

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Andrew Sheward ALEXANDER

Support person present: No

1. My name is Andrew Sheward Alexander. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1952. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Background

2. I have a MA degree in Mathematics from St. Peter's College, Oxford University. I hold an Army Outward Bound Certificate. In 1971 I served on a Short Service Limited Commission with the Royal Artillery. Between 1971 and 1974 I held an Army University Cadetship at Oxford University and attended an Officer Training Course at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst and an Education Officer Course at the School of Army Education in Beaconsfield. Between 1975 and 1977 I was an Education Officer with Junior Leaders (teenagers) with the Royal Artillery. Between 1977 and 1979 I was an Education Officer at 78 Army Education Centre, Middle Wallop, ran pre-pilot training courses and was a Garrison Education Officer. I have been on the governing bodies of Stockbridge Primary School, Test Valley Comprehensive School and Andover College.
3. Between 1979 and 1990 I was a Mathematics teacher at Stockport Grammar School. I also held the positions of form teacher and Head of Fourth Form during my time at the school. I was also involved in running numerous walking and camping trips in the UK and was both a singer and financial manager for the school choir during tours to the USA. During my time in Stockport I was appointed a Governor, then elected as Chair of Governors, at Great Moor Junior School. I was also a Member and Steward of Dialstone Lane Methodist Church.

Employment with Fettes

4. Between 1990 and 2012 I was a Mathematics teacher with the school. Between 1990 and 1992 I was Head of Mathematics. Between 1990 and 1991 I was a Pastoral Tutor to Glencorse House. This involved supervising the boarding house for one evening a week and meeting my teenage tutees individually every week to discuss progress.
5. Between 1991 and 1999 I was Head of the junior wing of the school. That part of the school was called Inverleith House but was formerly known as Fettes Junior School. Pupils aged between ten and thirteen years old attended Inverleith House. My role involved curriculum design and supervision, pastoral oversight of the pupils, staff supervision and assisting with new pupil recruitment. I do not recall precise dates but during the period between 2000 and 2012 I was at times the Master in charge of the Dining Hall, Chairman of the Common Room and a Pastoral Tutor at Glencorse House.
6. For a number of years, between 2000 and 2012, I was Director of Activities. In my capacity as Director of Activities I was a member of the Senior Management Team. The role involved coordinating the weekly pupil activities programme for all the senior pupils and trying to ensure a balance in all aspects of their extra-curricular lives.
7. Over and above my various titled roles with the school I ran numerous camping and residential educational trips, many of which I attended and or organised. I was on choir tours of the Czech Republic and the USA (twice) during which I was responsible for the well-being of the male pupils.
8. Between 1990 and 2013 I was an Army Officer in the School Combined Cadet Force (CCF). The CCF had more than 300 cadets. I was latterly the Commanding Officer with the CCF. In my capacity as an Army Officer and Commanding Officer I was involved with annual residential camps in the UK and Germany.

9. When I applied for my first role with the school it entailed a letter of application with CV and two referees. That was followed by a whole day interview process with the Headmaster, Director of Studies and Head of Mathematics and a tour of the school. Prior to appointment to Head of Inverleith House a further interview was held with SNR SNR including my wife. I gained my GTCS registration in Mathematics much later on when the next Headmaster required all staff to have this.

Policy

10. As Head of Inverleith House, I had responsibility for the overall care of all the younger pupils and set up the policies to be followed by the staff working with the pupils. My philosophy as a teacher was always that children who are content learn much better. At Inverleith House we established a relaxed but well-disciplined environment where children could develop their talents and live a full and happy life.
11. I worked with the staff allocated to me meeting them regularly as a group and individuals to talk through any issues or problems. I met with a small group of the oldest pupils, who were all prefects, every week in an informal setting to gain their feedback on anything they wanted to discuss.
12. Staff and pupils felt happy to bring any complaints either directly to me or through a teacher or an older pupil and I was never aware of any reluctance to speak out. There were two Matrons who spent time listening to the children as well as dealing with minor ailments. There were two Australian gap year students, one male and one female, who were like big siblings with whom the children talked freely.
13. Any complaint about a member of staff would be dealt with in consultation with the Headmaster. I recall this only occurring once in connection to a member of staff called Bill Stein. I discuss this incident in further detail below.
14. Inverleith House was run in such an openly friendly fashion that a specialised "whistleblowing" procedure was not needed. The boarding Housemaster and

Housemistress kept records of boarding matters and my Secretary maintained a record of day pupil matters and all pupil files. A more serious incident would be recorded on the staff or pupil's main file in the central school office.

Strategic planning

15. I did not have any involvement in, or responsibility for, strategic planning in relation to the school. I have little, if any, useful knowledge of the topic of strategic planning at the school.

Other staff

16. I have outlined my oversight of staff for Inverleith House in the supervision section below. As Head of Mathematics, I oversaw the work of all the Mathematics teachers by visiting lessons and monitoring class results carefully. Where a teacher was struggling I advised on ways to improve, whether that was to achieve better class discipline or on better teaching techniques.
17. As Commanding Officer in the CCF, I worked directly with the teachers who led cadets ensuring they had attended appropriate military training courses and watching them at work. I made sure to meet them all individually at least fortnightly.
18. As a member of the Senior Management Team I attended Department meetings of three subject areas (other than Mathematics) to advise if necessary and to keep the Director of Studies abreast of matters affecting each Department. I also carried out annual appraisals for a number of colleagues, gathering evidence by watching lessons, talking to those whom they worked with and listening to pupil opinion. I would prepare a draft written report which was shared in a discussion with the colleague and, after agreeing any amendments, pass final copies to the colleague and to the Headmaster.

Recruitment of staff

19. I was involved in the recruitment of mathematics teachers, the Inverleith House Secretary and the Boarding Housemaster for Inverleith House during my time at the school. Once a post was advertised and following letters of application accompanied by a CV those who were to be involved in interviewing went through the applications and drew up a shortlist. The shortlist usually consisted of six candidates. After discussion as a group this would be reduced to, usually, three who would be called for interview.
20. The views of at least two referees would be requested. References were expected to cover the experience and suitability of the candidate for the post as advertised. To my knowledge referees weren't actually spoken to. However, this may well have happened for more senior appointments.

Training of staff

21. Prior to arrival I was presented with the school's set of procedures. There were meetings with another Head of Department to discuss management of the Department and answer any questions throughout my time with the school. There were regular in-Service training sessions organised by Senior Management using outside expertise as appropriate. A fully funded programme of individual Continuous Professional Development was in place for all members of staff attending courses and or undertaking study. Topics were agreed with the respective Heads of Department and the Assistant Head in charge of this programme. Over and above my academic training I attended military refresher and update courses as required by the Services.

Supervision / staff appraisal / staff evaluation

22. In my capacity as a Mathematics teacher I was initially overseen by the Head of Department. Later on a system was introduced of colleague review of teaching in class, annual appraisal leading to a feedback meeting with a senior colleague and a written report to the Director of Studies and or Headmaster. In my capacity as Head of Mathematics I was monitored by the Director of Studies. Monitoring included detailed analysis of pupil results and individual teacher performance within the Department. There were approximately twice termly Heads of Department meetings.
23. In my capacity as Pastoral Tutor I had a weekly meeting with the Housemaster. In my capacity as Head of Inverleith House there was a weekly meeting with the Headmaster and a further weekly meeting including all senior Housemasters and Housemistresses. There were also monthly meetings with the junior pastoral and class tutors. Upward comment was encouraged during those meetings. Most days involved individual discussions with the boarding Housemaster and Housemistress.
24. In my capacity as Director of Activities I was part of the appraisal system and directly answerable to the Headmaster. In my capacity as a CCF Officer oversight was provided by the Commanding Officer and the School Staff Instructor together with regular visits from the local Cadet Training Team. There were biennial inspections by a senior military officer and an all-arms team of inspectors.

Living arrangements

25. Between 1990 and 1991 I stayed in a staff house in the school grounds. This was on the far side away from any children. Between 1991 and 1999 I lived in Malcolm House which is a house beside Inverleith House. That House was latterly attached to the new extension via a door connected to the corridor next to my office. Between 2000 and 2003 I lived in a staff house outwith the grounds. I was approximately 500 metres from the school. Between 2003 and 2013 I lived in my own house in [REDACTED] which was approximately 30 kilometres from the school.

26. The Headmaster resided in the main house by the school main building. House staff, which included the Housemaster or Housemistress and their family, resident tutors and or Matrons lived in their respective boarding houses near to pupil rooms and dormitories. There were other staff in a few staff houses within the grounds to the far side from the pupils. Some staff members stayed in staff houses outwith the grounds. All other staff stayed in their own private properties. Only House staff and the duty tutor, when on duty, had access to the residential areas within the school.

Culture within Fettes

27. To my knowledge, fagging did not exist at all. However, prior to my arrival there had been incidences of bullying. I cannot comment much on specifics of bullying as this was largely just comment from colleagues. From the steps I could see being taken to deal with this issue it seemed that it had been an issue previously.
28. I also became aware that there had been a culture of initiation ceremonies at the school. I learnt about this when a girl in my top year class told me that on her arrival it was quite usual for the senior girls in the boarding house to make the new girls stand in the dustbin and that this was used by them as a punishment. She was put out that SNR [REDACTED] who arrived one year before me, had banned any such behaviour as she felt she had been helped to put up with this ordeal by thinking that her turn to inflict it on others would one day come and now this had been taken away. It led me to the conclusion that if this was the case in a girls' house then no doubt similar occurrences had happened amongst the boys. I was pleased that SNR [REDACTED] had made it quite clear that such actions would not be tolerated.
29. SNR [REDACTED] immediately set about eradicating the culture of bullying and initiation ceremonies after he arrived. There was a clear message from him that bullying of any kind was unacceptable and anti-bullying training including role play put in place within the personal development programme. This was largely very successful and, although there will inevitably be some bullying where children are

assembled in an institution, we worked hard to educate the pupils as to why this occurred and how to deal with it as victim, perpetrator or bystander.

Discipline and punishment

30. For misdemeanours in class this could lead to detention, which was recorded electronically and monitored by the Director of Studies. Alternatively, a child who was being disruptive in any way might be asked to stand outside the room in the corridor until the class was properly settled again. When that occurred the member of staff would go and speak to the child and the child would usually be readmitted at this stage following an apology.
31. Most other things would go direct to the House staff, possibly via the child's personal tutor, who had a range of options from extra duties to restrictions of privileges. More serious matters would go to the Deputy Head or Headmaster. This could lead to suspension or possible expulsion.
32. Discipline was generally minor but, on rare occasions, could involve a "gating" for a few days. Gating meant a child's location was regularly monitored and they were not allowed out on weekend outings. For senior pupils this would also mean they were restricted to the school grounds because the juniors were not allowed out unaccompanied anyway. For something very serious the pupil would have to see the Headmaster and might be suspended. I only recall this happening once during my time in charge of Inverleith House.
33. There was a clear set of school rules, a copy of which was given to all pupils and staff and published on a school noticeboard. Any additional specific House measures would be similarly notified but within the House setting. As with Inverleith House, the key ingredient in the school more widely was to maintain a happy and secure environment within which the children could flourish. House staff kept records of their own internal matters and the Deputy Head and school office kept records of anything further.

34. At Inverleith House I used a group of the oldest pupils, comprising of prefects, to monitor those areas where staff would not usually be found. They could not issue punishments, but reported to staff. Before commencing their duties we took pupils who were due to become prefects on a residential training weekend. As described above, I met with these pupils weekly to obtain their feedback. The senior school also had a system of carefully selected prefects from the top year group who could issue minor punishments and whose actions were monitored by the Deputy Head.

Day to day running of the school

35. I was involved in the day to day running of the school when I was in charge of Inverleith House and on the Senior Management Team as Director of Activities. I have set out my role for Inverleith House above. As Director of Activities I organised the activity programme for all Senior pupils on Wednesday afternoons and met with the other members of the Senior Management Team weekly to discuss wider issues relating to the running of the school.
36. I can be confident that, if any child was being abused or ill-treated, it would have come to light at or around the time it was occurring. There were so many avenues open to pupils to communicate concerns and generally excellent relationships between pupils and their class teachers, personal tutor and other House staff.

Concerns about the school

37. To my knowledge the school was never the subject of concern, in school or to any external body or agency, or any other person, because of the way in which children and young people in the school were treated.

Reporting of complaints / concerns

38. There was a complaints and reporting processes in place if any child in the school, or another person on their behalf, wished to make a complaint or report a concern. Although informal I believe it to have been very open and comfortable for any child to use.
39. There was one parent who complained by the name of Mrs QWH, née QWH. She had a long connection with the school. Her father was a member of staff and [REDACTED] at some time prior to my appointment. When I first arrived Mrs QWH made a great show of befriending my wife and me but things changed when her son, [REDACTED], was expelled for drug taking. She became extremely upset by this as the family arrangement was apparently that she had care of the three children during term time and they went to their father in Switzerland during the holidays. I understand her initial assumption when [REDACTED] was expelled was that he would be able to attend the Edinburgh Academy as a day pupil but the Academy refused to accept him and so he went away to another boarding school which meant she saw him much less frequently.
40. Mrs QWH's son being expelled seemed to drive her over the edge and she became very antagonistic toward the school including on one occasion standing at my door screaming abuse at me for almost twenty minutes one weekend afternoon when I refused to support her in taking action against [REDACTED] Housemaster. This was followed by complaints concerning alleged staff and pupil behaviour towards her daughter BPR, née BPR, and waging a malicious campaign of smears against the school through the newspapers.
41. Mrs QWH's complaints usually took the form of letters regarding things to do with her daughter. The letters were addressed to me, as the girl attended Inverleith House as a day pupil, or sent directly to the Headmaster. Copies of these letters and the replies written by myself and the Headmaster at the time were filed in the school office.

Trusted adult / confidante

42. There were people in the school that a child could speak to about any worries they had, including concerns about the conduct or behaviour of other children, staff or others, towards them. Every child had a personal tutor, other House staff, House matrons, the school Chaplain, the school doctor or nurses or, indeed, any other member of staff with whom they felt particularly comfortable. In more recent times an independent school counsellor was appointed.
43. While in charge of Inverleith House I received various reports of incidents of pupil bullying which enabled me to step in as required and adapt or repeat the anti-bullying training if it was helpful to do so.

“Abuse”

44. I can't recall during my period of employment with the school whether the school had a definition of “abuse” that it applied in relation to the treatment of children at the school. I do not think it seemed necessary with the concept in my experience being well understood by colleagues.

Child protection arrangements

45. There were regular in-Service training sessions many of them aimed at understanding child protection issues. In-Service training was delivered either by experts in the field or by senior colleagues recently returned from specialist courses. Such training especially covered how the legal requirements and expectations changed over time.
46. There was a clear line of communication, usually beginning with the child's personal tutor or Housemaster or Housemistress and involving the Deputy Head and or one of the appointed Child Protection staff at an early stage. Part of the training given to all staff involved understanding how to receive and record any sensitive information

which was revealed in discussion with a pupil. There was a requirement to immediately pass any information regarding possible abuse or ill-treatment on to the appropriate personnel.

47. Understanding of child protection issues was acquired through the training given, the appointment of Child Protection staff, comprising of one male and one female member of staff, and the open and generally friendly nature of staff pupil relationships at the school. Also, the fact that very little of a pupil's life in the environment could be wholly private. This made both the opportunities less likely and the chances of any such inappropriate behaviour remaining unknown to others.
48. I believe this aspect of the school to have been wholly successful. Successive active and committed Deputy Heads kept themselves up to date in this essential aspect of school life and worked hard to ensure that attitudes throughout the school had quality care at the forefront.

External monitoring

49. There was a formal school inspection which, I think, was in 1995. It was during a period when I was in charge of Inverleith House. Inspectors spoke with the children, individually and in groups. Staff were not usually present. The inspectors did speak to me. The inspection included the lead inspector spending part of the weekend in the junior boarding house talking informally to the children and studying the way we conducted training for the prefects. Feedback was provided to me by the lead inspector. He made a point of speaking to me just before he went home and said how very impressed he was with how happy the children were and suggested we considered publishing our prefect training course.

Record-keeping

50. When I arrived at the school all records were pen and paper but as the years passed the school became increasingly up to date electronically. After that point communications, reporting and record-keeping were all done on the internal computer network. Disciplinary and personal information was held by the school office and House staff. Disciplinary and Child Protection information would be passed to the Deputy Head. Academic data was assembled for and held by the Director of Studies together with matters of class discipline. Letters and information regarding serious allegations were held on staff or pupil files by the school office.
51. I recall that the records for Fettes Junior School when I took over were almost non-existent. This may have contributed to the Headmaster's desire to incorporate the junior wing more closely into the main college.

Investigations into abuse – personal involvement

52. The only occasion when I was personally involved with an investigation into abuse at Fettes surrounded allegations made against a member of staff called William, or Bill, Stein. I have set out my involvement towards the end of this statement.

Reports of abuse and civil claims

53. I have been involved in the handling of reports to, or civil claims made against, the school by former pupils, concerning historical abuse. There is currently an ongoing, in my view spurious, claim of abuse being alleged by BPR against the school in relation to Bill Stein and two other former members of staff. This is currently being dealt with by the school's lawyers. The school may believe, as I do, that these claims are an extension of the malicious campaign against the school waged by BPR's mother, Mrs QWH.

54. I am saddened that [BPR] feels she has been sufficiently affected by alleged incidents of abuse whilst at the school to justify making a claim when, in my view, the only abuse that she ever suffered during that period was entirely due to the actions of her mother who made her behave in a way that was always going to make [BPR] very unpopular with other pupils and made easy relations with her teachers difficult to sustain.

Police investigations / criminal proceedings

55. I did become aware of police investigations into alleged abuse at the school. The police were investigating allegations made against Bill Stein. I know nothing of the school's response having retired some time earlier. I gave a statement to the police in 2015. As no trial ensued, I assumed the police had unsurprisingly taken the view that there was no case to answer. I have never given evidence at a trial concerning alleged abuse of children cared for at the school.

Specific alleged abusers

William "Bill" Stein


56. Bill Stein was the swimming coach for junior and senior pupils, taught diving to senior pupils and, being ex-Navy, was a CCF Navy Officer. In September 1992 we received complaints from the older junior girls regarding his behaviour. I have always believed Bill acted with the best of intentions, keen to ensure as many children as possible became competent swimmers, that they enjoyed swimming lessons and did not deliberately dawdle whilst changing after swimming to make themselves late for the next lesson. However, he had formed habits which were not appropriate and the complaints were that in junior swimming sessions he entered the girls' changing room whilst they were changing and chased the children in the pool during free swimming time pretending to be a submarine and nibbling at their toes.

57. After consultation with the Headmaster, I spoke to Bill about this. He was genuinely taken aback that his behaviour was upsetting the children but felt it had been necessary to go through the girls' changing room to hurry them along to their next lesson, especially as the girls with long hair used the excuse of taking a long time drying it, and that the "submarines" game was intended to make the free swimming time fun.
58. I gave Bill a verbal warning requiring him not to enter the water whilst junior girls were in the pool except where necessary for safety reasons, to ensure he was never alone in any part of the pool premises with just one of the girls and not to enter the girls' changing room while they were present except to deal with an accident or emergency.
59. When further complaints were received in June 1995 in relation to Bill's behaviour, which indicated he was not following these guidelines, I held another meeting with him and insisted he sign up to a set of formal written instructions as to how he must conduct himself in and around the pool. Bill said that he would feel unable to teach swimming under those restrictions and I believe left at the end of that term which was soon afterwards.
60. It is my firm belief that Bill never knowingly or intentionally abused any children. He was acting for what he saw as the best of reasons but which was carried out in a way that was not acceptable and upset some of the pupils.

Helping the Inquiry

61. It is important to ensure those recruited to a school and who will be in a position of caring for children are mature, responsible and well-adjusted adults with a strong moral compass. It is essential to have regular training sessions to keep staff up to date with current legislation and practice and to learn from experts and others working in the field about the pitfalls to be avoided.

62. No quantity of rules and regulations can ever replace the application of common sense in caring situations. Whilst knowing the rules and being familiar with examples of good practice are clearly important, there is a balance to be struck between sensible guidance and an excess of bureaucracy for the sake of making everything seemingly accountable.
63. The system within an institution should, without generating a feeling of having someone constantly looking over your shoulder, include mentoring from an experienced colleague and easy availability of advice if needed as well as periodic assessment and honest constructive feedback regarding performance. The focus of this should be on ways to improve rather than merely criticism of failings.
64. No environment will work well without trust between senior staff and junior practitioners to do their job and crucially between those cared for and their carers. This has to be earned over time by the development of a good working rapport at all levels.
65. I have no objection to my witness statement being published as part of the evidence to the Inquiry. I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed..........

Dated..... 09 March 2021