

## STATEMENT OF ALAN PLUMTREE

- 1 I am Alan James Charles Plumtree. I am 71. I am a retired Chartered Accountant, formerly in public practice. I qualified as a CA in 1976. I am currently the chairman of the Board of Her Majesty's Commissioners, Queen Victoria School, Dunblane, FK15 0JY. I can be contacted via the school.
- 2 I have been on the Board of Her Majesty's Commissioners for Queen Victoria School since April 2006. I was recommended for the post, originally, by a professional colleague, who was at that time a Commissioner herself. Before my appointment I also needed the approval of and security clearances from the MOD. I live locally to the school and it is well thought of in Dunblane, I was interested and happy to become involved. I have been the chairman of the Board of Her Majesty's Commissioners for Queen Victoria School since 2012. Usually, you would serve only two 5 year terms as a Commissioner plus if asked, one five year term as Chairman. I was however asked by the Board, to stay on, as I had been heavily involved in the arrangements for the building of a new teaching block. That project is still ongoing and so am I. Members of the Board receive no remuneration for their services. We are volunteers.
- 3 The published Vision Statement of Queen Victoria School states amongst other things that every pupil will be helped to realise their fullest academic potential and will be provided with a wide and diverse range of extra-curricular activities to help develop the whole person. The School aims to ensure that at least one adult member of staff will take a continuous proactive interest in the development of each pupil, meeting with the pupil regularly and providing structured and responsive discussion. The School will provide a valid and valuable alternative to the pupil's home environment during term times.
- 4 At every level throughout the "Command Chain " we are conscious that Scottish Service Personnel who dedicate their lives to protecting our Country are entitled to expect that the Country will in turn protect their children and we strive to ensure that we fulfil our part of that Covenant to the fullest extent possible. To achieve that aim we have a Deputy Head whose responsibility for the pastoral care of the children is his or her principal responsibility. We have three sub committees of the main Board of Commissioners, the Education and Admissions Committee, the Safeguarding and Child Protection Committee and the Health and Safety Committee all of which in accordance with their remits direct their attentions to the wellbeing of the children that have been entrusted to our care.
- 5 We work hard to ensure that our Service Personnel can perform their duties safe in the knowledge that the children that they have mandated to our care are educated, both academically and socially, to the very best of our and their ability, that they are properly fed, safely and comfortably accommodated and protected from foreseeable risks. Then when the

child finally completes their education with us the parents will know that they made the correct decision when they handed over their child to our care.

### **History of Governance at Queen Victoria School, Dunblane.**

- 6 Queen Victoria School Dunblane was established by Royal Warrant in 1905. It was originally a school for the sons of Scottish sailors and soldiers. As far as I am aware the Governance of the School has always vested in Her Majesty's Board of Commissioners whilst the Secretary of State for Defence (and his predecessors) has ultimate responsibility for the School.
  
- 7 The constitution of Queen Victoria School is contained in a Minute of Agreement which was also signed in 1905. A fund had been raised by voluntary contributions (I believe that soldiers and sailors were asked to voluntarily contribute a day's pay) to establish in Scotland a school in memory of Queen Victoria. In the Minute of Agreement, the Secretary of State for the War Department (now the Secretary of State for Defence) undertook to "maintain in perpetuity" Queen Victoria School. It went on to provide that the school would be maintained, managed and administered in terms of the Royal Warrant. It is my understanding that the Royal Warrant has not been amended since first signed.
  
- 8 There have been various changes to the Schedule to the Royal Warrant over the years, usually to recognise changing times and administrative matters. For example, admission to the school was extended to the children of members of the Royal Air Force and girls were finally admitted in 1996.
  
- 9 My understanding is that from 1992 until 2005 the School was run on an Agency basis, for the Ministry of Defence, by Her Majesty's Board of Commissioners, with the involvement of the school Bursar (now school Business Manager) and the Head Teacher. Prior to that time it was, I think, directly funded. This was just as I started my own involvement with the School. To that point, HM Board of Commissioners and the Head Teacher administered an annual budget allocated by the Ministry of Defence. HM Board of Commissioners would report annually to Parliament with a budget request. There is always a military presence on the Board as required by the Warrant, from each of the Services. Until 1973 the Headmaster was always drawn from the Army Education Corps as were many of the teachers. That is no longer the case and now all of the teaching staff are civilians with professional qualifications. In 2005 how the school managed its budget and governance changed in that it ceased to be an Agency of the Ministry of Defence and came under the direct command of Home Command, with day to day responsibilities held by Service Children's Education which then merged into the Ministry of Defence Directorate Children and Young People.

## **Current Governance of Queen Victoria School Dunblane**

### **(i) The Royal Warrant**

- 10 The School has always been a school for children of members of the Armed Forces with a Scottish connection. It has always been a school over which the Secretary of State for Defence (and his predecessors) have ultimate responsibility. The latest Schedule to the Royal Warrant for the School is dated 2018 and this confirms that the Secretary of State for Defence continues to be ultimately responsible for the requirements placed upon the School and for determining the policy, financial framework, delegations and freedom within which the School operates. He delegates his responsibilities for the school to the senior officer who holds Tri Service responsibility for service children and young people issues; presently the Commander of the Army's Home Command. That is currently, Lieutenant General Tyrone R Urch CBE. He is Commander Home Command and the Tri Service lead for service children.
  
- 11 I understand that the Inquiry has access to a copy of the latest Royal Warrant for reference. In outline it confirms that the School shall provide education for children between the ages of 10 and 18. The school curriculum shall be consistent with that applied by the Scottish Education Authority. The criteria and admissions policy for entry to the school are in that document, supported by the school Governance manual that sets out details of priority and need. Every effort is made to ensure that no child is restricted from attending the School by virtue of finance alone.
  
- 12 The Warrant provides that the Governance of the school is vested in Her Majesty's Board of Commissioners ("the Board") on terms specified by Commander Home Command following consultation with the Board. The make-up of the Board and its Committees is also set out in the Royal Warrant, together with its responsibilities. These include forming Committees for various purposes, including Admissions to the school and financial administration of legacies etc. It allows the Commissioners to issue policies for the effective control and administration of the school in accordance with the Royal Warrant. Any policies affecting the financial or other provisions to be made for the school require the prior approval of Commander Home Command.

### **(ii) Ministry of Defence**

- 13 The Secretary of State for Defence has ultimate responsibility for the school and delegates the administration of this to various departments in the Ministry of Defence on behalf of Commander Home Command. The Ministry of Defence approves and provides the School's

annual budget. Commander Home Command delegates to the Directorate Children and Young People the responsibility for the day to day management of the school.

- 14 All permanent staff are recruited on civil service recruitment terms and they are employed by the Ministry of Defence.
- 15 The Ministry of Defence recognises that Queen Victoria School is a Scottish School. It follows the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence. Wendy Bellars, a former Head Teacher felt that Directorate Children and Young People staff did not understand the Scottish system and had an English bias. In my experience Directorate Children and Young People teaching support and supervision has always been supportive wherever possible and taken into account that Queen Victoria School is a Scottish School, although to be fair to Ms Bellars, sometimes they do not always remember the differences.

(iii) Her Majesty's Board of Commissioners

- 16 Her Majesty's Board of Commissioners are responsible for the Governance of the School. According to the Royal Warrant, the Board of Commissioners shall have two ex officio members - the Lord Justice Clerk and the Governor of Edinburgh Castle. No more than nine other people, five of whom should have expertise in education, business, finance and the professions, are to be nominated by the Board and approved by Commander Home Command. In addition two persons are to be nominated by the Army Board of the Defence Council, one person to be nominated by the Admiralty Board of the Defence Council and one person to be nominated by the Air Force Board of the Defence Council. Up to two persons nominated by Commander Home Command will represent him at meetings of the Board. The two Ministry of Defence representatives on HM Board of Commissioners, currently are Colonel Clive Knightley of the Directorate Children and Young People and Andrew Yeoman, who is an educationalist with the Directorate Children and Young People. Although they are present for Board Meetings they do not have a vote as part of the Board.
- 17 I attach a printout from the school website with details of those currently on the Board. You will see that we have medical representatives, Ministry of Defence representatives, educational representatives, architectural representatives, business representatives and the Head Teacher and Business Manager from Queen Victoria School. Most Commissioners are appointed for an initial period of five years, with the option of a further second term. In exceptional circumstances a further third five year term is permitted. One of our committee, General Robert Bruce, is a former pupil of Queen Victoria School. With the exception of the Chair, no current Commissioner has served more than ten years.

- 18 The Chair of the Board is appointed by the Secretary of State for Defence on the recommendation of the Commissioners. They will hold office for a term of 5 years but in exceptional circumstances this can be extended for a further five year term. I am currently in my second term as Chair of the Board.
- 19 Any five or more Commissioners shall comprise a quorum at any meeting of the Board. Board meetings are held once in each school term. There are three terms. The Head Teacher should be in attendance at all meetings of the Board unless the Board decide otherwise. Very occasionally this has happened. We are authorised to have the occasional exceptional meeting if necessary. Covid- 19, for example, led to an exceptional meeting.
- 20 The Board has several committees as follows:  
 Waivers Committee  
 General Purposes Committee (GPC)  
 Education and Admissions Committee  
 Safeguarding and Child Protection Committee  
 Trust Funds Portfolio Management Committee  
 Health & Safety Committee (now part of GPC)
- 21 These Committees usually have at least one expert, in the field, on the Committee. They meet three times a year except for the General Purposes Committee which meets four times, more if necessary and all report to the full Board. I am a member of the General Purposes Committee and have the right to attend all other committees which I do usually do at least once a year, for each.
- 22 The Safeguarding and Child Protection Committee is responsible for ensuring that the school complies with all legislative requirements concerning child protection and pastoral care. The Governance Manual defines "Child protection procedures" and this Committee's duties. They consider and deal with the physical, emotional and welfare needs of the children. The General Purposes committee deals with their material needs - buildings, furnishings, IT, etc. The members of the Safeguarding and Child Protection Committee are the same as the Education and Admissions Committee as their skill sets overlap. For example they were involved together in establishing safe Covid home schooling policies.
- 23 In my time on the Board, there has always been a committee that has had responsibility for dealing with safeguarding and child protection.
- 24 All Commissioners are required to obtain Protecting Vulnerable Groups certification.

- 25 The Board finds out and takes account of the views of parents. About 20 years ago the Commissioners set up a parent liaison group which is a link between the parents and the Board of Commissioners. As part of the school's complaints policy, the parents can write directly to the Chairman of the Commissioners, and this does happen from time to time.

(iv) Her Majesty's Board of Commissioners, Governance Manual

- 26 One of our projects, over the last few years, has been the establishment of one comprehensive Governance Manual, bringing together the various policies for the management of the school, its relationship with the MOD and the roles and responsibilities of Her Majesty's Board of Commissioners. This was finally finished last year after several drafts and I will provide the Inquiry with a copy of the "Queen Victoria School, Her Majesty's Board of Commissioners Governance Manual, Version 3.1 February 2020." This manual has had input from all the experienced educationalists and other experts who have been on HM Board of Commissioners in recent times. It also has had input from the Directorate Children and Young People. It has been approved by Commander Home Command.

- 27 The Governance Manual has sections on:

- Status, Governance and Management - covering the ownership and funding of the school, details on Her Majesty's Board of Commissioners, School permanent staff and eligibility for admission to the school.
- The Roles and Responsibilities of the Board of Her Majesty's Commissioners - covering Commissioner visits, Commissioner's links to boarding houses, staff appointments, certain school events, review of school performance and review of Board performance.
- The code of conduct for Board members - covering the principles of conduct, standards of conduct, declaration of interests and contacts with the media.
- Operational guidance - covering the aims of the Board, meetings, voting, motions, ruling on matters of procedure, visit/conference reports, urgent business and minutes.
- Her Majesty's Commissioner's Committees - covering the roles of the various standing committees, their relationship with the Board, ad hoc committees, scheme of delegation and support for committees. There are then specific rules and regulations and detail on the various committees - the General Purposes Committee, the Education and Admissions Committee, the Safeguarding and Child Protection Committee, the Health and Safety Committee and the Trust Funds Portfolio Management Committee.

- Duties of Commissioners as Trustees - covers the detail about the Commissioners actions in relation to the Trust.
  - The induction and training for Her Majesty's Commissioners.
- 28 The Governance Manual recognises that ensuring that pupils receive the highest possible quality of education and pastoral care is key to what we do. We also recognise and are proud of the military history of the school and the strong links that continue to this day.

(v) Finances

- 29 The main funding for the school comes from the Ministry of Defence. We have to apply to them to cover everything, from very minor day to day repairs to the funding of the proposed new teaching block. 51 Brigade in Stirling are good at supporting the school on infrastructure matters but all infrastructure projects and repairs must be done by Ministry of Defence contractors. The Directorate Children and Young People do assist with finance of certain limited projects.
- 30 Parents make a contribution to their children's costs, but this is minimal. It currently runs at £500/term approximately.
- 31 There is also a Trust, the Queen Victoria School Fund, to assist with funding. This was previously three Trusts with the aim of providing the school and its pupils with some additional funding. The bulk of the Fund represents the balance left from the original appeal plus unrestricted legacies. There is now about £2m sitting in the Trust Fund. The Trust Fund is administered by the Board who give grants to the School, as required throughout the year. For example, we have in the last eighteen months amongst other things paid for school trips overseas, funded a poly tunnel for growing plants and vegetables primarily for biology studies and supported former pupils in their first year at University.
- 32 All Commissioners are charity trustees of the Queen Victoria School Fund ("QVSF").
- 33 In my opinion the children at Queen Victoria School are often better off materially as pupils, than those at State Schools, with regard to the budget spent on them. For example, all children at Queen Victoria School had iPads before it was considered the norm in other schools. Currently every child in S3 upwards has a Google Chromebook of their own provided by the School and this has made the provision of distance learning and virtual classrooms a reality throughout this lockdown with all children effectively attending normal school lessons daily. A further 130 Chromebooks are due for delivery in February so that all children in P7 to S2 will then have their own laptop. The Ministry of Defence is very good at sourcing and

keeping the school well stocked with technology - the educational equipment is excellent. The children are also well looked after in relation to their health and sporting facilities. About three times per year some of the Commissioners join the children for lunch and all will confirm that the quality and quantity of the food provided by the canteen and cafe, are excellent.

### **Additional Comments**

- 34 The welfare and education of the children at the Queen Victoria School is central to the working of Her Majesty's Board of Commissions. The Head Teacher reports to the Board, on any matters of concern. He attends all Board Meetings. He also sits on the Education and Admissions Committee. It is my practice to meet with the Head Teacher every Tuesday throughout school term time, for a catch up on all matters of concern in relation to the children. It is an informal meeting but it is my experience that if there is anything that the Board should know about regarding the welfare of the children then the current Head Teacher, Donald Shaw, will bring it up at the meetings. It also allows us time to consider future policy matters before taking them to the Board of Her Majesty's Commissioners and the Directorate of Children and Young People. I should say that these meetings have probably been less frequent, over the last 11 months or so because of Covid-19.
- 35 In my time at the school as a Commissioner I have not myself witnessed any evidence of child abuse. There are the occasional and expected romantic relationships between some of the pupils, but nothing beyond what would be the normal case for young people at that stage in their lives.
- 36 I am aware of a case, in August 2015, involving one of the Queen Victoria School teachers who was found to have child pornography on his home computer. I understand, that he was found through a national police operation tracing the source of payments to inappropriate web sites. To my relief the police confirmed that this case did not involve any pupils at the School. The teacher was suspended and then dismissed.
- 37 The one other case that I am aware of was in 2018 when a music instructor was accused of inappropriate behaviour with mainly senior girls. He was immediately suspended, charged by the police, and subsequently dismissed by the Ministry of Defence. He is I believe still awaiting trial as a result of delays firstly on the grounds of ill health and then because of ongoing delays in the Court system.
- 38 It is my understanding that Queen Victoria School has always taken a strong line at any shouting and swearing at pupils by teachers. Part of this was linked to the then teaching staff having an Army Education Corp or military background. It was not considered that this was a proper way to educate the pupils, in military circles. In my time at the School, there has



always been a strong "anti-bullying" policy and there is zero tolerance of this when, on the very odd occasion, it has happened. We are currently working towards alternatives to suspending pupils from School, which is only used as a last option anyway. We are currently looking at what might be of more benefit to the children.

(signed)



(dated)

*26th February*

2021

ALAN JAMES CHARLES PLUMTREE