), at TRN-8-000000007, p.21 and [Written statement of Mark Pyper](#) (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at WIT-1-000000607, p.20, paragraph 73.

⁶⁶⁶ Gordonstoun School, *Child Protection Policy/Procedures: Children (Scotland) Act 1995*, 2002, at GOR-000004099, p.10.

⁶⁶⁷ Gordonstoun School, *Child Protection Policy/Procedures: Children (Scotland) Act 1995*, 2002, at GOR-000004099, p.11.

⁶⁶⁸ The RECORD acronym derives from guidance issued by SCIS in 1997 with regular updates thereafter. It refers to the recording in detail of what staff have seen or heard. Gordonstoun School, *Child Protection Policy/Procedures*, 2003, at GOR-000004040, pp.10–11.

⁶⁶⁹ Gordonstoun School, *Child Protection Concern Form*, 2004, at GOR-000003840.

⁶⁷⁰ HMle, *Inspection of Care and Welfare Residential Provision: follow through, Gordonstoun School*, 16 November 2004, at GOR-000003625.

monitor all aspects of care within individual houses'.⁶⁷¹ Improvements to record-keeping had been made by the time of the next inspection by the Care Commission in 2007, with the inspector observing that '[a]ppropriate procedures and recording systems were in place in relation to child protection and bullying concerns'.⁶⁷²

In 2013, the school introduced its online Wellbeing Information System, described above and in Gordonstoun's Part B response.⁶⁷³ The system was commended by the Care Inspectorate in 2015:

The system allowed varying levels of access for specific members of staff, from widely shared information for all relevant staff to very restricted access, as in the case of child protection issues, to a very small select group. The system was used very positively to record and access significant information and had hugely enhanced the ease of recording and information sharing across the school.⁶⁷⁴

However, when reviewing Gordonstoun's formal systems for recording complaints in 2015, the Care Inspectorate noted that, whilst the current system was effective in dealing with complaints raised, it did not ensure that all relevant staff were aware of them. The Care Inspectorate recommended that '[t]he

system of recording complaints should be reviewed and developed to ensure there is one clear system of recording complaints, any action taken, and the outcome of any decisions'.⁶⁷⁵

Gordonstoun has done this, and the Wellbeing Information System is subject to ongoing development and improvement.⁶⁷⁶

Staff recollections of record-keeping

David Hanson, a teacher at Aberlour House from 1965 to 2001, could not recall there being a school policy on record-keeping, nor there being a record of punishments.⁶⁷⁷ He believed some records were made: complaints dealt with by the headmaster were noted, and, if serious, added to the pupil's file; minutes of staff meetings were kept and stored in the school office; and pupils' academic performance was recorded, with reports provided to parents every term. He concluded that the record-keeping 'that existed in 1965 evolved little in the next 25 to 30 years'.⁶⁷⁸

Diana Monteith taught at Gordonstoun over three separate periods. When she first joined the school in 1989, she 'was not really aware of how records were kept'.⁶⁷⁹ Later, as an assistant housemistress, she 'kept a

671 HMIe, Inspection of Mainstream School Care Accommodation Services, Gordonstoun School, 6 June 2006, at GOR-000003632, p.2.

672 Care Commission, Gordonstoun School, 15 March 2007, at GOR-000003633, p.7.

673 Gordonstoun, [Part B response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0103, p.6.

674 Care Inspectorate, Inspection report, Gordonstoun School: School Care Accommodation Service, 8 January 2015, at GOR-000000032, p.16.

675 Care Inspectorate, Inspection report, Gordonstoun School: School Care Accommodation Service, 8 January 2015, at GOR-000000032, p.32.

676 See Continual Improvement document, 23 January 2023, at GOR-000004706.

677 [Written statement of David Hanson](#) (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at WIT-1-000000602, p.5, paragraph 18; p.9, paragraph 50; p.11, paragraph 57; and p.14, paragraphs 69-72.

678 [Written statement of David Hanson](#) (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at WIT-1-000000602, p.14, paragraph 72.

679 [Written statement of Diana Monteith](#) (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989-93; 1998-2005; 2006-21; assistant housemistress, 1989-93; director of pastoral care, 2010-15), at WIT-1-000000519, p.35, paragraph 127.

file in [her] office on the girls'.⁶⁸⁰ As head of the English department at the turn of the millennium, she was not aware of pastoral record-keeping but extensive records were kept on children's academic performance. On becoming the sixth-form coordinator in 2007, she kept her own electronic and paper files on students. As director of pastoral care and deputy head (pastoral) from 2010, she introduced 'tighter systems of record-keeping' across the school.⁶⁸¹ This included the introduction of a school-wide disciplinary incident form – which she had been using for the sixth form since 2006 – and the development of the Wellbeing Information System. Before then, any records of child protection concerns were kept by the child protection coordinator.

Reflecting on the period before becoming director of pastoral care, Diana Monteith said: 'I don't think I would have been aware of whether children were reporting what they considered to be abuse, ill-treatment or inappropriate conduct ... as this wasn't part of my role'.⁶⁸² She believed that during that period, housemasters and housemistresses would have kept records on each student, with duplicates made and kept in the headmaster's office, whilst pastoral staff may have kept records of major breaches of discipline. Though 'there was not a formal way of recording complaints' at that time,

the Code of Conduct explained to staff the procedure to be followed when a child made a complaint, and Diana Monteith believed that any complaints made by a child about a member of staff would have been recorded in the files of the person being complained about.⁶⁸³ She also commented on the absence of punishment books prior to the changes she introduced.⁶⁸⁴ In her view, 'there was nothing inherently wrong with this system ... [but] it did not always provide all the information one might have liked about a child to build a full picture'.⁶⁸⁵

During Mark Pyper's (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999) tenure, punishments were recorded using a variety of methods: 'Records were kept centrally, including letters on students' files, for all expulsions and suspensions/restrictions; by senior pastoral staff for detentions or other school punishments; by house staff for gatings and other house-based punishments'.⁶⁸⁶ Punishments delegated to Colour Bearers had to be approved – by the sixth-form coordinator or house staff – and recorded.

With regard to child protection, Mark Pyper asserted that

Records of pupil welfare, including matters relating to abuse, were kept in 1990 and

680 [Written statement of Diana Monteith](#) (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989–93; 1998–2005; 2006–21; assistant housemistress, 1989–93; director of pastoral care, 2010–15), at WIT-1-000000519, p.35, paragraph 127.

681 [Written statement of Diana Monteith](#) (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989–93; 1998–2005; 2006–21; assistant housemistress, 1989–93; director of pastoral care, 2010–15), at WIT-1-000000519, p.10, paragraph 38.

682 [Written statement of Diana Monteith](#) (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989–93; 1998–2005; 2006–21; assistant housemistress, 1989–93; director of pastoral care, 2010–15), at WIT-1-000000519, p.36, paragraph 130.

683 [Written statement of Diana Monteith](#) (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989–93; 1998–2005; 2006–21; assistant housemistress, 1989–93; director of pastoral care, 2010–15), at WIT-1-000000519, p.11, paragraph 42, and p.27, paragraph 98.

684 [Transcript, day 234](#): Diana Monteith (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989–93; 1998–2005; 2006–21; assistant housemistress, 1989–93; director of pastoral care, 2010–15), at TRN-8-000000025, p.95.

685 [Written statement of Diana Monteith](#) (former teacher, Gordonstoun, 1989–93; 1998–2005; 2006–21; assistant housemistress, 1989–93; director of pastoral care, 2010–15), at WIT-1-000000519, p.36, paragraph 132.

686 [Written statement of Mark Pyper](#) (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at WIT-1-000000607, p.16, paragraph 56.

immediately stored afterwards in a pupil's central file, usually also in files retained by the housemaster or housemistress, and a member of staff's file, centrally held, if a member of staff has been involved in an incident.⁶⁸⁷

This was the system in place when he joined the school and it remained so until 1997: 'when a first Child Protection Policy was established, the Child Protection Co-ordinator kept a record of all incidents including the background, involvement of external agencies etc'.⁶⁸⁸ Whilst acknowledging that 'Gordonstoun records were thin in 1990', he suggested that this 'does not necessarily mean a failure to record incidents. There may have been few or no incidents or none that were known'.⁶⁸⁹ It seems improbable that there were few or no incidents; it is more likely that the conduct was unknown or not recorded. As Mark Pyper accepted,⁶⁹⁰ bullying of younger boys by older boys and inadequate staff supervision was part of life at Gordonstoun when he arrived at the school in 1990.

Simon Reid, principal at Gordonstoun between 2011 and 2017, recalled that when he arrived, pupil and staff records were in paper format and 'clerical staff were just beginning the process of converting and storing all pupil files in electronic form'.⁶⁹¹

Records were also kept by housemasters and housemistresses 'for matters pertinent to the daily lives of pupils in house'.⁶⁹² Whilst practices were 'in flux' when he arrived at Gordonstoun, the records he 'inherited and used carried all the information needed for understanding the needs of pupils'.⁶⁹³

He recalled that all information on pupils was stored on the Wellbeing Information System after its introduction in 2013, including 'records provided by teachers, house parents and other welfare staff'.⁶⁹⁴ He also highlighted how the system required the person entering information in the system to state whether 'what they were reporting was a child protection matter'; if it was, 'the report [was required to be] registered immediately with the Child Protection Officer and the Deputy Head of Pastoral Care and could then be escalated as required'.⁶⁹⁵

Pupils' recollections of record-keeping

Some applicants have tried to recover their records from the school, including in relation to Aberlour House.

Aberlour House

John Findlay was told that his records 'were missing' and that 'when Aberlour

687 [Written statement of Mark Pyper](#) (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at WIT-1-000000607, p.20, paragraph 73.

688 [Written statement of Mark Pyper](#) (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at WIT-1-000000607, p.20, paragraph 73.

689 [Written statement of Mark Pyper](#) (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at WIT-1-000000607, pp.20-1, paragraph 74.

690 [Written statement of Mark Pyper](#) (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at WIT-1-000000607, pp.6-8, paragraphs 26-32.

691 [Written statement of Simon Reid](#) (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011-17), at WIT-1-000000558, p.19, paragraph 71.

692 [Written statement of Simon Reid](#) (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011-17), at WIT-1-000000558, p.19, paragraph 71.

693 [Written statement of Simon Reid](#) (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011-17), at WIT-1-000000558, p.19, paragraphs 74 and 76.

694 [Written statement of Simon Reid](#) (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011-17), at WIT-1-000000558, p.19, paragraph 74.

695 [Written statement of Simon Reid](#) (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011-17), at WIT-1-000000558, p.3, paragraph 9.

House moved from Aberlour village to Gordonstoun's main campus ... the school lost an awful lot of records'.⁶⁹⁶

'Sarah' understood that when the police tried to recover her records from Aberlour House, they were told that the school's records had been destroyed in a fire and they were only able to find one document confirming the dates she and her alleged abuser had been at Aberlour (so possibly relevant to the incident they were investigating). This document was either a magazine or newsletter.⁶⁹⁷

The destruction of records from Aberlour House was also significant to 'James' and his parents. On learning about the abuse 'James' had experienced at Aberlour House, his parents contacted his former headmaster, Toby Coghill, who replied that he had tried to 'obtain any records which might exist at Gordonstoun. (All Aberlour House records, incidentally, followed pupils to their next school.) These records are slimmed down for storage to bare statistics and therefore I found absolutely nothing whatsoever which would throw any light on this unhappy episode or jog my memory.'⁶⁹⁸

Gordonstoun

'Paul', who had attended Gordonstoun in the late 1980s and early 1990s, was aware that 'the school has very little record' of him.⁶⁹⁹

'Dr Mann' recalled that there was a punishment book

where it would be recorded if you hadn't cleaned something right. Time would be put against your name so that if one of the seniors wanted somebody to do a job for them they could check the book. Once they found someone who had time they could use this person and the time for the job they wanted done.⁷⁰⁰

'Benjamin' remembered that 'there was a report card sent out every term which told the parents all they needed to know'.⁷⁰¹ John Findlay still has all his report cards.⁷⁰²

'Annie' doubted 'if there was a record made of any punishment given out'.⁷⁰³

Other applicants recalled the absence of follow-up from staff when reporting concerns and instances of abuse. 'Duncan'

696 [Written statement of John Findlay](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985-91; Gordonstoun, 1991-6), at WIT.001.001.9906, p.31, paragraphs 125-7.

697 [Written statement of 'Sarah'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1983-7; Gordonstoun, 1987-92), at WIT-1-000000751, p. 33, paragraphs 141-2.

698 Letter from Toby Coghill, 14 July 1995, at WIT-3-000000146, p.18; [Written statement of 'James'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1971-4; Gordonstoun, 1975-8), at WIT-1-000000374, p.22, paragraph 98.

699 [Written statement of 'Paul'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1989-91), at WIT-1-000000804, pp.35-6, paragraph 160.

700 [Written statement of 'Dr Mann'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1975-9), at WIT.001.001.8871, pp.5-6, paragraph 29.

701 [Written statement of 'Benjamin'](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1979-80; Gordonstoun, 1980-5), at WIT-1-000000453, p.20, paragraph 98.

702 [Written statement of John Findlay](#) (former pupil, Aberlour, 1985-91; Gordonstoun, 1991-6), at WIT.001.001.9906, p.31, paragraphs 125-7.

703 [Written statement of 'Annie'](#) (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1986-8), at WIT-1-000000594, p.25, paragraph 133; and p.32, paragraph 170.

remembered that ‘things were reported to them but most of the issues were not acted upon’.⁷⁰⁴

Response to evidence about records

In its closing submission, Gordonstoun stated: ‘As part of the changes seen over the last 30 years, record-keeping has been transformed. The School has fully organised the thousands of student files in its archive. Digitisation is an ongoing project.’⁷⁰⁵

Conclusions about records

Gordonstoun has retained significantly more records than other schools in the case study and has thus been able to provide

to the Inquiry a more extensive range of documents. The school has proved willing to extend its record-retention policies to provide greater support for its pupils. Equally, however, there are still gaps and there have been marked inconsistencies in record-keeping policies at various periods in the school’s history which, at times, coincide with institutional changes such as the closure of Aberlour House and its relocation to the Gordonstoun campus. These inconsistencies were also the result of failures to record and of the destruction of such records as had been made. Consequently, the records supplied to SCAI, whilst substantial, necessarily fail to disclose the whole nature and extent of the abuse inflicted on children at Gordonstoun and Aberlour House.

704 [Transcript, day 231](#): read-in statement of ‘Duncan’ (former pupil, Gordonstoun, 1971–6), at TRN-8-000000022, p.8.

705 Gordonstoun, Closing submission, at GOR-000004683, p.9, paragraph 24.

10

Inspection reports

Introduction

Until Part V of the Education (Scotland) Act 1946 came into force in 1957, there was no statutory control of either the setting up or the running of boarding schools by private individuals, organisations, or religious groups.⁷⁰⁶ Thereafter, and until 1995, the regulation that did exist afforded the state very little oversight of how independent boarding schools operated, or any real power to provide effective protection of boarders.

Inspection of boarding facilities: background

While there was no formal requirement to inspect independent schools prior to 1946, archived Scottish Education Department files released to SCAI confirm that inspections of boarding schools were taking place from at least the 1920s. The earliest report of an inspection at Gordonstoun made available to the Inquiry is dated 11 January 1956, with the inspection having taken place the previous year.⁷⁰⁷ It refers to an earlier inspection in 1952, and Gordonstoun's written response

suggests there were earlier visits in 1938 and 1946.⁷⁰⁸ The earliest report of an inspection at Aberlour made available to SCAI dates from 7 May 1951.⁷⁰⁹

Education (Scotland) Act 1946

The Education (Scotland) Act 1946 introduced a number of significant changes to the inspection of schools generally and, in particular, to the oversight of independent schools. Section 61 of the 1946 Act placed a duty on the Secretary of State for Scotland to arrange for the inspection of 'every educational establishment being a school or junior college' at such intervals as he considered 'appropriate'.⁷¹⁰

Section 62 of the 1946 Act conferred on independent schools the right to request an inspection to ascertain its 'general efficiency' or the 'efficiency of the instruction of any specified subject'⁷¹¹ (with the school paying the expenses of the inspection as fixed by the Secretary of State). In practice, section 61 was seen as relevant for inspection of state schools and junior colleges, and section 62 as being for independent schools.⁷¹²

706 Kenneth McK. Norrie, Report to SCAI, [Legislative Background to the Treatment of Children and Young People Living Apart from their Parents](#) (November 2017), p.318.

707 Scottish Education Department, Inspection of Gordonstoun School, 11 January 1956, at GOR-000003628.

708 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.11.

709 Scottish Education Department, Inspection of Wester Elchies (and Aberlour House), 7 May 1951, at SGV-000067152.

710 [Education \(Scotland\) Act 1946](#), sections 61 and 62.

711 [Education \(Scotland\) Act 1946](#), section 62.

712 NRS ED48/1377, Registration of Independent Schools: General Policy, 1953-67, Minutes, 6 October 1955, at SGV-000007325, pp.41-2.

Part V of the 1946 Act required independent schools to register with the newly created Registrar of Independent Schools in Scotland; failure to do so was a criminal offence. However, it was only with the Registration of Independent Schools (Scotland) Regulations 1957 that the relevant provisions came into force. The 1957 Regulations detailed the registration procedure and the information required. Whilst the 1957 Regulations did not establish standards for the care or education of pupils, they bolstered the inspection provisions outlined in Part V of the 1946 Act, by bringing into effect a complaints mechanism. As Professor Norrie stated, this

added teeth to the inspection process that had existed by then for the previous ten years. Under this mechanism the Secretary of State could specify in a Complaint shortcomings that required to be rectified (having presumably been identified at inspections), in terms of the efficiency and suitability of the education provided; the suitability of the school premises; the adequacy or suitability of the accommodation provided; the Secretary of State could also conclude that the proprietor of the school or any teacher was not a proper person to be such proprietor or teacher.⁷¹³

The Secretary of State or the Scottish Education Department could strike a school off the register or disqualify a proprietor or teacher. No further details were provided as to how proprietors of independent schools or teachers might be judged as being 'not a proper person' for these roles.

The 1957 Regulations remained in place until their revocation by the Registration of Independent Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2005, which were in turn replaced by the Registration of Independent Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2006.⁷¹⁴ The 2006 Regulations remain in force.

Education (Scotland) Acts 1962 and 1980

Following the implementation of the 1946 Act, an independent school could request an inspection. However, in 1962, the law changed and inspections were then carried out only at the discretion of the Secretary of State for Scotland.⁷¹⁵ That remained the position when the 1962 Act was replaced by the 1980 Act, but was reconsidered after another change in the law took place in 1995.

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 amended section 125 of the 1980 Act, making it a duty of local authorities and schools' managers or boards to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people whilst resident at a school.⁷¹⁶ The amended section also included empowering the relevant inspectors (HMI) to inspect the whole of a school – including any boarding facilities – in order to determine whether the welfare of children was being adequately safeguarded and promoted. Until 2001, it was the responsibility of HMI to inspect the boarding facilities within a school. As explained below, the Care Commission was responsible for the regulation and inspection

713 Kenneth McK. Norrie, Report to SCAI, [Legislative Background to the Treatment of Children and Young People Living Apart from their Parents](#) (November 2017), p.319.

714 [The Registration of Independent Schools \(Scotland\) Regulations 2005](#); [The Registration of Independent Schools \(Scotland\) Regulations 2006](#).

715 [Education \(Scotland\) Act 1962](#), section 67; [Education \(Scotland\) Act 1980](#), section 66.

716 [Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#), section 35; [Education \(Scotland\) Act 1980](#), section 125A.

of such facilities between 2002 and 2011, since when inspections have been the responsibility of the Care Inspectorate.

Inspections of Gordonstoun's educational provision continued to be carried out by HMle until 2011, when Education Scotland was established and took over responsibility for the inspection of schools. Education Scotland has inspected the educational provision at Gordonstoun every year since 2012.

The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001

The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 provided for the establishment of the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care (the Care Commission).⁷¹⁷ On its establishment in 2002, the Care Commission took over the regulation and inspection of care services, including boarding facilities at independent schools. The first *National Care Standards* were published in 2002.

In 2011, the Care Inspectorate took over the functions of the Care Commission, the Social Work Inspection Agency, and the child protection unit of HMle. The Care Inspectorate, accordingly, became responsible for the regulation and inspection of boarding facilities at independent schools. The *National Care Standards* were replaced by the *Health and Social Care Standards* in 2018.⁷¹⁸

Based on these standards, the Care Inspectorate has developed several quality frameworks to apply when evaluating care services, including those provided by school accommodation. Before these frameworks

were introduced, the Care Inspectorate and the Care Commission applied a number of themes and statements in the course of their inspections. In 2021, the Care Inspectorate published its quality framework for boarding schools.⁷¹⁹

The Care Commission had, and the Care Inspectorate had and has, the power to make recommendations and set out requirements for the improvement of services. Recommendations set out actions the care service provider should take to improve or develop the service. Whilst service providers are expected to meet these recommendations, they are neither mandatory nor enforceable. Requirements, on the other hand, are legally enforceable and are set out to ensure the care service complies with legislation and policy. The care service provider must make the required improvements within a given timescale. A service's registration may be cancelled if a requirement is not met within that timescale. The Care Inspectorate can apply to the Sheriff Court for emergency cancellation of a service's registration if it believes that there is a serious and immediate threat to life or wellbeing.

Gordonstoun was registered with the Care Commission from 2005, and has been registered with its successor, the Care Inspectorate, since 2011.

Inspection records

Aberlour

Available records confirm that the Scottish Education Department inspected Aberlour and Wester Elchies from at least 1951 and

717 Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001, section 1.

718 Health and Social Care Standards | Care Inspectorate Hub.

719 Care Inspectorate, *A quality framework for mainstream boarding schools and school hostels*, April 2021.

that HMle inspected Aberlour from at least 1996. Table 7 in [Appendix C](#) sets out the detail of the inspections carried out by both.

The Scottish Education Department inspection reports focus on the facilities offered at Aberlour and the educational provision, not on the residential care of children. According to the report from March 1964, 'Conditions as a whole [were] fairly spartan',⁷²⁰ while the report of 1970-1 commends the headmaster and staff for their efforts to provide the boys in their care with a good environment, both domestic and educational. This aligns only partly with what I find to have been the position on the basis of the evidence I heard.

The earliest report of an HMle inspection of Aberlour seen by SCAI is from September 1996, after the school was inspected in April 1996. The focus was on attainment in English language and mathematics, but consideration was given to the welfare of residential pupils. It found that 'Aberlour House is a good school which has had considerable success in meeting its aims of developing the whole child. Preparing a development plan which takes account of national guidance will assist the school to sustain its distinctive traditions and to manage change with confidence.'⁷²¹ Specific reference was made to the headmaster developing 'good policy statements for boarding arrangements and child protection'.⁷²² A return visit was anticipated to assess progress.⁷²³

Gordonstoun

As noted, available records confirm that the Scottish Education Department inspected Gordonstoun from at least 1955, with that report (issued in January 1956) referring to an inspection in 1952.⁷²⁴ Gordonstoun, in its Part A response, refers to the school having been inspected in the years 1938 and 1946.⁷²⁵ [Appendix C](#) contains three tables setting out details of inspections carried out by HMle (1955-2019), the Care Commission (2006-11), and the Care Inspectorate (2011-17).

The earliest inspection report SCAI has dates from January 1956. Inspectors visited classrooms to observe teaching and see pupils' work, interviewed staff and pupils, and inspected school accommodation and facilities, including boarding facilities. They concluded that 'this school is, by and large, succeeding in achieving its aim due to the broad conception it has of academic and of physical activities, both of which are directed to the full development of the individual in the service of the community as a whole'.⁷²⁶

Subsequent inspection reports make it clear that HMle accessed information from ever broader sources. For example, the report of the 1996 inspection records that 'HM Inspectors also met with the Chairman of the Board of Governors, another governor and the financial controller and carried out a survey of parental opinion',⁷²⁷ while that of the 2002 inspection states that inspectors

720 Scottish Education Department, Inspection of Wester Elchies (and Aberlour House), 7 May 1951, at SGV-000067152, p.1.

721 HMIs, Standard Inspection of Aberlour House, September 1996, at GOR-000003621.

722 HMIs, Standard Inspection of Aberlour House, September 1996, at GOR-000003621.

723 See [Appendix C](#), Table 7 for details of the recommendations.

724 Scottish Education Department, Inspection of Gordonstoun School, 11 January 1956, at GOR-000003628.

725 Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0003, p.93.

726 Scottish Education Department, Inspection of Gordonstoun School, 11 January 1956, at, GOR-000003628, p.7.

727 HMIs, Extended Inspection of Gordonstoun School, 21 January 1997, at GOR-000003623, p.4.

attended meetings concerned with pupils' welfare and a number of extra-curricular activities and events ... Members of the inspection team analysed responses to questionnaires issued to staff and to all residential pupils and their parents. They met the vice-chairperson of the Board of Governors and spoke to a sample of parents.⁷²⁸

Thereafter inspections became increasingly sporadic. The next inspection was in 1964 and reflected the effort required to both

meet the legitimate and constantly changing demands of the workaday world for sound academic training and measurable examination successes and also to maintain the importance and the place of those challenging activities and individual responsibilities which have been characteristic features of the school since its early days. The dual task is formidable, in the demands it makes on accommodation and equipment and on the qualifications required of the staff, in the problems it sets in the appointment of time to subject teaching, individual study, and activities.⁷²⁹

In a sense, this foresaw the difficulties that were to follow over the next decades, and it is unfortunate that the only inspection carried out prior to the 1990s was in 1971, with only a draft inspection report being available to SCAL.⁷³⁰

The next inspection, remarkably, was more than a quarter of a century later, in 1996, and was positively sought by the then head Mark

Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun; principal from 2009), who had been working to effect change. The school's strengths were found to include a 'distinctive ethos', a 'strong sense of pride in the school among staff and pupils', a 'very high quality of pastoral care', and the 'high quality pastoral vision and skills of the headmaster'.⁷³¹

The following inspection was in September 2002. It looked at the effectiveness of pupil care and how well residential provision was managed. By then, HMle had moved to the model of reporting against quality indicators, with gradings ranging from 'unsatisfactory' to 'very good'. All ratings after the 2002 inspection were 'very good' or 'good', apart from the provision of accommodation and facilities, which was 'fair'.

A follow-up visit was made in November 2004 and was positive in its assessment:

The school has made considerable improvements in accommodation and in a variety of care and welfare issues. Refurbishment of the boarding houses continued to a planned schedule. A variety of changes, in quality assurance, communication and more clearly specified rules about some facets of life in the boarding houses, had resulted in improvements in ethos.⁷³²

As a result, HMle concluded that no further visit in relation to the 2002 report was required.

The next inspection was in June 2006. This was the first joint inspection of mainstream

728 HMIs, Extended Inspection of Gordonstoun School, 21 January 1997, at GOR-000003623, p.1.

729 Scottish Education Department, Inspection of Gordonstoun School, March 1964, at SGV-000067147, p.11.

730 Scottish Education Department, Draft report of Inspection of Gordonstoun School, spring 1971, at SGV-000067147, p.31.

731 HMIs, Extended Inspection of Gordonstoun School, 21 January 1997, at GOR-000003623.

732 HMle, Inspection of Gordonstoun School, 16 November 2004, at GOR-000003625.

school care accommodation services by the newly established Care Commission and HMle, with the report also jointly prepared and published by the two organisations.⁷³³ The inspectors recommended that plans to improve the accommodation and facilities for residential pupils should continue and that the school should adopt more systematic approaches to record-keeping to ensure staff could effectively monitor all aspects of care within individual houses. Nevertheless, reporting against the quality indicators, all assessments were 'very good', save self-assessment which was 'good'.

The next HMle inspection was in June 2009.⁷³⁴ All assessments were 'excellent' or 'very good'.

Education Scotland last visited Gordonstoun on 3 December 2019 when it attended for a quality improvement and professional engagement visit.

The Care Inspectorate has advised that it expects its next inspection of Gordonstoun to take place in the year 2024-5.

The Care Commission

The Care Commission inspected Gordonstoun on a regular basis from 2006 to 2011. Table 8 in [Appendix C](#) sets out the detail of these inspections.

The first individual inspection by the Care Commission took place in January 2007 and was unannounced. Using the National Care Standards for School Care Accommodation 2002, Gordonstoun was assessed in relation to Standard 3 (Care and Protection) and Standard 5 (Comfort, Safety and Security). Staff, procedures, and conditions were all approved, and no requirements were made following the inspection, although there were two recommendations.⁷³⁵

In September 2007, the first announced inspection took place. The focus area of the inspection was 'Protecting People' (i.e. child protection) and Staff Training and SSSC Codes/Registration.⁷³⁶ No requirements were made, but there were three recommendations.⁷³⁷ Between January 2007 and September 2011, the Care Commission inspected Gordonstoun on an announced and unannounced basis on five occasions.⁷³⁸ The inspections involved meeting both pupils and staff at all levels, as well as looking at records.

The Care Inspectorate

The Care Inspectorate took over the functions of the Care Commission in 2011 and between then and 2017 inspected Gordonstoun on four occasions, following a similar methodology to the Care Commission.⁷³⁹ Quality grades were all

733 HMle, Joint Inspection of Gordonstoun School, 6 June 2006, at SGV-000007969 and GOR-000003632.

734 HMle, Report of Inspection of Gordonstoun Schools, 9 June 2009, at GOR-000003626.

735 Care Commission, Inspection Report: Gordonstoun School, 25 September 2007, at CIS.001.002.5739, p.8; see also [Appendix C](#), Table 8.

736 Care Commission, Inspection Report: Gordonstoun School, 25 September 2007, at CIS.001.002.5739, p.3; see also [Appendix C](#), Table 8.

737 Care Commission, Inspection Report: Gordonstoun School, 25 September 2007, at CIS.001.002.5739, p.8; see also [Appendix C](#), Table 8.

738 See [Appendix C](#), Table 8.

739 See [Appendix C](#), Table 9.

deemed 'very good', and management and leadership 'excellent'. The gradings, set out in [Appendix C](#), Table 9, suggest that in the period 2011 to 2017, care and support at Gordonstoun were consistently of a high standard, as were staffing, and management and leadership.

Aberlour as part of Gordonstoun

The first report in the new era of Aberlour is dated 26 June 2001.⁷⁴⁰ The care and welfare of pupils were again inspected as part of a national sample of residential provision.⁷⁴¹ The inspectors noted: 'Most house staff had been appointed within the last twelve months and some had limited experience of residential care'.⁷⁴² Comment was made that 'Two gap year students provided extensive support to the permanent staff',⁷⁴³ which suggests the practice remained constant throughout the life of Aberlour House.

HMle, in its 2001 report, evaluated the quality of education provided using quality indicators. Evaluations were mixed, as can be seen in [Appendix C](#), Table 7. Pastoral care was rated 'good', but the development plan was 'unsatisfactory'. The inspectors returned in January 2003 and concluded that 'In light of the good progress made in meeting the main points for action, HM Inspectors will make no further visits to the school in connection with the inspection report of June 2001'.⁷⁴⁴ From 2004, Aberlour became known as the Gordonstoun Junior School.

Pupils' recollections

No applicant recalled there ever being any external inspections. This aligns with evidence from the other boarding schools in this case study that in the post-war period and until the early 1990s, there was at best occasional external inspection of boarding schools in Scotland, with limited, if any, pupil engagement.

Staff recollections

David Hanson (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2) recalled that Aberlour was subject to at least two full inspections during his time there and that 'The inspectors did spend considerable time speaking with the children, usually, I think, in a small group'.⁷⁴⁵ I don't question his evidence about that, but it is also of note that no applicant who was a pupil at Aberlour was aware of such engagement taking place. Moreover, if inspectors spoke to children, the subject matter of their conversations remains unknown and there is no evidence of any such conversations being on the basis of any planned structure or purpose.

The Gordonstoun evidence provided important reflections on the place of inspection in the looking after of children in residential care. Mark Pyper was keen to have inspections, so he took the initiative: 'I wrote to the inspectors and said: "You haven't been here for 17 years, isn't it about time you

740 HMle, Inspection report of Aberlour House, 26 June 2001, at GOR-000003627.

741 HMle, Inspection report of Aberlour House, 26 June 2001, at GOR-000003627, p.1.

742 HMle, Inspection report of Aberlour House, 26 June 2001, at GOR-000003627, p.4.

743 HMle, Inspection report of Aberlour House, 26 June 2001, at GOR-000003627, p.4.

744 HMle, Follow-up to the Inspection of Care and Welfare of Residential Pupils, Aberlour House, 6 May 2003, at SGV-000000771, p.2.

745 [Written statement of David Hanson](#) (former teacher, Aberlour, 1965-2001; acting head 1991-2), at WIT-1-000000602, p.13, paragraph 67.

turned up?" ... I mean, I genuinely thought 17 years for a group that say: "We come every seven years" was not a good thing in any case.⁷⁴⁶ He also wrote to parents⁷⁴⁷ and the board of governors⁷⁴⁸ to explain why he was taking this approach. It was the right approach to take. Further, it is of note that the period during which inspections did not take place coincides with much of the period when children were being abused.

Mark Pyper could see there were benefits to be gained from welcoming objective and independent views, such as those of inspectors:

I adopted, as indeed I did towards governors, a different view from others because I felt that the more people who were involved, knowledgeable, enthusiastic to help and committed, the better. And I saw that over time with governors ... and I was right to suspect that it would also be true of inspectors.⁷⁴⁹

He was also candid about the fact that

no school likes to have a bad inspection report, and therefore you not only do the best you can in school but you present yourself in the best way, and there may well be a reticence in schools to say: 'I am struggling with this, with X', and I tended to think: if these people are coming, you may as well tell them what you're struggling with because there's

quite a good chance they'll have seen it somewhere else and be able to help you. And from that 2006 inspection onwards I always took that line and it was always valuable and it didn't necessarily mean you got sort of gamma minus.⁷⁵⁰

That is a healthy mentality – one that is more likely to work to the advantage of children than where a school fears intervention from outside its own four walls. Most of today's boarding schools have embraced or are now embracing similar thinking, but in the 1990s Mark Pyper, to his credit, was ahead of his contemporaries. As he wrote to parents in July 1996, 'the sharpening and supportive experience of a major inspection will inevitably be helpful'.⁷⁵¹

Mark Pyper was at pains to point out that his engagement with inspectors did not result in a lack of objectivity on their part. He emphatically agreed that if one has confidence in the inspectors, one could look on them as a free consultancy service, saying:

they were happy to do that. Some of them were still quite tough. It didn't mean actually that they then said: 'Oh, goody, goody, it's all wonderful', they didn't say that, but they were able, from their experience, to say, 'Why don't you try this? Have you thought of that?' and I found that very useful.⁷⁵²

746 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-000000025, pp.113–16.

747 Headmaster's letter to parents, July 1996, at GOR-000003630, p.6.

748 Headmaster's Report to the Board, Summer Term, 1994, at GOR-000002919, p.2.

749 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-000000025, pp.113–16.

750 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-000000025, pp.113–16.

751 Headmaster's letter to parents, July 1996, at GOR-000003630, p.10.

752 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-000000025, pp.113–16.

He viewed inspection as part of getting on with the job, saying that it

became a routine, and not all that long after, of course, the Care Commission was instituted and so there were inspections by both Care Commission and HMI and they continued both regularly and reasonably frequently up until I finished in 2011. 2009 was the last – it was a joint inspection by both groups and they were very thorough and I always found them most helpful and supportive ... Oh, they were a great help – always.⁷⁵³

Mark Pyper's evidence is a clear example of the benefits to be gained from adopting a growth mindset.

Mark Pyper's successor, Simon Reid (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011–17), and Lisa Kerr (principal, Gordonstoun, 2017–24) were equally clear. Each emphasised that in the business of looking after children and keeping them safe, inspection is 'absolutely everything'⁷⁵⁴ and 'a very, very powerful and useful tool'.⁷⁵⁵

Conclusions about inspections

It seems significant that no inspections appear to have been carried out when children were being abused so frequently, particularly in the boarding houses. The apparent lack of inspection at Gordonstoun and Aberlour for such a long period before the mid-1990s was wholly unsatisfactory. It can only have contributed to a growing sense of misplaced confidence and complacency. That, in turn, increased the scope for serious abuse to occur, unchallenged and undetected.

Fortunately, inspections have become routine since the 1990s, with increasing focus on pastoral care and child protection. Methodology has evolved and continues to do so. Increasing input comes not just from staff but also from pupils, parents, and governors. School policies and procedures are regularly reviewed.

The evidence provided by Gordonstoun's leaders demonstrated a proper awareness of the real benefits of inspection and the need to work collaboratively with the inspectors.

753 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster, Gordonstoun, 1990–2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-000000025, pp.113–16.

754 [Transcript, day 235](#): Simon Reid (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011–17), at TRN-000000026, pp.30–2.

755 [Transcript, day 235](#): Simon Reid (former principal, Gordonstoun, 2011–17), at TRN-000000026, pp.30–2.

Appendix A - Terms of Reference

Introduction

The overall aim and purpose of this Inquiry is to raise public awareness of the abuse of children in care, particularly during the period covered by SCAI. It will provide an opportunity for public acknowledgement of the suffering of those children and a forum for validation of their experience and testimony.

The Inquiry will do this by fulfilling its Terms of Reference which are set out below.

1. To investigate the nature and extent of abuse of children whilst in care in Scotland, during the relevant time frame.
2. To consider the extent to which institutions and bodies with legal responsibility for the care of children failed in their duty to protect children in care in Scotland (or children whose care was arranged in Scotland) from abuse, regardless of where that abuse occurred, and in particular to identify any systemic failures in fulfilling that duty.
3. To create a national public record and commentary on abuse of children in care in Scotland during the relevant time frame.
4. To examine how abuse affected and still affects these victims in the long term, and how in turn it affects their families.
5. The Inquiry is to cover that period which is within living memory of any person who suffered such abuse, up until such date as the Chair may determine, and in any event not beyond 17 December 2014.
6. To consider the extent to which failures by state or non-state institutions (including the courts) to protect children in care in Scotland from abuse have been addressed by changes to practice, policy or legislation, up until such date as the Chair may determine.
7. To consider whether further changes in practice, policy or legislation are necessary in order to protect children in care in Scotland from such abuse in future.
8. To report to the Scottish Ministers on the above matters, and to make recommendations, as soon as reasonably practicable.

Definitions

‘Child’ means a person under the age of 18.

For the purpose of this Inquiry, ‘Children in Care’ includes children in institutional residential care such as children’s homes (including residential care provided by faith-based groups); secure care units including List D schools; Borstals; Young Offenders’ Institutions; places provided for Boarded Out children in the Highlands and Islands; state,

private, and independent Boarding Schools, including state-funded school hostels; healthcare establishments providing long-term care; and any similar establishments intended to provide children with long-term residential care. The term also includes children in foster care.

The term does not include children living with their natural families; children living with members of their natural families; children living with adoptive families; children using sports and leisure clubs or attending faith-based organisations on a day-to-day basis; hospitals and similar treatment centres attended on a short-term basis; nursery and daycare; short-term respite care for vulnerable children; schools, whether public

or private, which did not have boarding facilities; police cells and similar holding centres which were intended to provide care temporarily or for the short term; or 16- and 17-year-old children in the armed forces and accommodated by the relevant service.

‘Abuse’ for the purpose of this Inquiry is to be taken to mean primarily physical abuse and sexual abuse, with associated psychological and emotional abuse. The Inquiry will be entitled to consider other forms of abuse at its discretion, including medical experimentation, spiritual abuse, unacceptable practices (such as deprivation of contact with siblings), and neglect, but these matters do not require to be examined individually or in isolation.

Appendix B - Corporal punishment in Scottish schools and related matters

The parental right of chastisement

The common law of Scotland granted parents the right to inflict corporal punishment upon their children.⁷⁵⁶ This right was statutorily acknowledged in 1889 by the Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of, Children Act, and repeated by its successors – including the Children Act 1908 and the Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act 1937.⁷⁵⁷ However, corporal punishment was only lawful if it were ‘(i) aimed at chastisement, in the sense of educative punishment, and (ii) within a moderate and reasonable level of severity. Acting in a manner beyond “reasonable chastisement” has long been a legal wrong.’⁷⁵⁸ Although the concept of ‘reasonableness’ has changed over time according to society’s changing views on the rights of children and their parents, ‘cases from the earliest period indicate a judicial awareness of the dangers to vulnerable children of excessive physical punishment’.⁷⁵⁹ Therefore, although parents did have the right to punish their children, this parental

right was not without limits – it had to have a purpose and had to be reasonable.

Corporal punishment in Scottish schools and the views of the courts

Throughout much of the period examined in this case study, corporal punishment was permitted in Scottish schools. Traditionally, in state schools, it took the form of striking the palm of the pupil’s hand with the Lochgelly tawse.⁷⁶⁰

A teacher’s power to chastise was not delegated by parents ‘but was a self-standing privilege arising from the obligation of the teacher to maintain school-room discipline’ which in the boarding schools extended to the residential side. Nineteenth-century court cases involving teachers emphasised that corporal punishment had to be ‘without any cruel or vindictive feeling or passion’,⁷⁶¹ and that a ‘schoolmaster is invested by law with the power of giving his pupils moderate and reasonable corporal punishment, but the law

756 See Alexander Birrell Wilkinson and Kenneth McK. Norrie, *The Law Relating to Parent and Child in Scotland*, 3rd edn. Edinburgh: W. Green (2013). See also Kenneth McK. Norrie, Report to SCAI, [Legislative Background to the Treatment of Children and Young People Living Apart from their Parents](#) (November 2017), p.346.

757 See Kenneth McK. Norrie, Report to SCAI, [Legislative Background to the Treatment of Children and Young People Living Apart from their Parents](#) (November 2017), p.346.

758 See Kenneth McK. Norrie, Report to SCAI, [Legislative Background to the Treatment of Children and Young People Living Apart from their Parents](#) (November 2017), p.346.

759 See Kenneth McK. Norrie, Report to SCAI, [Legislative Background to the Treatment of Children and Young People Living Apart from their Parents](#) (November 2017), p.347.

760 See ‘[How the Tawse Left its Mark on Scottish Pupils](#)’, BBC News, 22 February 2017. The Lochgelly tawse was so called because most teachers preferred tawses manufactured by a leather business based in Lochgelly, Fife.

761 *Muckarsie v Dickson* (1848) 11 D 4, p.5.

will not protect him when his chastisement is unnatural, improper, or excessive'.⁷⁶²

Little changed for much of the twentieth century. In *Gray v Hawthorn*,⁷⁶³ in 1964, the Court of Appeal emphasised the importance of discretion when it affirmed a teacher's conviction for assault:

There is no doubt that a school teacher is vested with disciplinary powers to enable him to do his educational work and to maintain proper order in class and in school, and it is therefore largely a matter within his discretion whether, and to what extent, the circumstances call for the exercise of these powers by the infliction of chastisement ... If what the schoolmaster has done can truly be regarded as an exercise of his disciplinary powers, although mistaken, he cannot be held to have contravened the criminal law. It is only if there has been an excess of punishment over what could be regarded as an exercise of disciplinary powers that it can be held to be an assault. In other words the question in all such cases is whether there has been dole⁷⁶⁴ on the part of the accused, the evil intent which is necessary to constitute a crime by the law of Scotland. The existence of dole in the mind of an accused person must always be a question to be decided in the light of the whole circumstances of the particular case ... such matters as the nature and violence of the punishment, the repetition or continuity of the punishment, the age, the health and sex of the child, the blameworthiness and the degree of blameworthiness of the child's conduct, and so on, are all relevant circumstances in

considering whether there was or was not that evil intent on the part of the accused at the time of the alleged offence.⁷⁶⁵

The child was 11 and was belted eight times in the space of two hours for being dirty, having an untidy schoolbag, performing poorly in schoolwork, making spelling mistakes, and having poor handwriting, a factor exacerbated by the injuries caused by the repetitive belting. From today's perspective, aspects of the sheriff substitute's reasoning seem surprising:

[I] found no fault with the appellant regarding the punishments inflicted for having dirty hands and knees. I attached no importance to the total number, as such, of strokes delivered on the morning in question. What I found fault with was the succession of punishments and reasons (or lack of just reasons) therefore, as narrated in my findings. At some stage their repetition amounted to what I can only describe as a degree of unjust persecution. I inferred dole only from the excess of punishment in the circumstances narrated.⁷⁶⁶

I would not have considered it appropriate to belt a child for any of the reasons set out. I would consider it abusive.

The reasoning in *Gray v Hawthorn* was followed in the 1980 case of *Stewart v Thain*,⁷⁶⁷ which involved a headteacher smacking a 15 year old on the buttocks, apparently with parental approval. The Court remained loath to interfere in school discipline which was still very much a matter

762 *Ewart v Brown* (1882) 10 R 163, p.166.

763 *Gray v Hawthorn* (1964) JC 69.

764 In Scots law 'dole' means corrupt, malicious, or evil intention.

765 *Gray v Hawthorn* (1964) JC 69.

766 *Gray v Hawthorn* (1964) JC 69, p.72.

767 *Stewart v Thain* (1980) JC 13.

of educational discretion, where '[e]ach case must be considered in the light of the whole circumstances relevant to it'.⁷⁶⁸

Corporal punishment in boarding schools

In the boarding sector, the use of the cane by both staff and senior pupils was common, as was the use of other implements, particularly the slipper or gym shoe.

Outwith the classroom, teachers' powers to use corporal punishment were commonly delegated, especially in the boarding houses, to senior pupils, usually school or house prefects.

That may have always been the norm given staffing numbers but might also reflect the language of both section 37 of the Children Act 1908 and section 12(7) of the Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act 1937, both of which concerned cruelty to persons under 16. The 1937 provision, for example, which concerned behaviour of persons who had 'attained the age of sixteen years' stated: '[n]othing in this section shall be construed as affecting the right of any parent, teacher, or other person having the lawful control or charge of a child or young person to administer punishment to him'.⁷⁶⁹

This case study has demonstrated that there was inadequate, if any, consideration given by schools to the legal position. Individual institutions followed their own traditions and styles although there was a general understanding from witnesses that the maximum number of blows that could be given was six, even if that was not infrequently disregarded. As for the delegation of corporal punishment to

pupils it was simply the way that things were done and was often ill considered and inadequately supervised. And the lack of supervision exposed children to a risk of abuse; serious harm could obviously ensue.

Societal change in the approach to corporal punishment

While the courts and the boarding schools may have thought corporal punishment acceptable as a means of maintaining order until relatively recently, that was not the case in other areas of society.

Curtis Report

In September 1946, the Secretary of State for the Home Department, the Minister of Health, and the Minister of Education presented a report to Parliament from the Care of Children Committee, chaired by Miss Myra Curtis. It was the result of detailed inquiry into the provision for children in care and its recommendations, strongly urged on the government, included:

We have given much thought to this question and have come to the conclusion that corporal punishment (i.e., caning or birching) should be definitely prohibited in children's Homes for children of all ages and both sexes, as it already is in the Public Assistance Homes for girls and for boys of 14 and over. We think that the time has come when such treatment of boys in these Homes should be unthinkable as the similar treatment of girls already is and that the voluntary Homes should adopt the same principle. It is to be remembered that the children with whom we are concerned are already at a disadvantage in society. One of the first essentials is to nourish their self-respect; another is to make them feel that

⁷⁶⁸ Stewart v Thain (1980) JC 13.

⁷⁶⁹ Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act 1937, section 12(7) as originally enacted.

they are regarded with affection by those in charge of them. Whatever there is to be said for this form of punishment in the case of boys with a happy home and full confidence in life, it may, in our opinion, be disastrous for the child with an unhappy background. It is, moreover, liable to ... abuse. In condemning corporal punishment we do not overlook the fact that there are other means of enforcing control which may have even more harmful effects. We especially deprecate nagging, sneering, taunting, indeed all methods which secure the ascendancy of the person in charge by destroying or lowering the self-esteem of the child.⁷⁷⁰

This showed remarkable insight and boarding schools should have had regard to it; they provided residential care for children living away from home – some from when they were very young – and their circumstances made them vulnerable. Had the Committee addressed the punishment practices at Gordonstoun and Aberlour during the periods covered in the evidence, I conclude that it is likely that their criticisms of corporal punishment would have applied to them with equal force.

The Administration of Children's Homes (Scotland) Regulations 1959

Although not applicable to boarding schools, the Administration of Children's Homes (Scotland) Regulations 1959, which applied to both local authority and voluntary homes from 1 August 1959, reflected a shift in social attitudes to the punishment of children in any institution.

The Regulations 'contained rules for the administration of homes, the welfare of children accommodated therein, and for oversight of both these matters'.⁷⁷¹

Regulation 1 required those responsible for the administration of the home to ensure that it was 'conducted in such manner and on such principles as will secure the well-being of the children of the home'.⁷⁷² Regulation 11 provided that corporal punishment may 'exceptionally be administered'.⁷⁷³

Approved Schools (Scotland) Rules 1961

Again, though not applicable to boarding schools, the standards noted in the Approved Schools (Scotland) Rules 1961 should have had an impact on the thinking of boarding schools in relation to their use of corporal punishment.

Rule 31 dealt specifically with corporal punishment. Some of the conditions referred to were apt for all boarding schools in Scotland at that time:

- (a) for an offence committed in the course of ordinary lessons in the schoolroom the principal teacher may be authorised by the Managers to inflict on the hands not more than three strokes in all;

...

- (c) except when the punishment is inflicted in the presence of a class in a schoolroom, an adult witness must be present;

- (d) no pupil may be called upon to assist the person inflicting the punishment;

...

⁷⁷⁰ The Curtis Report (1946), at LEG.001.001.8722, pp.168-9, paragraph xviii.

⁷⁷¹ Kenneth McK. Norrie, Report to SCAI, [Legislative Background to the Treatment of Children and Young People Living Apart from their Parents](#) (November 2017), p.204.

⁷⁷² The Administration of Children's Homes (Scotland) Regulations (1959), regulation 1, at LEG.001.001.2719.

⁷⁷³ The Administration of Children's Homes (Scotland) Regulations (1959), regulation 11, at LEG.001.001.2723.

- (f) for boys under 14 years of age, the number of strokes may not exceed two on each hand or four on the posterior over ordinary cloth trousers;
- (g) for boys who have attained the age of 14 years, the number of strokes may not exceed three on each hand or six on the posterior over ordinary cloth trousers;
- (h) only a light tawse may be used: a cane or other form of striking is forbidden ... and any person who commits a breach of this Rule shall be liable to dismissal or other disciplinary action.⁷⁷⁴

Rule 32 provided that full particulars of any corporal punishments should be recorded in a punishment book by the headmaster.

It is not obvious that much regard was had to these rules in the operation of the boarding schools considered in this case study, and the approach taken to corporal punishment, just as with the recording of punishments, was variable. The tone of each school very much depended, for decades, on the outlook of the headmaster. Some were progressive, others not. Far too much was left to the discretion of individual teachers, some of whom had dreadful reputations amongst pupils for their excesses, which only demonstrates an absence of necessary oversight.

The position was even worse when corporal punishment by senior pupils is considered. While there was evidence of a change of outlook from the pupils themselves during the 1960s,⁷⁷⁵ there was often no oversight by the schools, on occasion, consciously.

Elimination of corporal punishment in state schools

By the late 1960s, following agreement in principle that the teaching profession should be encouraged to move towards the gradual elimination of corporal punishment, a consultative body – the Liaison Committee on Educational Matters – issued a booklet entitled *Elimination of Corporal Punishment in Schools: Statement of Principles and Code of Practice*.⁷⁷⁶ It set out rules designed to limit the use of corporal punishment including:

It should not be administered for failure or poor performance in a task, even if the failure (e.g., errors in spelling or calculation, bad homework, bad handwriting, etc.) appears to be due not to lack of ability or any other kind of handicap but to inattention, carelessness or laziness. Failure of this type may be more an educational and social problem than a disciplinary one and may require remedial rather than corrective action.

Corporal punishment should not be inflicted for truancy or lateness unless the head teacher is satisfied that the child and not the parent is at fault.

Where used, corporal punishment should be used only as a last resort and should be directed to punishment of the wrong-doer and to securing the conditions necessary for order in the school and for work in the classroom.

It should normally follow previous clear warning about the consequences of a repetition of misconduct.

⁷⁷⁴ Approved Schools (Scotland) Rules (1961), rule 31, at LEG.001.001.2696, pp.9-10.

⁷⁷⁵ See, for example, [Transcript, day 220](#): Kenneth Chapelle (former pupil, Loretto School, 1961-6), at TRN-8-000000011, p.74.

⁷⁷⁶ See Corporation of Glasgow, Education Department, Meeting of Schools and School Welfare Sub-Committee, 6 May 1968, at GLA.001.001.0703. The booklet was sent to all education authorities in February 1968.

Corporal punishment should be given by striking the palm of the pupil's hand with a strap and by no other means whatever.⁷⁷⁷

The Secretary of State for Scotland welcomed the issue of this booklet. The thinking as to what was acceptable even in the school setting had begun to shift significantly.

Further developments

In 1977 the Pack Committee, chaired by Professor D.C. Pack, and set up by the Secretary of State for Scotland, reported on indiscipline and truancy in Scottish schools. It reported that 'corporal punishment should, as was envisaged in 1968, disappear by a process of gradual elimination rather than by legislation'.⁷⁷⁸

A working group appointed by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities reviewed that process and produced a report entitled *Discipline in Scottish Schools* in 1981. The Secretary of State for Scotland considered the report and concluded, in a letter of 9 February 1982, 'that the way is now open for progress leading to the elimination of corporal punishment in Scottish schools within the foreseeable future'.⁷⁷⁹

The case of *Campbell and Cosans v UK*⁷⁸⁰ was held just three weeks after the Secretary of State's conclusions. In its decision, the European Court of Human Rights, while rejecting an argument that the use of

corporal punishment in Scottish schools was contrary to Article 3, 'found the United Kingdom in breach of Article 2 Protocol 1 for failing to respect the parents' philosophical conviction against corporal punishment. The Government ... considered it impractical to prohibit corporal punishment only of children whose parents objected, and so instead, all pupils at public schools were granted protection from corporal punishment by their teachers'.⁷⁸¹

Consequently, section 48 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 introduced a new section 48A to the Education Act (Scotland) 1980 which came into force on 15 August 1987 and abolished corporal punishment for some pupils. Section 48A(5)(a) provided that a 'pupil' included a person for whom education was provided at

- (i) a public school,
- (ii) a grant-aided school, or
- (iii) an independent school, maintained or assisted by a Minister of the Crown, which is a school prescribed by regulations made under this section or falls within a category of schools so prescribed.

Although the legislation did not apply to independent schools, specific provision was made to prescribe the Queen Victoria School at Dunblane, funded by the Ministry of Defence, under section 48A(5)(iii) on 15 August 1987.⁷⁸²

777 Liaison Committee on Educational Matters, *Elimination of Corporal Punishment in Schools: Statement of Principles and Code of Practice*, February 1968, at GLA.001.001.0706.

778 Scottish Council of Independent Schools, *Corporal Punishment in Scottish Schools*, at SCI-000000009, p.2.

779 Scottish Council of Independent Schools, *Corporal Punishment Abolition in Scotland – Timeline*, at SCI-000000007, p.1.

780 *Campbell and Cosans v United Kingdom* (1982) 4 EHRR 293.

781 Kenneth McK. Norrie, Report to SCAI, [Legislative Background to the Treatment of Children and Young People Living Apart from their Parents](#) (November 2017), p.354.

782 The Education (Abolition of Corporal Punishment: Prescription of Schools) (Scotland) Order 1987.

In general guidance, issued by the Scottish Education Department on 17 June 1987, corporal punishment was defined as ‘any act which could constitute an assault. This covers any intentional application of force as punishment and includes not only the use of the cane or the tawse, but also other forms of physical chastisement, e.g., slapping, throwing missiles such as chalk, and rough handling.’⁷⁸³

Other than in the case of Queen Victoria School, the legislation did not prevent boarding schools from continuing with corporal punishment, although that would have led to a two-tier approach given the prohibition of its use for pupils on assisted places. However, consistent with the change in society, many independent boarding schools, as well as day schools, were either thinking of abolishing it or had already abolished it.

The Independent Schools Information Service (Scotland), the forerunner to the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS), surveyed its members in 1984 and found that 36 no longer had corporal punishment while 24 retained it, although

half of them were considering abolition. Looking to the schools in the case study, only Fettes Prep School had stopped using corporal punishment. Keil School, Loretto Junior School, Merchiston Castle School, Morrison’s Academy, and Queen Victoria School retained it although were contemplating abolition, while Loretto senior school and Gordonstoun were not. The Edinburgh Academy did not feature in that survey.⁷⁸⁴

A similar survey in October 1988 revealed that only five prep schools and two senior schools retained corporal punishment, though four either had unofficially abolished it or were phasing it out. That included The Edinburgh Academy. The only senior school to retain it was Loretto,⁷⁸⁵ although by 1991 a further SCIS survey confirmed that it was no longer used by any of its member schools.⁷⁸⁶ Loretto, it appears, had stopped the use of the cane in 1990.⁷⁸⁷

Finally, section 16 of the Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act 2000 extended the prohibition against corporal punishment to all schools and repealed section 48A of the 1980 Act.

783 Scottish Council of Independent Schools, Corporal Punishment Files, at SCI-000000023, p.8.

784 Independent Schools Information Service (Scotland), at SCI-000000038.

785 Independent Schools Information Service (Scotland), at SCI-000000039.

786 Scottish Council of Independent Schools, at SCI-000000025.

787 Loretto School, note on a comparison of witness observations/recommendations with Loretto School today, at LOR-000000771, p.6.

Appendix C – Inspection reports relating to Gordonstoun

Given the number and scale of the available reports, edited summaries are produced below. Full copies of more recent documents may be accessed via the websites of the respective organisations.

Table 6: Scottish Education Department and HMle inspections, Gordonstoun, 1955–2009

Date of inspection/report: 1952
Report has not been made available to SCAl.
School roll
330

Date of inspection/report: 1955⁷⁸⁸
Focus of inspection
Gordonstoun and Altyre Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • general • English, history, and geography • languages • maths • science • navigation • arts and crafts • music • physical education
Key findings/conclusions
School roll
375; an increase of 45 from inspection report of 1952.
The report states there were more applicants than places available; that it was the school's policy to accept a certain number of pupils who would not normally be admitted to a public school; and that it is pleasing to be able to report that such entrants gain a great deal by the varied training they receive.
Accommodation and premises
Progress continues to be made in the improvement of the premises. Round Square has been reconditioned. There is a need for better art rooms, small practice rooms for music, and improved facilities for all branches of science.
Conclusion
This school is, by and large, succeeding in achieving its aim due to the broad conception it has of academic and of physical activities, both of which are directed to the full development of the individual in the service of the community as a whole.

⁷⁸⁸ Scottish Education Department, Inspection of Gordonstoun School, 11 January 1956, at GOR-000003628.

Date of inspection/report: March 1964⁷⁸⁹**Focus of inspection**

Gordonstoun

Residential units, academic curriculum, and activities

Key findings/conclusions**School roll**

400 boys and a teaching staff of 46.

The school admits each year about 75 boys of whom an academic standard equivalent to Common Entrance is required, some coming from preparatory schools, some from Scottish and English local authority schools, some from abroad. The school also admits each year, as a deliberate policy, up to 15 boys who do not satisfy the normal academic requirements but who seem otherwise suited to benefit from the kind of education which Gordonstoun offers.

Accommodation and premises

The school consists of seven houses ... Three of the houses are of very recent construction, a fourth has been wholly reconstructed from old premises, one dates back almost to the inception of the school, and two are old estate houses on which little renovation has been done.

The newer houses are attractively designed and arranged and are provided with most of the facilities necessary in a boys' boarding house. Dormitories are spacious and airy, and single or other small rooms are provided to allow nearly all boys good conditions for independent study. The two new, mostly recently built houses unfortunately lack either a common room or indoor games room. The older houses are deficient in a number of respects: accommodation and facilities in boot rooms, locker rooms, and wash rooms generally fall short of a satisfactory standard.

In each form, boys are arranged for each subject in sets according to ability in that subject.

Conclusion

Gordonstoun, still a young school ... is now striving both to meet the legitimate and constantly changing demands of the workaday world for sound academic training and measurable examination successes and also to maintain the importance and the place of those challenging activities and individual responsibilities which have been characteristic features of the school since its early days. The dual task is formidable, in the demands it makes on accommodation and equipment and on the qualifications required of the staff, in the problems it sets in the appointment of time to subject teaching, individual study, and activities, and, above all, in the need it creates for a full understanding and a clear balance of aims to be worked out and appreciated by all the staff.

789 Scottish Education Department, Inspection of Gordonstoun School, March 1964, at SGV-000067147.

Date of inspection/report: spring 1971⁷⁹⁰

Focus of inspection

Gordonstoun

- English
- history
- geography/geology
- classics
- modern languages
- maths
- science: chemistry and physics
- arts and crafts
- business studies and economics
- technical subjects
- seamanship
- music
- physical education

Key findings/conclusions

School roll

400 boys and a teaching staff of 38, and three musical instrument teachers.

The school admits 80 boys per year of whom an academic standard equivalent to Common Entrance is required. The school also admits several boys on scholarship.

Ethos

The philosophy of the school is unchanged.

Accommodation and premises

The new Hopeman House, a boarding house for 60 boys of all ages, presents a contrast with well maintained, clean, warm but more spartan accommodation of the six older houses.

Conclusion

There is every indication that Gordonstoun continues to evolve. A carefully considered organisation has been created to maintain a balance between the academic and general life of the school, and these are both subject to constant review. The welfare of the boys is well provided for and supervised. This report commends the school's recent achievement in the task of matching its aims, methods, and facilities to present day conditions.

⁷⁹⁰ Scottish Education Department, Inspection of Gordonstoun School, March 1964, at SGV-000067147, pp.31-7.

Focus of inspection

Gordonstoun School

- English
- modern languages
- maths
- chemistry and science
- geography
- computing
- physical education
- religious studies

Key findings/conclusions

School roll

445 pupils, 18 of whom were day pupils.

31 pupils were funded under the Assisted Places Scheme.

Ethos

Pupils and staff were very proud of Gordonstoun. The school had a strong and distinctive ethos. Staff demonstrated an admirable commitment to providing all-round education. Pupils enjoyed and benefited greatly from a wide range of outdoor pursuits, service ventures, and social, musical, and dramatic activities. They had very good opportunities to exercise responsibility in the life of the school and in a variety of services and projects focused outside the school. Moreover, the school had properly recognised the need to adapt to changing social values. An austere regime, supported by physical punishments, had been replaced by a more supportive culture, in which all pupils were valued equally.

Morale amongst pupils and staff was generally high. The vast majority of pupils were open, confident, and courteous.

Almost all parents who responded [to the questionnaire] were very positive about the school.

Some senior pupils were unsure of the sanctions they could properly apply as senior members of their houses. The current review of discipline was sensibly addressing such concerns.

All staff and pupils interviewed were satisfied that sensible measures to prevent bullying had been taken and were successful. Many senior pupils provided exemplary support to younger pupils in their houses. Those carrying major school responsibilities, such as house captains and Colour Bearers, should have a fuller induction into their responsibilities.

Accommodation and premises

Classroom and boarding accommodation was generally good, although two houses needed refurbishment. Altyre House, in particular, needed to be brought up to the standard of the other houses. Plans were in place to refurbish some classrooms and to provide more suitable accommodation for learning support.

⁷⁹¹ HMIs, Extended Inspection of Gordonstoun School, 21 January 1997, at GOR-000003623.

Pastoral and residential care was of very high quality. Pupils were cared for and encouraged to behave responsibly and respect others. There were good opportunities for privacy and pupils' need for confidentiality was respected.

Effective procedures were in place to ensure an ordered and safe experience for boarders. The arrangements for child protection were good.

Academic provision

The school was generously provided with experienced and well-qualified teaching and non-teaching staff. However the quality of teaching and learning was variable ... The success of the disciplinary review in improving classroom behaviour should be closely monitored.

The school demonstrated substantial strengths in its support for pupils. The recently established learning support department had made good progress in beginning to develop provision for students experiencing specific learning difficulties and for overseas pupils with limited English.

Management

The headmaster provided positive and sensitive leadership. He was open, supportive, and principled in his relationships with staff and pupils. He had been highly influential in establishing a very high quality of pastoral care for pupils. He was currently working closely with the board of governors to ensure that the distinctive traditions of the school were maintained while desirable change was introduced.

The newly promoted deputy head and the other members of the senior management team fulfilled their remits effectively.

House staff were generally highly competent in fulfilling a wide range of demanding residential, teaching, and other duties. The deployment of further members of the teaching staff to house duties for specified times each week would relieve them of some pressure of work and enhance pupil care further. The role of tutors should be reviewed to ensure that pupils benefit consistently from the best practice in tutor support.

The headmaster had effectively developed communication among staff. He had established an appropriate structure of committee which met regularly and gave teachers good opportunities to express and share their views.

Staff were encouraged to take advantage of opportunities for professional development.

Policy and planning

The headmaster was responsible for initiating policy across the school. He had introduced good policies governing pastoral care, including policies on anti-bullying and the abuse of harmful substances. They had been agreed with house staff and effectively implemented. A well-organised handbook gave staff detailed information on school policies and procedures. The school now needs to implement guidelines on learning and teaching.

The school was at an early stage of development planning. Recent development plans did not focus sufficiently on learning and teaching or on pastoral care.

The arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning and other aspects of the work of the school required considerable development.

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Date of inspection/report: 21 January 1997**Conclusion**

Among the school's strengths the inspectors mentioned the following:

- the distinctive school ethos and strong sense of pride in the school among staff and pupils
- a very high quality of pastoral care
- the wide-ranging contacts with parents and very good opportunities for pupils to serve the wider community
- the excellent programme of outdoor education
- the high-quality pastoral vision and skills of the headmaster.

The inspectors also noted action points including:

- Some teachers fulfilled duties as tutors in exemplary fashion, but overall the level and quality of tutor support for pupils was very uneven. The responsibilities of tutors should be more clearly specified. The tutor system should be monitored more closely.
- Revised guidelines for child protection should be shared with pupils so that they are clear how they apply to themselves.
- Moreover, the school had properly recognised the need to adapt to changing social values. An austere regime, supported by physical punishments, had been replaced by a more supportive culture, in which all pupils were valued equally.

Date of inspection/report: 8 October 1998⁷⁹²**Focus of inspection**

Gordonstoun School

Context

Follow-up inspection

Key findings/conclusions

In a letter from HM inspectors of 9 March 1999 key strengths of the school included:

- the distinctive school ethos and strong sense of pride in the school among staff and pupils
- a very high quality of pastoral care
- the high-quality pastoral vision and skills of the headmaster
- the considerable commitment and industry of staff
- a thorough system of assessing pupils' progress and reporting regularly to parents.

HM inspectors note that either each of their earlier recommendations had been met or very good progress had been made.

⁷⁹² HMIs, Follow-up Inspection Report, Gordonstoun School, 9 March 1999, at SGV-000000765.

Date of inspection/report: 17 September 2002⁷⁹³

Focus of inspection

Gordonstoun School and Aberlour

Subject of inspection

The effectiveness of pupil care and how well residential provision was managed

Key findings/conclusions

School roll

390 pupils, 22 of whom were day pupils.

The optimum roll for boarders was 418.

Ethos

The ethos within the boarding houses was overall good. The quality of the relationships between residential staff and pupils was generally good. Pupils and staff were very proud of Gordonstoun.

The level of staffing was very good. HMle inspectors found the arrangements for the care of pupils to be overall good.

Accommodation and premises

In two of the boarding houses some bedrooms were very small with inadequate ventilation and daylight. The school had not developed an effective strategy for the continuing upkeep and improvement of the residences, including furnishings and equipment.

The organisation of accommodation, particularly in the older houses, raised issues of security and fire safety which needed urgent attention.

Overall the accommodation had some important weaknesses.

Academic provision

The school provided very good support for pupils requiring extra help in their learning. A team of tutors provided academic and pastoral support for pupils. Regular meetings ensured a good flow of communication between academic and house staff.

Management

The headmaster provided good leadership. Senior promoted staff provided very good support. The team of housemasters and housemistresses were very committed to their work and were successful in creating a caring atmosphere. Almost all housemasters and housemistresses provided effective leadership and managed their houses well.

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⁷⁹³ HMle, Inspection of Gordonstoun School, 17 September 2002, at GOR-000003636.

Date of inspection/report: 17 September 2002

Policy and planning

Arrangements for quality assurance were good. The pastoral committee met regularly to monitor and evaluate the overall quality of provision. Approaches to monitoring and evaluating the residential aspects of pupils' care and welfare were informal. The school was developing plans to introduce more systematic approaches to monitoring and evaluation.

The Board of Governors discussed issues relating to the care and welfare of residential pupils in their regular meetings with the headmaster. They provided useful support for the ongoing work of the school.

Arrangements for development planning were good. Action plans identified targets, timescales, and responsibilities.

Main points for action included:

- The policy and procedures for dealing with any child protection issues should be clarified.
- The school should implement its plans to introduce more systematic approaches to monitoring and evaluating the quality of residential provision.

Date of inspection/report: 16 November 2004⁷⁹⁴

Focus of inspection

Gordonstoun School

Context

Following the HMle inspection report of September 2002, the school prepared an action plan setting out how it would address the main points for action identified in the report.

Subject of inspection

The extent to which the school was continuing the quality of its work, and to evaluate progress made in responding to the main points for action in the initial report.

Key findings/conclusions

Continuous improvement

The school has made considerable improvements in accommodation and in a variety of care and welfare issues. Refurbishment of the boarding houses continued to a planned schedule. A variety of changes, in quality assurance, communication, and more clearly specified rules about some facets of life in the boarding houses, had resulted in improvements in ethos.

⁷⁹⁴ HMle, Follow-up to the Inspection of Care and Welfare Residential Provision, Gordonstoun School, 16 November 2004, at GOR-000003625.

Progress towards meeting points for action

- Policy and procedures for dealing with any child protection issues: very good progress:
 - New child protection policy was adopted in March 2003 which contains guidance on procedures for staff, a leaflet of advice for pupils, and links to the school's information and communications technology (ICT) policy and other policies concerned with care and welfare.
 - Record keeping has been improved.
 - Training has been organised for both staff and pupils.
 - The school has very helpful contacts with local social services and police.
- Plans to introduce more systematic approaches to monitoring and evaluating the quality of residential provision: very good progress:
 - All boarding houses were now involved in a very good systematic system of monitoring and evaluation run by the Director of Student Admissions, Development and Welfare who had a very good overview of boarding as a result.
 - Headmaster visits to each boarding house and discussion of issues with respective headmaster/mistress.
 - Pupils confirmed that they could raise matters through the house council and Colour Bearers.

Conclusion

HMle concluded that no further visit in relation to the 2002 report was required.

Date of inspection/report: 6 June 2006⁷⁹⁵

Context

Joint inspection of mainstream school care accommodation services by the Care Commission and HMle. Report prepared and published jointly by the Care Commission and HMle.

Key findings/conclusions

School roll

539 pupils, of whom 474 were boarders. The maximum roll for boarding was 506.

Ethos

The quality of the relationships between staff and pupils was generally good. Pupils were very well cared for and received a high level of support from house staff. Pupils and staff were very proud of the boarding houses and Gordonstoun. The school provided a wide range of helpful information to new or prospective pupils and their parents. Arrangements for pupils' personal and social development were good.

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⁷⁹⁵ HMle and Care Commission, Inspection of Gordonstoun School, 6 June 2006, at SGV-000007969, GOR-000003632, and CIS.001.002.5662.

Date of inspection/report: 6 June 2006**Accommodation and premises**

There was a wide variation across the different houses in the fabric of the buildings and the quality of the furnishings. Newer houses provided good quality accommodation for pupils. Older houses such as Duffus, Cumming, Gordonstoun, and Round Square needed upgrading and refurbishment ... Security arrangements were good. These measures had assisted staff and pupils to feel that they are safe and secure on campus ... The school had a rigorous approach to risk assessment.

Management

The headmaster provided good leadership. He was committed to the continuous improvement of the school. The director of student admissions, development, and welfare was extremely hardworking and conscientious and provided highly effective support to the headteacher. He provided a positive role for housemasters and residence staff. Members of the educational management team contributed well to the provision of effective care and welfare of all pupils. The school's range of policies relating to care were clearly set out and understood.

The school's arrangements for self-evaluation were good. The Board of Governors provided support to the school and met regularly with the headmaster to discuss issues relating to the care and welfare of residential pupils.

Main points for action

The school and Board of Governors should act on the following recommendations:

- The school should continue with its plans to improve the accommodation and facilities for residential pupils.
- The school should adopt more systematic approaches to record-keeping to ensure staff effectively monitor all aspects of care within individual houses.

Date of inspection/report: 4 October 2007⁷⁹⁶**Focus of inspection**

Gordonstoun School

Context

Follow-up inspection

Key findings/conclusions

The notes from the HM inspector's visit to the school contain information concerning activities and programmes run by the school and details of how achievements of pupils are celebrated by the school.

⁷⁹⁶ HMIE, Follow-up Inspection of Gordonstoun School, 4 October 2007, at SGV-000000765.

Date of inspection/report: 9 June 2009⁷⁹⁷**Focus of inspection**

The Gordonstoun Schools

- examples of good practice
- school's expectations of all children and young people
- school's sense of direction

Key findings/conclusions**School roll**

The roll for the school was 608, 117 in the Aberlour House junior school and 491 in the senior school.

539 pupils, of whom 474 were boarders.

Ethos

The school has a very clear vision which is shared effectively with young people, parents, and staff.

Main points for action

The school and Board of Governors should act on the following recommendations:

- Continue with plans to share effective practice in learning and teaching.
- Build on existing arrangements and involve young people further in reviewing their progress and planning next steps in their learning.

Date of inspection/report: 7 October 2011⁷⁹⁸**Focus of inspection**

Gordonstoun School

Context

QUIPE visit

Key findings/conclusions

HM Inspector linked to the school makes introductory visit to discuss current arrangements for inspections, QUIPE (Quality Improvement and Professional Engagement) visits, and approaches to self-evaluation which they conclude as being 'very thorough'.

797 HMle, Inspection of the Gordonstoun Schools, 9 June 2009, at GOR-000003626, and HMle, Report of Registrar visit to Aberlour House, 4 June 2009, at SGV-000007966.

798 HMle, Quality Improvement and Professional Engagement (QUIPE) visit to Gordonstoun School, 7 October 2011, at SGV-000000765.

Date of inspection/report: 3 December 2019⁷⁹⁹

Focus of inspection

Gordonstoun School

Context

QUIPE visit

Key findings/conclusions

Conclusion

Education Scotland said: 'We are confident the school has the necessary arrangements and procedures in place to ensure continued improvement in the quality of education provided. During the visit, we identified aspects of innovative practice. We shall work with the school and Board of Governors to record the innovative practice and share it more widely.'

⁷⁹⁹ Education Scotland, Letter to Parents/Carers following Inspection of Gordonstoun School, 3 December 2019, at GOR-000003629.

Table 7: Scottish Education Department and HMle inspections, Wester Elchies and Aberlour House, 1951-2009

Date of inspection/report: 7 May 1951 ⁸⁰⁰
<p>Focus of inspection</p> <p>Aberlour House</p> <p>Subjects of inspection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English • arithmetic • French • scripture • art • handwork • singing • music
Key findings/conclusions
<p>School roll</p> <p><i>Wester Elchies</i></p> <p>43 (including nine girls) between seven and 11 years of age</p> <p><i>Aberlour House</i></p> <p>70 (including five girls). 27 between seven and 12 years of age; 43 aged 12 and above</p> <p>Accommodation</p> <p><i>Wester Elchies</i></p> <p>The pupils were accommodated in seven good-sized rooms, four to 10 occupants in each. Four WCs and one urinal for boys, two WCs for girls.</p> <p><i>Aberlour House</i></p> <p>The pupils were accommodated in 10 spacious rooms, three to 11 occupants in each. Two bathrooms for boys and one for girls.</p>

800 Scottish Education Department, Inspection of Wester Elchies (and Aberlour House), 7 May 1951, at SGV-000067152, pp.10-17.

Date of inspection/report: 18 and 19 October 1951⁸⁰¹

Focus of inspection

Aberlour House

Subjects of inspection

- English
- arithmetic
- French
- art
- handwork
- music

Key findings/conclusions

School roll

Wester Elchies

39 between seven and 10 years of age.

Aberlour House

67 between 10½ and 14½ years of age.

Accommodation

Wester Elchies

The pupils were accommodated in seven good-sized rooms, four to 10 occupants in each. Four WCs and one urinal for boys, two WCs for girls.

Aberlour House

The pupils were accommodated in 10 spacious rooms, three to 11 occupants in each. Two bathrooms for boys and one for girls.

The inspectors commented that the more gifted children make satisfactory progress but that it was difficult to assess the work of the less academically gifted children; that every effort is made to give individual attention to each pupil and that instruction is earnest and conscientious. However, the lack of training in teaching methods is apparent.

801 Scottish Education Department, Inspection of Wester Elchies (and Aberlour House), 18 and 19 October 1951, at SGV-000067152, pp.17-18.

Date of inspection/report: March 1964⁸⁰²

Focus of inspection

Aberlour House

Subjects of inspection

- English
- history and geography
- French
- Latin
- maths
- art and crafts
- physical education
- music

Key findings/conclusions

School roll

Aberlour House

110 between seven and 13½.

Ethos

The principles of the school, its aims, and its methods are essentially those of Gordonstoun, adapted to suit the needs of younger boys. Emphasis is laid on training for responsibility, on providing experience in personal control, and in the supervision of others. A simple form of the Gordonstoun pupil hierarchy is operated. Pupil discipline is supported by a head boy assisted by 10 officers. The Gordonstoun principle of preserving a due balance in the education of the whole child is seen in the organised expeditions. In this respect the exclusion of science from the curriculum is noted with regret.

In recent years, most of the teaching has been done by experienced teachers. In the departments of English, mathematics, art, and music, however, staff changes have been frequent and from time to time persons with little or no experience have had to be employed. Overall, the attainment of boys was only moderately good.

The oral performance of boys was good. They spoke freely, with courtesy and candour. The good tone and pleasant atmosphere of the school could be attributed to the headmaster, Mr B.R. Delap, who had been in post for a very lengthy period.

Accommodation

There are 11 dormitories, all situated in the main house. Conditions as a whole are fairly spartan.

Residential care

The supervision of the boarding arrangements and of the domestic and other staff is undertaken by the wife of the headmaster. A few of the dormitories are low ceilinged and poorly illuminated, and some need repainting. Toilets and bathrooms are adequate in number and reasonably accessible.

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802 Scottish Education Department, Inspection of Wester Elchies (and Aberlour House), March 1964, at SGV-000067152, pp.23-6.

Date of inspection/report: March 1964

Meals are cooked and served in good condition. Kitchen premises would be improved with suitable coverings for the floors and work surfaces.

The boys keep well, are well fed, and get lots of sleep; the incidence of infectious and other disease is slight.

Date of inspection/report: March 1971⁸⁰³

Focus of inspection

Aberlour House

Subjects of inspection

- English
- humanities
- Latin
- French
- maths
- science
- art and crafts
- music
- physical education

Key findings/conclusions

School roll

Aberlour House

85 between eight and 13½ years of age.

Ethos

The principles of the school, its aims, and its methods are essentially those of Gordonstoun. The rules, structure of ranks, and house system were all reviewed three years ago; staff and boys were consulted and many of the boys' suggestions adopted. Eight Flights, each with a leader, are organised into two Houses. Rules are few and clearly defined. Within this system there are sufficient rewards and sanctions to ensure a discipline which is very largely self-imposed. The school seeks to promote character development, especially as regards qualities of honesty, self-discipline, and a sense of service to others. The pleasant manners, confident but respectful behaviour, happy appearance on social occasions, and the enthusiasm shown both at work and play indicate that the system is proving generally successful.

Accommodation

The premises consist of the Mansion House, converted stables, and a modern classroom block including a well-equipped science laboratory and a swimming pool.

There are 11 dormitories, all in a good state of decoration. A new bathroom with showers has been provided.

803 Scottish Education Department, Inspection of Aberlour House, September 1971, at SGV-0000067152, pp.27-33.

Residential care

The headmaster, his family, and the whole staff are involved in the supervision and care of the boys at all times.

Conclusion

Much thought and careful planning and execution is evident in all aspects of the school. Premises continue to be improved, the comfort and wellbeing of the boys is conscientiously supervised, a considered attempt is made to give a balanced and well-rounded education, modern methods of teaching are used in an effective manner to stimulate individual industry and interest, and standards are maintained by continuous assessment. Liaison with Gordonstoun is a continuing process. The headmaster and his staff are to be commended for their efforts to provide, for the boys in their care, a good environment, both domestic and educational.

Date of inspection/report: September 1996⁸⁰⁴

Focus of inspection

Aberlour House

Context

The inspection took place as part of a national sample of primary education.

Subjects of inspection

- school's development plan and other documents
- English language attainment
- maths attainment
- environmental studies
- personal and social education
- outdoor education
- welfare of residential pupils

Key findings/conclusions

School roll

110 pupils of which 93 boarders.

Ethos

The school had a very positive and distinctive ethos ... Overall, the school had been successful in creating a very pleasant and stimulating atmosphere. Pupils and staff were very proud of their school. The school had developed good communications with parents.

The school was very well staffed with experienced and qualified teaching and care staff. All academic staff had appropriate pastoral duties. The house staff included a matron who had an appropriate qualification in child care. Quality of teaching and learning was good.

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804 HMIs, Standard Inspection of Aberlour House, September 1996, at GOR-000003621.

Accommodation

The pupils were organised according to age in five forms, from Form 1/2 to Form 6.⁸⁰⁵ The accommodation overall was good ... Boarding included a comfortable common room and had a welcoming and homely atmosphere. Dormitory accommodation was freshly decorated, but some rooms had inadequate electrical lighting for reading. The girls' accommodation would benefit from more shower facilities.

Good policy statements governing boarding arrangements and child protection had been devised by the headmaster in consultation with staff. They had been approved by the Board of Governors.

Residential care

The quality of residential care was very good. Pupils were well cared for physically. They were treated sensitively as individuals and encouraged to be responsible for themselves and to respect others. Their care includes a healthy and varied diet ... it was noted however that there were few opportunities for privacy.

Effective procedures were in place to ensure an ordered and safe experience for boarders. Staff were alert to individual needs which included appropriate routines to supervise pupils; careful records of any accidents and incidents during the school day; and good arrangements for child protection.

School management

The headmaster provided sound and sensitive leadership. He maintained high personal standards in his relationships with pupils, staff, and parents. His pastoral skills were a significant strength of the school. The headmaster's wife contributed greatly to the work of the pastoral team and managed the house and domestic staff efficiently and well. A system of staff appraisal had recently been introduced, with an arrangement to review its effectiveness after two years.

805 HMIs, Standard Inspection of Aberlour House, September 1996, at GOR-000003621, p.1.

Focus of inspection

Aberlour House

Context

Inspection as part of a national sample of residential provision.

Subjects of inspection

- school
- parents' views, pupils' views, and staff views
- pupil care
- accommodation
- staffing
- aims and policy making

Key findings/conclusions

School roll

83 pupils of which 61 were boarders – 28 girls and 33 boys. The optimum boarding roll was 78.

Ethos

Overall, the ethos was good ... Relationships among and between staff and pupils were generally positive. Overall, the quality of pastoral care was good. Arrangements for the supervision of pupils were generally good. Child protection guidelines were clear. A range of policies relating to pastoral care and child protection, including an anti-bullying policy and a Boarding House Code of Conduct, were published in the Staff Handbook. These policies gave clear and helpful advice to staff, although the complaints policy was not sufficiently clear. Overall, the aims and policies provided an appropriate framework for action. However the deployment of care staff, including gap year students, needed to be reviewed to ensure more equitable and appropriate distribution of duties.

Accommodation

The accommodation overall was good ... Some aspects of the accommodation however needed to be improved. Arrangements for individual privacy in the showers was unsatisfactory ... The headmaster had a good awareness of the quality of boarding provision based on informal observation and discussion with staff and pupils. He now needed to develop more systematic approaches to monitoring provision in order to ensure consistency of approaches across the school.

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806 HMle, Inspection of Aberlour House, 26 June 2001, at GOR-000003627.

Date of inspection/report: 26 June 2001**School management**

The headmaster gave a strong and positive lead and demonstrated a high level of professional competence. His wife shared responsibility for the management of the school and gave him good support. Overall, leadership was good. However, most staff were relatively new to the school. Only the headmaster and his wife had received training in child protection and other issues related to the care and welfare of children. The school did not yet have a formal induction programme for newly appointed staff. It had recently introduced a scheme for staff development and appraisal.

The Council of Aberlour House, a subcommittee of the Board of Governors of the Gordonstoun Schools, met each term to review the work of the school and to plan future developments. Overall, the school's arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the quality of its work were fair. There were however major weaknesses in the school's approaches to development planning. There was no plan for the current session.

Main points for action included:

- The school should improve its arrangements for quality assurance and draw up a development plan to cover its priorities for improving the care and welfare of residential pupils.
- Appropriate training, including in child protection, should be provided for staff. Teamwork amongst all those involved in care and welfare of pupils should be improved to ensure consistent approaches.
- The school and Board of Governors should improve the deficiencies on accommodation identified in the report.

The school should implement its plans to involve pupils more fully in decisions about boarding provision.

Date of inspection/report: 6 May 2003⁸⁰⁷**Focus of inspection**

Aberlour House

Context

Follow-up visit to the inspection of June 2001

Key findings/conclusions

The inspectors concluded that the school had made good progress in meeting the main points for action and that no further visits to the school would be made in relation to the report of June 2001.

The school had developed a range of approaches to enable pupils to influence the arrangements for their care.

807 HMIe, Follow-up to the Inspection of Aberlour House, 6 May 2003, at SGV-000000771.

Table 8: Care Commission inspections, Gordonstoun, 2006-11

Date of inspection/report: 6 June 2006⁸⁰⁸
Context Joint inspection with HMle
Key findings/conclusions
See Table 6, p.163

Date of inspection/report: 15 March 2007⁸⁰⁹
Context Unannounced visit In accordance with Care Commission inspection guidance for 2006-7, the service was inspected after a Regulatory Support Assessment was carried out.
Key findings/conclusions
National Care Standard 3: School Care Accommodation Services - Care and Protection Areas for improvement included: Individual staff need to update their knowledge and training to ensure the procedures are appropriately followed.

Date of inspection/report: 23 October 2007⁸¹⁰
Context Announced visit
Key findings/conclusions
National Care Standard 7: School Care Accommodation Services - Management and Staffing Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school updated its child protection policy and procedures in June 2007, providing extensive information, and uses the North East of Scotland Child Protection Committee guidelines and Scottish Council of Independent Schools guidelines on child protection and contact names and numbers. • Staff received training annually from the school's child protection coordinator.

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808 Care Commission and HMle, Inspection Report: Gordonstoun School, 6 June 2006, at GOR-000003632.

809 Care Commission, Inspection Report: Gordonstoun School, 15 March 2007, at GOR-000003633.

810 Care Commission, Inspection Report: Gordonstoun School, 23 October 2007, at CIS.001.002.5739 and GOR-000003637.

Date of inspection/report: 23 October 2007

- The Child Protection Officer had delivered a talk to all students on issues of child protection, bullying and responsible behaviour.
- Students were aware of the sanctions imposed should they not adhere to the codes of conduct ... which were clearly detailed within the student handbook.
- Sanctions imposed by senior students were reasonable and understood by all.
- A recent 'incident' described by staff demonstrated that students felt they could challenge decisions should they feel these were unfair, and received a fair hearing.
- At the time of inspection the school was in discussion with SSSC regarding appropriate training and qualification for the role of Matron.

Areas for development

Colour Bearers to receive training in child protection as they have a role in supporting students.

Recommendations

Training in relation to child protection should be extended to include senior pupils with a role in supporting younger pupils.

Staff and pupils should be aware of the Children's Charter and framework standards for child protection.

Date of inspection/report: 28 March 2008⁸¹¹**Context**

Unannounced visit

Key findings/conclusions**National Care Standard 7: School Care Accommodation Services - Management and Staffing****Recommendations from previous inspection**

- For Colour Bearers to receive training in child protection - fully met
- For all staff and students to be aware of the framework standards for child protection and the Children's Charter - fully met
- For the school to put in place a training plan for teaching staff and matrons - partly met.

Areas for development

Matrons received an induction and formal appraisal. It would be beneficial for this process to be expanded to include regular and effective supervision.

Not all houses were standardised in routine and good practice should be shared by housemasters/mistresses.

811 Care Commission, Inspection Report: Gordonstoun School, 28 March 2008, at CIS.001.002.5786 and GOR-000003635.

Context

Announced visit

Key findings/conclusions

Quality Theme 1 - Quality of Care and Support

Overall 5 - Very Good

Strengths

- Opportunity for students to be involved in a wide range of decisions which would influence their care and support.
- All students could have their views represented at year group and house group council meetings with tutor and Housemasters.
- Minutes from meetings evidenced issues which had been raised being positively progressed.
- Service users actively involved in the inspection process.
- Parents were able to comment on assessing and improving the quality of care and support through questionnaires and parents' meetings.
- Aberlour (junior school) had weekly services which parents could attend and which afforded parents the opportunity to access staff.
- Access to counsellor.
- Child protection officer and comprehensive child protection procedures.
- Staff received regular child protection training.
- Matrons and HMs spoken with during the inspection demonstrated knowledge of the procedures to be followed should they have any concerns.
- Senior pupils received child protection training and were aware of the situations which should alert them to concerns to be shared with the Child Protection Officer.
- Senior pupils had an important role of mentoring younger students, e.g. a senior pupil made an anti-bullying poster to raise awareness.

Quality Theme 3 - Quality of Staffing

Overall 5 - Very Good

Strengths included:

- Communication between staff and students was open and respectful, with views of students given weight and credibility.
- Students' handbook: information included internal and external contacts, names of people to contact, with emphasis placed on students sharing concerns and how to positively resolve them.

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812 Care Commission, Inspection Report: Gordonstoun School, 24 September 2008, at CIS.001.002.5793.

Date of inspection/report: 24 September 2008

- All students spoken with throughout the inspection spoke of positive relationships with Matrons, HMs and educational staff.
- Policies, procedures and documentation reflected the ethos of the school and instilled in both staff and students a commitment to their individual and community responsibilities.
- Systems in place to ensure students had adult support when mentoring younger students.

Quality Theme 4 - Quality of Management and Leadership

Overall 5 - Very Good

- Boarding houses were subject to regular monitoring and evaluation by senior staff.
- Matrons were involved in regular pastoral meetings with housemasters and the director of pastoral care.
- Good practice guidance relating to areas of care, health, and wellbeing were available at the school.
- Staff received appropriate training.
- A training needs analysis had been completed which identified core training for pastoral staff.
- The framework of meetings ensured that senior staff had a constant overview of what was going on within the school.
- A staff consultative committee and board of governors ensured a level of accountability.
- Senior staff were aware of the notification requirements of relevant incidents to the Care Commission and/or SSSC.

Date of inspection/report: 16 April 2009⁸¹³**Context**

Unannounced visit

Key findings/conclusions**Quality Theme 1 - Quality of Care and Support**

Overall 5 - Very Good

Strengths

- Opportunity for students to be involved in a wide range of decisions which would influence their care and support.
- All students could have their views represented at year group and house group council meetings with tutor and housemasters.

813 Care Commission, Inspection Report: Gordonstoun School, 16 April 2009, at GOR-000003631.

- Minutes from meetings evidenced issues which had been raised being positively progressed.
- Service users actively involved in the inspection process.
- Parents were able to comment on assessing and improving the quality of care and support through questionnaires and parents' meetings.
- Aberlour (junior school) had weekly services which parents could attend and which afforded parents the opportunity to access staff.
- Child protection officer and comprehensive child protection procedures.
- Staff received regular child protection training.
- Matrons and HMs spoken with during the inspection demonstrated knowledge of the procedures to be followed should they have any concerns.
- Senior pupils received child protection training and were aware of the situations which should alert them to concerns to be shared with the Child Protection Officer.
- Senior pupils had an important role of mentoring younger students, e.g. a senior pupil made an anti-bullying poster to raise awareness.
- Educational curriculum included a range of health-related topics to support students in making positive choices.

Quality Theme 3 - Quality of Staffing

Overall 5 – Very Good

Strengths

- Questionnaires distributed to students to encourage them to evaluate and assess quality of staffing.
- Questionnaires taken into account in the formal appraisal of staff.
- Communication between staff and students was open and respectful, with views of students given weight and credibility.
- Students' handbook: information included internal and external contacts, names of people to contact, emphasis placed on students sharing concerns and how to positively resolve them.
- All students spoken with throughout the inspection spoke of positive relationships with Matrons, HMs, and educational staff.
- Policies, procedures and documentation reflected the ethos of the school and instilled in both staff and students a commitment to their individual and community responsibilities.
- Student development scheme: designed as a framework to guide students with support.
- Systems in place to ensure students had adult support when mentoring younger students.

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Quality Theme 4 - Quality of Management and Leadership

Overall 5 – Very Good

Strengths

- The school had a comprehensive development plan which detailed the progress of the school and identified action points.
- Staff, parents, and students had the opportunity to evaluate staff performance and influence staff appraisal via annual questionnaires.
- Staff were accessible to parents.
- Boarding houses were subject to regular monitoring and evaluation by senior staff.
- Matrons were involved in regular pastoral meetings with housemasters and the director of pastoral care.
- Good practice guidance relating to areas of care, health, and wellbeing were available at the school.
- Staff received appropriate training.
- A training needs analysis had been completed which identified core training for pastoral staff.
- The framework of meetings ensured that senior staff had a constant overview of what was going on within the school.
- A staff consultative committee and board of governors ensured a level of accountability.
- Senior staff were aware of the notification requirements of relevant incidents to the Care Commission and/or SSSC.

Table 9: Care Inspectorate inspections, Gordonstoun, 2011-17

Date of inspection/report: 6 September 2011⁸¹⁴
Context Unannounced visit
Key findings/conclusions
Quality Theme 1 - Quality of Care and Support Overall 5 – Excellent Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for students to be involved in a wide range of decisions which would influence their care and support. • All students could have their views represented at year group and house group council meetings with tutors and housemasters. • Minutes from meetings evidenced issues which had been raised being positively progressed. • Service users actively involved in the inspection process. • Students were able to express their views on the quality of care and support they received from staff through their involvement in the 360° supervision of staff. • Parents were able to comment on assessing and improving the quality of care and support through questionnaires and parents' meetings. • Aberlour (junior school) had weekly services which parents could attend and which afforded parents the opportunity to access staff. • Students spoke of having a wide range of choices. • Students spoke of being encouraged at all times – encouraged to shine. • Students were provided with opportunities to develop a knowledge and understanding of the world around them. • All students were given areas of responsibility. • Responsibilities were based on age and ability and grew as the young person grew. • Students spoke of having the support of a range of people to ensure they settled into school and continued to thrive.

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⁸¹⁴ Care Inspectorate, Inspection Report, Gordonstoun School: School Care Accommodation Service, 6 September 2011, at GOR-000003634 and SGV-000012421.

Quality Theme 4 - Quality of Management and Leadership

Overall 6 – Excellent

Strengths

- Questionnaires were distributed to parents and students. Questions sent to parents included a 'management and communications' section. Further space was available for more individual comment to expand on any of the management and communication questions.
- Meetings students were involved in allowed information to be shared with a range of senior staff.
- Parents visited the school on formal visits and for informal events. All provided opportunities for parents to meet with staff and to share views.
- Students were made aware through handbooks, posters, and discussion how they could express a concern. Emphasis was placed on students sharing concerns in order to positively resolve them.
- The school had an annual development plan which detailed the progress of the school and identified action points.
- The plan had been developed in consultation with all staff with a survey of students in their final year having been included.
- School governors had an overview of the plan and its progress.
- Staff, parents, and students had the opportunity to evaluate staff performance and influence staff appraisal via annual questionnaires.
- Individual staff had clear roles and responsibilities within the school.
- Staff were accessible to parents.
- Boarding houses were subject to regular monitoring and evaluation by senior staff.
- Matrons were involved in regular pastoral meetings with housemasters and the director of pastoral care.
- Good practice guidance relating to areas of care, health, and wellbeing were available at the school.
- Staff received appropriate training.
- The framework of meetings ensured that senior staff had a constant overview of what was going on within the school.
- A staff consultative committee and board of governors ensured a level of accountability.

Senior staff were aware of the notification requirements of relevant incidents to Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland or SSSC.

Context

Unannounced visit

Key findings/conclusions

Quality Theme 1 - Quality of Care and Support

Overall 4 - Good

Strengths

- Opportunity for students to be involved in a wide range of decisions which would influence their care and support.
- All students could have their views represented at year group and house group council meetings with tutor and housemasters.
- Students were actively involved in the inspection process during the unannounced inspection.
- Minutes from meetings evidenced issues which had been raised being positively progressed.
- Student meetings evidenced students taking on a high level of responsibility for organising events and information sharing with fellow students.
- The Student Development Scheme provided students with the opportunity to record their endeavours and achievements on a blog.
- Students were able to express their views on the quality of care and support they received from staff through their involvement in the 360° supervision of staff.
- Parents were able to comment on assessing and improving the quality of care and support through questionnaires and parents' meetings.
- The junior school had weekly services that parents could attend which afforded parents the opportunity to access staff.
- The school website had comprehensive information about all aspects of life at the school and was updated regularly. A parents' portal allowed parents to have secure access to a host of key information.
- The school had an identified Child Protection Officer and comprehensive child protection procedures.
- Staff received regular child protection training.
- Matrons and HMs spoken with during the inspection demonstrated knowledge of the procedures to be followed should they have any concerns.
- Senior pupils received child protection training and were aware of the situations which should alert them to concerns to be shared with the Child Protection Officer.

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815 Care Inspectorate, Inspection Report, Gordonstoun School: School Care Accommodation Service, 29 November 2012, at CIS.001.002.5888.

Date of inspection/report: 29 November 2012

- Senior pupils had an important role of mentoring younger students.
- Senior staff represented the school on the Moray GIRFEC committee.
- Documents and procedures had been developed to ensure compliance with GIRFEC principles and the wellbeing of students.
- A wellbeing protocol and committee had been established.
- Case conferencing and professional discussion for students requiring additional support had been introduced and developed.
- Student support plans had been developed for students requiring additional support. The plans were proactive and included risk assessment.
- Medical centre, qualified nurses, and a GP, following NHS best practice guidelines. Strong links with external healthcare providers.
- Students were aware of the times they could access the drop-in service.
- Refectory: fresh and varied food. Young students had separate dining room, and adult supervision.
- Catering offering was sensitive to cultural and faith needs of children.
- Wide range of activities available.
- Educational curriculum included a range of health-related topics to support students in making positive choices.
- A comprehensive system was in place to record and monitor accidents and incidents.
- Numerous systems were in place to reduce the possibility of bullying.

Recommendations

- The Provider to consider how information which relates to the support of students is effectively shared with key staff.
- The Provider to develop infection control procedures and ensure that relevant staff and students are aware of best practice.

Quality Theme 3 - Quality of Staffing

Overall 5 – Very Good

Strengths

- Reference is made to Quality Theme 1, Statement 1 which details the ways service users and their families are involved in aspects of discussion and decision making.
- Pastoral staff were knowledgeable about the students they supported and demonstrated a high level of motivation, warmth, and commitment to them.
- Pastoral staff in boarding houses were either registered with the relevant statutory body or were in the process of being registered.
- An online staff handbook was available to all staff.

- Pastoral training days were organised to reinforce training and good practice.
- Pastoral staff spoken with stated that they were well supported by senior members of the pastoral team and could access them at any time.
- Newly appointed house staff and matrons were allocated more experienced staff as mentors.
- Student development scheme: designed as a framework to guide students with support.
- Systems in place to ensure students had adult support when mentoring younger students.
- Records were kept of all staff training, reviews, and appraisals, and continuous personal development.
- Staff leaving the service had the opportunity to complete exit questionnaires and have exit interviews.

Areas for improvement

A structured induction was in place for new staff. This should be developed further to include training in relation to infection control and medication administration.

Quality Theme 4 - Quality of Management and Leadership

Overall 6 - Excellent

Strengths

- The school had a variety of quality assurance procedures in place which involved students, staff, and stakeholders.
- The school had an annual development plan which detailed the progress of the school and identified action points for the forthcoming year.
- School governors had an overview of the plan and its progress.
- A staff consultative committee met and had the opportunity to question or clarify decisions made by senior staff. They also had regular meetings which school governors attended.
- Staff, parents, and students had the opportunity to evaluate staff performance and influence staff appraisal via annual questionnaires.
- Individuals had clear roles and responsibilities within the school.
- Staff were accessible to parents to discuss any issues in relation to the care or education of their children.
- Boarding houses were subject to regular monitoring and evaluation by senior staff.
- Matrons were involved in regular pastoral meetings with housemasters and the director of pastoral care.
- Good practice guidance relating to areas of care, health, and wellbeing were available at the school.

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Date of inspection/report: 29 November 2012

- Staff received appropriate training.
- A training needs analysis had been completed which identified core training for pastoral staff.
- The framework of meetings ensured that senior staff had a constant overview of what was going on within the school.

Date of inspection/report: 25 and 26 June 2013⁸¹⁶**Context**

Unannounced visit

Key findings/conclusions**Quality Theme 1 - Quality of Care and Support**

Overall 5 - Very Good

Strengths included:

- Opportunity for students to be involved in a wide range of decisions which would influence their care and support.
- All students could have their views represented at year group and house group council meetings with tutor and housemasters.
- Students were actively involved in the inspection process during the unannounced inspection.
- Minutes from meetings evidenced issues which had been raised being positively progressed.
- Student meetings evidenced students taking on a high level of responsibility for organising events and information sharing with fellow students.
- The Student Development Scheme provided students with the opportunity to record their endeavours and achievements in a blog.
- Students were able to express their views on the quality of care and support they received from staff through their involvement in the 360° supervision of staff.
- Parents were able to comment on assessing and improving the quality of care and support through questionnaires and parents' meetings.
- Parents' meetings were held regularly throughout the year.
- The junior school had weekly services that parents could attend which afforded parents the opportunity to access staff.

⁸¹⁶ Care Inspectorate, Inspection Report, Gordonstoun School: School Care Accommodation Service, 26 June 2013, at GOR-000003638.

- The school website had comprehensive information about all aspects of life at the school which was updated regularly.
- A parents' portal allowed parents to have secure access to a host of key information.
- The *Gordonstoun Record* provided news and updates about the endeavours and achievements of students across a wide range of activities.
- Students engaged in a wide range of activities which promoted their physical health and wellbeing.
- The educational curriculum included a range of health-related topics aimed at providing students with information to support them to make positive choices.
- External agencies visited the school to provide current and expert knowledge.
- The services of the Young People's Addiction Counsellors was accessed by young people.
- The school had an identified Child Protection Officer and comprehensive child protection procedures.
- Staff received regular child protection training.
- Matrons and HMs spoken with during the inspection demonstrated knowledge of the procedures to be followed should they have any concerns.
- Senior staff represented the school on the Moray GIRFEC committee.
- Documents and procedures had been developed to ensure compliance with GIRFEC principles and the wellbeing of students.
- A wellbeing protocol and committee had been established.
- Case conferencing and professional discussion for students requiring additional support had been introduced and developed.
- Senior pupils received child protection training and were aware of the situations which should alert them to concerns to be shared with the Child Protection Officer.
- Senior pupils had an important role of mentoring younger students.
- Student support plans had been developed for students requiring additional support. The plans were proactive and included risk assessment.
- Medical centre, qualified nurses, and a GP, following NHS best practice guidelines. Strong links with external healthcare providers.
- Students were aware of the times they could access the drop-in service.
- Refectory: fresh and varied food. Young students had separate dining room and adult supervision.
- The catering offering was sensitive to the cultural and faith needs of children.
- A comprehensive system was in place to record and monitor accidents and incidents.
- Numerous systems were in place to reduce the possibility of bullying.

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Date of inspection/report: 25 and 26 June 2013

- Student health history and consent forms had been completed for all students. This information was accessible to all staff caring for students and to the medical centre staff.
- All staff had received Health and Wellbeing training.
- The school had recruited a full-time clinical psychologist.

Quality Theme 2 - Quality of Environment

Overall 5 - Very Good

Strengths

- The school had appropriate policies and procedures and risk assessments in place to ensure the safety of service users and staff had knowledge of them.
- Staff were vigilant to any repairs which were required and contacted the maintenance team when repairs were required.
- The school had a Health and Safety Committee which had developed comprehensive procedures to ensure the safety and wellbeing of students and staff.
- Individual boarding houses had locked doors with keypad entry systems.
- Generic risk assessments for boarding houses had been completed and were being further developed.
- A critical incident/emergency evacuation plan was in place which detailed how such situations would be managed.

Areas for improvement

Concerns had been raised about the windows in certain boarding houses. Upper-floor windows continue to cause concern. The Health and Safety Committee will continue to discuss how this issue can be resolved.

Requirement

The Provider to continue to take appropriate action to prevent/reduce the identified risks presented by upper-floor windows.

Timescale

Immediately and ongoing

Quality Theme 3 - Quality of Staffing

Overall 5 - Very Good

Strengths

- Pastoral staff were knowledgeable about the students they supported and demonstrated a high level of motivation, warmth, and commitment to them.
- All staff were appropriately registered with the SSSC or another professional body (such as the General Teaching Council). A training plan was in place for staff who were registered with the condition that they gain the required qualification.
- An online staff handbook, outlining roles, responsibilities, relevant policies and procedures, and reference to best practice documents was available.
- A structured induction was in place for new staff which included mentoring from more experienced staff.
- Weekly meetings and pastoral training days were organised to reinforce training and good practice.
- Records were kept of all staff training, reviews, and appraisals, and continuous personal development.
- Staff leaving the service had the opportunity to complete exit questionnaires and have exit interviews.

National Care Standard 7 - Management and Staffing

Quality Theme 4 - Quality of Management and Leadership

Overall 6 - Excellent

Strengths

- The school had a variety of quality assurance procedures in place which involved students, staff, and stakeholders.
- The school had an annual development plan which detailed the progress of the school and identified action points for the forthcoming year.
- School governors had an overview of the plan and its progress.
- A staff consultative committee met and had the opportunity to question or clarify decisions made by senior staff. They also had regular meetings which school governors attended.
- Staff, parents, and students had the opportunity to evaluate staff performance and influence staff appraisal via annual questionnaires.
- Individuals had clear roles and responsibilities within the school.
- Staff were accessible to parents to discuss any issues in relation to the care or education of their children.
- Boarding houses were subject to regular monitoring and evaluation by senior staff.

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Date of inspection/report: 25 and 26 June 2013

- Matrons were involved in regular pastoral meetings with housemasters and the director of pastoral care.
- Good practice guidance relating to areas of care, health, and wellbeing were available at the school.
- Staff received appropriate training.
- Students were made aware through handbooks, posters, and discussion how they could express a concern.

Date of inspection/report: 8 January 2015⁸¹⁷**Context**

Unannounced visit

Key findings/conclusions**Quality Theme 1 - Quality of Care and Support**

Overall 5 - Very Good

Strengths were as set out in the 2013 report along with:

- The school had developed an electronic wellbeing system which was used to record a wide range of important information about young people.
- Medical centre, qualified nurses, and a GP, following NHS best practice guidelines. Strong links with external healthcare providers.
- The system was used very positively to record and access significant information and had hugely enhanced the ease of recording and information sharing across the school.
- Establishment of food committees: students met with the chef and catering staff to share ideas and opinions.
- Numerous systems were in place to reduce the possibility of bullying.
- All staff had received health and wellbeing training.
- At the last two inspections a requirement had been made regarding medication storage, administration, and recording. All pastoral staff had received medication training with appropriate medication storage facilities being available in all houses.
- Regular monitoring of boarding houses.

817 Care Inspectorate, Inspection Report, Gordonstoun School: School Care Accommodation Service, 8 January 2015, at GOR-000003639 and GOR-000000032.

Quality Theme 2 - Quality of Environment

Overall 5 - Very Good

Strengths were as in 2013 along with:

- Monitoring and evaluation of the boarding houses was carried out on a rolling basis and identified any areas for improvement or upgrade.

Recommendations

Each boarding house should have an individual risk assessment which identifies strategies to minimise risk. Risk assessments should identify all strategies which have been implemented and be reviewed on a regular basis.

Quality Theme 3 - Quality of Staffing

Overall 5 - Very Good

Strengths were as in 2013 along with:

- Reviews: first term (for new staff) and then annual review.
- Weekly meetings and pastoral staff training days were organised to reinforce training and good practice, and to discuss any concerns about students.
- Regular supervision of staff by a senior member of staff.
- Staff received health and wellbeing training, and training in the use of the new wellbeing system.

Areas for improvement

Pastoral staff had made good progress in achieving the qualifications required to meet the registration requirement of the SSSC. A plan was in place which would ensure all staff would meet the registration requirement.

Pastoral staff were part of various 1:1 and group meetings which were not minuted. A lack of minutes made it difficult to review decisions which had been made and whether or not these had been met.

Recommendations

Pastoral staff and 1:1 meetings should be formally minuted to ensure that discussion and decisions can be effectively monitored and reviewed.

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National Care Standard 7 - Management and Staffing

Quality Theme 4 - Quality of Management and Leadership

Overall 6 - Excellent

Strengths were as in 2013 along with:

- Students had the opportunity to meet the senior management team and the Board of Governors in a number of settings, including visits to the boarding houses.
- Staff, parents, and students had the opportunity to evaluate staff performance, influence staff appraisal, and comment on a wide range of boarding and pastoral issues via questionnaires.
- The recently introduced wellbeing system provided a comprehensive system for information recording and sharing. The capabilities of the system allowed a wide number of people to access and input information and supported the effective support of students. Senior pastoral staff had a very good knowledge of the principles of GIRFEC and had introduced appropriate review meetings.
- The framework of meetings ensured that senior staff had a constant overview of what was going on within the school.

Areas for improvement

Discussion and examination of some records highlighted the need for a single system which would ensure that all relevant staff knew the issues that had been raised, who with and how these were being managed. The current system did ensure that complaints were dealt with, however they needed to be recorded through the use of a single system, accessible to all relevant senior staff.

At the time of the inspection the inspectors were made aware of a number of incidents about which they should have been formally notified. An assurance was given that appropriate notifications will now be made.

Recommendations

- The system of recording complaints should be reviewed and developed to ensure there is one clear system of recording complaints, any action taken, and the outcome of any decisions.
- At the time of the inspection the inspectors were made aware of a number of incidents about which they should have been formally notified. The Care Inspectorate must be notified of all incidents as detailed within 'Records all Services (excluding Childminders) Must Keep and Notification Reporting Guidance'.

Context

Unannounced visit

Key findings/conclusions

Quality Theme 1 - Quality of Care And Support

Overall 5 - Very Good

Quality Theme 3 - Quality of Staffing

Overall 5 - Very Good

What the service does well

- Staff were motivated and committed to meeting the needs of students in all areas of school life.
- Guardians in the local area provided invaluable support to students and high-quality pastoral care, supported well by school staff.
- Boarding houses had a very positive culture of care with an ethos of mutual respect.
- Students reported feeling safe and well cared for by boarding staff and through a range of student-led support systems such as peer mentoring and buddies.
- Students were aware of informal and formal ways to raise any issues of concern.
- All staff had regular child protection training and had a good knowledge and understanding of safeguarding procedures.
- A designated child protection officer worked with the senior members of the pastoral team and relevant external agencies.
- Comprehensive wellbeing and child protection policies were in place.
- Senior students received child protection training and were aware when concerns should be shared with the Child Protection Officer.
- Health and wellbeing was promoted across the school.
- Achievement was recognised and celebrated for all students.
- The school had an onsite medical centre.
- The school employed a clinical psychologist who supported students and staff and had links to CAMHS.
- The school had developed its own electronic wellbeing system which was used to record and share important information.
- Overall the system was a real asset to the school and to ensuring student wellbeing.
- Staff recruitment and induction was generally good.

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818 Care Inspectorate, Inspection Report: Gordonstoun School, School Care Accommodation Service, 16 November 2017, at GOR-000000033.

Date of inspection/report: 16 November 2017

- A formal induction programme provided new staff with the knowledge and training they needed.
- Staff attended a variety of training courses relevant to the health and wellbeing of students.
- Pastoral staff worked well together and supported each other across the school's different environments.

What the service could do better

Staff were very aware of the additional support individual students needed, however these were not always formalised in a support plan.

Medication systems were generally good, however the inspection identified some improvements which could be made with overseas medication and controlled drugs. Increased auditing would also provide greater safeguards.

Healthcare staff had identified plans to increase the opportunity for health promotion and extend their collaborative working across the school. This would be a welcome addition to the healthcare services already available to students. Healthcare staff should also have a greater role in more frequent auditing of medication kept in the boarding houses.

Pastoral staff had opportunities to share their views and contribute to the development of the boarding houses, however they should also have 1:1 meetings with their line manager looking at their practice and professional development.

Recommendations

Students who have additional support needs should have a formal plan of support which is shared with those people key to ensuring that the support is provided.

National Care Standards School Care Accommodation Services - Standard 3: Care and Protection

Medication systems should be reviewed to ensure they comply with best practice. More frequent external auditing should be introduced to ensure greater safeguards.

National Care Standards School Care Accommodation Services - Standard 13: Keeping Well - Medication

Pastoral staff should have regular 1:1 meetings with their line manager.

Appendix D - Breakdown of numbers of children at Gordonstoun

From its inception in 1934, Gordonstoun was a boys-only school for boarders aged between 12 and 18. In the 1960s, the school introduced day pupils and it became co-educational in 1972.

Gordonstoun does not hold accurate records of pupils for the entirety of the period under consideration. The information presented in Table 10 is therefore incomplete.⁸¹⁹

Table 10: Pupil roll: number of admissions, 1934-2014

Year	Boarders				Day pupils			
	Male	Female	Gender unknown as in mixed house	Total	Male	Female	Gender unknown as in mixed house	Total: day and boarders
1934	13			13				13
1935	44			44				44
1936	83			83				83
1937	119			119				119
1938	116			116				116
1939	131			131				131
1940	132			132				132
1941	94			94				94
1942	117			117				117
1943	139			139				139
1944	164			164				164
1945	171			171				171
1946								
1947	196			196				196
1948	214			214				214
1949	253			253				253
1950	264			264				264
1951	278			278				278

⁸¹⁹ Gordonstoun, [Part A response to section 21 notice](#), at GOR.001.001.0041, p.39; Gordonstoun, boarding and day students information, at GOR-000004705. A first analysis of the number of pupils highlighted some discrepancies and missing information. The Inquiry asked Gordonstoun to provide further information. Gordonstoun provided an updated table to the Inquiry noting that it 'cannot be held to be definitive or completely accurate due to its reliance on historical records'. See Gordonstoun, email from Gordonstoun to SCAI, 25 January 2023, at GOR-000004704.

Year	Boarders				Day pupils			
	Male	Female	Gender unknown as in mixed house	Total	Male	Female	Gender unknown as in mixed house	Total: day and boarders
1952								
1953								
1954								
1955								
1956								
1957								
1958								
1959	141 (Altyre only)							
1960	140 (Altyre only)							
1961								
1962	384			384	20			404
1963	384			384	14			398
1964	381			381	11			392
1965	376			376	12			388
1966	380			380	9			389
1967	383			383	6			389
1968	386			386	5			391
1969	405			405	0			405
1970	403			403	0			403
1971	404			404	0			404
1972	356		59	415	4	6		425
1973	360		64	424	6	11		441
1974	300	57	66	423	6	12		441
1975	317	62	62	441	6	10		457
1976	320	105		425	6	14		445
1977	323	109		432	6	18		456
1978	321	109		430	7	17		454
1979	319	119		438	8	20		466
1980	314	116		430	5	20		455
1981	321	119		440	4	18		462

Year	Boarders				Day pupils			
	Male	Female	Gender unknown as in mixed house	Total	Male	Female	Gender unknown as in mixed house	Total: day and boarders
1982	294	116		410	7	15		432
1983	286	137		423	15	12		450
1984	282	157		439	15	8		462
1985	297	184		481	14	15		510
1986	274	171		445	17	16		478
1987	253	169		422	9	9		440
1988	261	193		454	10	10		474
1989	255	186		441	22	14		477
1990	243	178		421	20	10		451
1991	264	202		466	0	8		474
1992	261	208		469	0	5		474
1993	255	207		462	0	6		468
1994	260	197		457	0	6		463
1995	253	165		416	0	3		419
1996	261	192		453	3	7		463
1997	246	204		450	14	5		469
1998	235	165		400	14	5		419
1999	227	165		392	13	6		411
2000	219	166		385	11	6		402
2001	208	162		370	13	12		395
2002	233	166		399	17	18		434
2003	252	174		426	12	17		455
2004	254	162		416	14	18		448
2005	219	161	26	406	11	18		435
2006	262	150		412	23	18		453
2007	252	187	40	479	22	11		512
2008	232	160	40	432	34	20	2	488
2009	247	187		434	33	21		488
2010	233	156	36	425	30	23		478
2011	237	179	37	453	30	25		508

Boarders					Day pupils			
Year	Male	Female	Gender unknown as in mixed house	Total	Male	Female	Gender unknown as in mixed house	Total: day and boarders
2012	216	174	33	423	22	27		472
2013	228	168	30	426	27	39		492
2014	268	195	34	497				

Appendix E - Number of complaints, civil actions, police investigations, criminal proceedings, and applicants to SCAI

Table 10: Breakdown of numbers

Number of complaints made to Gordonstoun relating to abuse or alleged abuse as of 19 October 2020 a) against staff b) against pupils	a) 19 b) 102 ⁸²⁰ Plus 1 complaint unclear if against staff or pupils
Number of civil actions raised against Gordonstoun relating to abuse or alleged abuse at the school	0
Number of civil actions raised against Aberlour House relating to abuse or alleged abuse at the school	2
Number of police investigations relating to abuse or alleged abuse at Gordonstoun of which the school was aware as of 19 October 2020 a) against staff b) against pupils	a) 4 b) 1
Number of criminal proceedings resulting in conviction relating to abuse at Gordonstoun of which the school was aware as of 19 October 2020	1
Number of SCAI applicants relating to Gordonstoun	22
Number of SCAI applicants relating to Aberlour	8

⁸²⁰ These numbers are much higher than the other schools in the case study but should not be seen as indicative that abuse was more common at Gordonstoun. They reflect Gordonstoun's particularly good recent record-keeping and thorough response to the Inquiry.

Appendix F - Convictions

Andrew Keir

Andrew Keir taught physics at Gordonstoun between 1983 and 1994. His teaching career spanned 1973-2012 and otherwise was in England.

He appeared at Elgin Sheriff Court 2015 on a summary complaint (PF ref: EL15001786) which, as drafted, libelled six charges – lewd, libidinous, and indecent practices and behaviour x 2, indecent assault x 2, and breach of the peace x 2.

Mr Keir was convicted, after trial, on 9 March 2018, of four charges as follows:

(1) on an occasion between 1 November 1988 and 31 March 1989, both dates inclusive, at the swimming pool at Gordonstoun School, Duffus, Elgin, Moray you Andrew Keir did use lewd, indecent, and libidinous practices and behaviour towards AAA, born xx XX 1975, c/o Police Service of Scotland, Elgin, and remove your swimming trunks in his presence and in the presence of other children exposing your naked penis, shower naked in his presence, and make sexual remarks in his presence.

(2) on an occasion between 1 November 1988 and 19 January 1989, both dates inclusive, at the swimming pool at Gordonstoun School, Duffus, Elgin, Moray you Andrew Keir did use lewd, indecent, and libidinous practices and behaviour towards BBB, born xx XX 1975, c/o Police Service of Scotland, Elgin, and remove your swimming trunks in his presence and in the presence

of other children exposing your naked penis, seize him by the body, and cause your naked penis to touch his body, shower naked in his presence and again expose your naked penis, and make sexual remarks in his presence.

(3) on various occasions between 1 January 1991 and 31 December 1991, both dates inclusive, at Gordonstoun School, Duffus, Elgin, Moray you Andrew Keir did indecently assault CCC, born xx XX 1976, c/o Police Service of Scotland, Elgin and did restrain him, touch his body and touch his crotch over his clothing, place your arm around him, again touch his body, place your hands beneath his trousers and pants, undo his belt and trousers, and touch his naked penis and masturbate him.

(4) on an occasion between 1 January 1991 and 31 December 1991, both dates inclusive, at the swimming pool, Gordonstoun School, Duffus, Elgin, Moray you Andrew Keir did conduct yourself in a disorderly manner and did remove your swimming trunks in the presence of CCC, born xx XX 1976, c/o Police Service of Scotland, Elgin and did invite him to remove his own swimming trunks and commit a breach of the peace.

On 1 May 2018 Mr Keir was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment, the maximum sentence open to the Sheriff. The latter expressed dissatisfaction with the Crown for prosecuting the case at summary level.

Mr Keir also has a conviction in England which is relevant. On 24 January 2019 he

appeared before magistrates and tendered guilty pleas to charges of possessing, making, and distributing indecent images of children between 2001 and 2017.

He received a cumulo sentence of 28 months' imprisonment. The most significant individual sentences related to distribution of Category A and B images between 2014 and 2015.

Appendix G - Notice of draft findings

Some individuals received notice of relevant findings in draft form and were afforded a reasonable time to respond, if they wished to do so. They did respond, I carefully considered their responses, and I took them into account before finalising these findings.

Appendix H - Mark Pyper's talk to the school, 14 September 1990

Only 10 days after term started, the newly appointed Gordonstoun headmaster spoke to the entire school. He gave a blunt account of the state the school was in and had been for a long time. It was unacceptable, and there was behaviour of which pupils should be ashamed; abuse was, evidently, a real problem. The following is a transcript of what he said:

On several occasions this term I have said – and I repeat it now – that I find Gordonstoun a happy School with a very good atmosphere. Relationships and dealings between staff and pupils – and amongst pupils – are open, friendly and positive ...

But – and there is a but – we can only say the situation is really good if that atmosphere reaches all people in the School in all places at all times, including when you are in your own rooms – when you know that there are no members of staff in the vicinity. If there is one person unnecessarily unhappy and certainly if that person is unhappy because of something which has been said or done by another – then we have failed and the atmosphere cannot really be said to be good.

I, of course, came here a few weeks ago open-minded, but had been warned by a number of people that I might find some unpleasantness. Well, I have looked – and even without looking, several instances of unpleasantness have come to me. What, first of all, do I mean by unpleasantness? I am intentionally avoiding the word bullying for that normally conjures up pictures of severe physical aggression – that of

course is wholly undesirable, but there is more to it than that. Sometimes you don't know when you are being unpleasant – the joke that goes too far – only a joke if the person on the receiving end sees it as such – teasing, verbal abuse including shouting and swearing at those in younger years – any form of unofficial faggotting – any form of financial racketeering or manipulation – cliques and boycotts – the giving of excessive punishments – all these are forms of unpleasantness, of bullying, and are absolutely unacceptable.

This is not, incidentally, confined to boarding houses. It can be across the School as a whole. Nor is it always older to younger pupils – it can be between those in the same age groups. It very often stems from a lack of tolerance, a lack of understanding, and an anti-social refusal to acknowledge that others may be different from you, different from the majority – look different, behave differently – express different views – but their rights are the same as anyone else's.

There is a case recently of someone being teased because he comes from a state school background – how disgraceful. There is a note to me from a member of staff: 'Today a 3rd former was late because his bag had been thrown in a bush. Yesterday the contents of the bag were strewn around the grounds. The boy is very homesick. This form of unpleasantness is quite common.' What an appalling indictment and what a despicable action. How dare you, whoever you are, behave like that. You should be, and I hope you are, utterly ashamed of yourselves.

I will not listen, in connection with any of this, to a defence that it has gone on for years – that it was done to us so we do it to others. I am sure that what we are talking about is perpetrated by a small minority or a very few, but one instance is one too many – utterly intolerable. There is no such thing as an acceptable level of unpleasantness. We must not hide from what goes on beneath the surface.

But although the perpetrators may be in a minority, you are all responsible, we are all responsible. If you see, hear or know of anything and do nothing about it, you are guilty of bullying yourselves. Give help when help is needed. Do not just go along with the crowd. What I am saying is of crucial importance to every single person in this Chapel.

There is no place at Gordonstoun for unpleasant behaviour. I have to warn you that if you are involved in any unpleasantness you run the risk of being asked to leave the School immediately and permanently without warning ...

I have my part to play in this by making your surroundings as pleasant as possible in terms of space, comfort, and resources – I shall be looking at this and at the deployment and responsibilities of staff – to ensure that their skills and time are used for the best benefit of all.

I am also, as a next step, and not as a final solution, towards creating a slightly gentler atmosphere going to stop all forms of punishment which involve physical detention – both those unofficially still in practice such as press-ups and cold showers, which I regard as totally undesirable, and those more widely

used at present, all PD punishments which involve runs. These are now abolished ...

And you – what can you do? A very great deal. You can start by thinking positively about your School, what activities might we do, might we start – in House or School. What resources do we need to make the School an even better place, to bring people together, including those sometimes left out in the cold. Think, talk, then put your case. Agitate – I would be pleased to see you with suggestions.

But above all you must behave considerately in a civilised way at all times – this is not always natural, I know, and requires self-discipline, and you must ensure that others do the same ...

This is a very great School ... but it is not enough just to say that. We are all privileged to be here and have major responsibilities and duties to perform as a result ... and an important measure of that will be the underlying atmosphere. Eliminate *all* unpleasantness and then build positively for everyone.

It is our job, your job, to create and maintain a happy, friendly, caring environment for everyone, all of the time. Let us do this together.⁸²¹

Mark Pyper recalled the immediate reaction to his speech:

The school didn't like this at all ... I should also tell you, on this particular day, I expelled two for being extremely unpleasant to a junior boy and they were members of the first rugby XV, and I was told by both staff and pupils: 'You cannot expel members of the first XV', and I

821 Mark Pyper's talk to the School, 14 September 1990, at WIT-3-000000544.

said: 'Well, that's tough, they're on the train already', but ... I also abolished all forms of physical punishment ... So they were hit three ways. They had no physical punishments at all

of any sort, they had two members of the first XV expelled, and you had this chap standing up saying this. Not many people spoke to me for the next week.⁸²²

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p.6 source unknown; pp.18 and 28 Walker's Shortbread; p.73 Duffus Estate. All other photos Gordonstoun.

822 [Transcript, day 234](#): Mark Pyper (former headmaster Gordonstoun, 1990-2011; principal from 1999), at TRN-8-000000025, pp.126-7.

