

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Dr Michael Gibson BSc (Hons) Physics, MEd Psych, PhD Psych

Support person present: No

1. My name is Dr Michael Gibson. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1945 and I am 72 years old. At present I work for the World Bank as a consultant in Kuwait and Sri Lanka.


Career and responsibilities

2. I qualified in 1968 with honours in physics then worked as a teacher in Queen's Park Secondary School, Glasgow. I then did an MEd in psychology and transferred to Lanarkshire in 1971 where I initially worked with children who were having difficulty and had been excluded from school.
3. Between 1971 and 1982 I was a psychologist with Lanarkshire Council. I was a senior psychologist working in the upper ward in Lanarkshire covering places like Carstairs, Biggar and Carnwath.
4. In 1982 I was promoted to Deputy Principal Psychologist in Edinburgh and in 1989 I became the Principal Psychologist in East and Midlothian. A few months later I transferred to HM Inspectorate of Schools.
5. In Lanarkshire at that time were several hospitals which dealt with mentally handicapped children. In 1974 the law changed which gave all children the right to an education. This was the Education (Mentally Handicapped Children)(Scotland) Act 1974.

6. Prior to 1974 there were 3 categories grading mentally handicapped children. "Educable" which meant they had an IQ of roughly 55 to 70 which meant you went to a special school; "Ineducable but trainable" which meant they had an IQ of roughly between 45 and 55 which meant you went to a junior occupational centre; and "Ineducable and untrainable" which meant they had an IQ of 45 or less and were outwith the responsibility of the education department and were the responsibility of the social work and health services.
7. In effect they were trainable if they were toilet trained and could go to a junior occupational centre. They were deemed untrainable if they were not toilet trained.
8. Many mentally handicapped children were in long-stay hospitals. The hospitals were the responsibility of the health boards.
9. One of my jobs, after the law changed, was to go round the hospitals and assess the children for education.
10. Several of the children were lying in cots with very little stimulation and many of those looking after them had little in the way of skills to help stimulate the children or progress their language. One of the moves we made was to put teachers in these hospitals to help with the stimulation of such children with the aim being to take the children out of such settings. This was happening all over Scotland at this time.
11. St Charles Institute for Mentally Handicapped Children was an institute run by a religious order of nuns. At this time we were institutionally naïve about the issue of child abuse. The place was run by nuns and, as such, we thought the children would be in safe hands. The children themselves, because they were intellectually challenged, would not be able to say if abuse had taken place.

12. We would not know if abuse had taken place unless we saw obvious physical injuries. I was not aware of any problems there and, in fairness to the nuns, they did not insist on sitting- in during any examinations. I had no concerns about what was happening at St Charles.

13. Secondary Institutions - to be published later



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15. My responsibility at St Charles hospital was simply to assess the children for education. At Ridgepark school I was assessing those going into and leaving the school. I was part of a committee that looked at the progress of all the children.

16. To be admitted into a special school in those days there were three professionals involved these being a psychologist, a medical officer and a report from the school where the child was attending.

17. At the hospital I had no responsibility for the placement of children. Some were there because their parents couldn't look after them. These days such children would likely be in foster care or a children's home.

18. I have no recollection of dealing with Smyllum Orphanage though I am sure I would have been there as it came under Lanark Council. If I was there I would have written up notes in case files though I don't know where such notes would now be. These notes would cover both residential and non-residential children for any school we attended.

19. Stanmore House residential school wasn't a local authority school but was run by the Scottish Council for Spastics (now Capability Scotland) though local authorities did pay for children to go there.

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Secondary Institutions -

I was encouraged by the Inspectorate to provide psychological services. We would offer our services and advise places to approach us if they had concerns about emotional or behavioural difficulties.

21. Children did not come to see me. I always went to see them in their normal settings. I have plenty of recollections about St Charles and Stanmore but I just can't recall Smyllum. It is possible that Smyllum didn't take up our offer of psychological assistance.

22. Records would have been held at Clydesdale Street, Psychological Services, Lanarkshire From 1975 onwards I was in Strathclyde but, prior to that, it was Lanarkshire County Council. Strathclyde was regional and would have been my employers from 1975.

23. The 1975 Children Act was a significant sea-change in my professional life whereas the 1968 Social Work (Scotland) Act was already in place and I had absorbed it as the normal way of working.

24. We worked hand in hand with the Education Department, the Health Board and Social Work.

25. The function of the Medical Officer was advising on the child's medical condition. You couldn't place a child in a residential school without the support of the Medical Officer.
26. Child Guidance was established in 1945 and later became known as Psychological Services though I'm not sure in which year the change occurred. Child Guidance was not an appropriate title as it suggested the child needed guidance but it wasn't always the case that it was the child that needed guidance.
27. I did have children who ran away referred to me while I was a psychologist, and visited such places, but I don't recall it as a significant problem. If I did speak to such a child I would explore the underlying problems as to why the child had run away.
28. It was a problem we took very seriously due to the obvious risks to children who ran away.
29. Approved schools didn't come under the responsibility of the local authority at that time.
30. In 1982 I got promoted to Depute Principal Psychologist in Edinburgh under Lothian Regional Council. I was doing a similar job as the one in Lanarkshire though from a more senior post. I was still out and about visiting schools and working with children and families.
31. There were about 30 special schools around Scotland, for children with special educational needs (e.g. for autism and children with behavioural problems). The Scottish Education Department had a list of school types and "List D" was a list of schools dealing with children who had had involvement within justice system.

32. I was a psychologist in Lothian from 1982 to 1989. I can't say that I had any concerns about the way the children were treated in residential schools. I did get to speak to them on their own, to look at their living quarters and where they went to school. By that time we were more aware of how things could go wrong in respect of children in care.
33. We may have been naïve in the past at how safe we saw children who were in care especially those in religious orders. We were never given any training in the 70's as to how to be aware of abuse. It wasn't on the national radar. Training in such things started maybe in the 80's because there was more publicity about it and schools were becoming more aware of it.
34. I can't say I saw any great differences in the way schools dealt with children in the 70's and the 80's though they did have to deal with some very violent children, especially boys. The schools did have protocols in place to deal with such children.
35. In 1989 I joined Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Schools and I was there for about eleven years. I had an inspection function. Nisbet Gallagher was the Senior Chief Inspector. In 2000 there were problems with the SQA examinations and the Inspectorate became an agency.
36. I transferred from the Inspectorate in 2002, approximately, to join the Education Department in The Scottish Government and worked closely with ministers advising on policy.
37. There are seven grant- aided schools which the Government part-funds. These are Stanmore House, Lanarkshire run by Capability Scotland Corseford House, also run by Capability Scotland; East Park Home, Glasgow; Donaldson's School for the Deaf, Linlithgow; Royal Blind School, Edinburgh; Harmeny School, Edinburgh; and Scottish Centre for Motor

Impairments, Cumbernauld. All are run by Charities, Trusts or Boards of Governors.

38. Roughly 60% of the funds for these schools was paid for by the government. The government didn't run these schools but a civil servant usually sat on the board of governors or education committee.

39. From 1989 to 2000 I was involved in inspecting all types of schools from nursery to secondary, from institutions to hospitals and basically anywhere where the education of children was involved.

40. My job was to inspect educational provision but we would also look at the care regimes. We would go out in the evenings and meet the children, speak to the staff, look at the log books etc.

41. By this time we had training on child care and it was light-years from what we were aware of in the 70's. By now we were getting more involved in communicating with the children and would hold focus groups without the staff. Nowadays, a care inspector would attend with us to carry out these duties.

42. In 1989 I did inspect secure units as part of my remit. By that time there was more information coming out about sexual abuse with more cases of it being reported especially in places run by religious orders. We were on the lookout for it as our worst case scenario was to give a place a clean bill of health only for a case to be reported shortly thereafter.

43. For this reason we examined everywhere very closely. This included private boarding schools like Fettes etc.

44. At the end of the day, despite how much you inspect a place, a lot of it comes down to a requirement of the children to speak out.

45. Social Work came round with us when examining schools. I don't recall when that started as I do recall going on visits without a social worker. We enjoyed the presence of a social worker because they brought with them a good level of expertise and legal background.
46. By then I was a civil servant and we were sensitive about grant-aided schools. Much of their funds were coming from the government yet the government had no direct control but, instead, were relying on the board of governors to provide effective governance.
47. In a sense one of the things the inspectors would try to do would be to look at the processes and systems in the schools. For example, was there a process in place for the students to get their complaints across?. We would look for several sources of evidence in relation to what had occurred to ensure that any conclusion we came to was evidence- based.
48. If somebody had asked me in 1989 about my attitude to the care of children in residential care, based on what I had to deal with, I would say that by and large it was positive. I didn't see any systematic abuse though, yes, things could have been better.
49. To me, when considering systematic abuse in a residential school, I would be looking at the following factors. It is unlikely I would have walked into a school and seen children walking about with injuries but you can pick up on atmospheres, the quality of interaction, their humour, does it look as if the child can interact, the ethos of the school. Do the children look healthy? Do they get out and about? Are visitors welcome? Is the school open about what they represent? How do they communicate with the local community or do they keep themselves to themselves?
50. Such assessments are probably a modern way of looking at things and perhaps would not have been considered in the 70's. What you are doing is trying to look at it through a child's eye so it's not just about the curriculum.

51. If you are working with a group of children or an individual child you have to set out a way of communicating. At the same time you have to be able to obtain feedback if you become aware of something that endangers their safety.
52. This means trust has to be built, in case it is necessary to take things further. You don't just ask about negative things, you look for positive aspects of the school. You ask open questions to allow them to express themselves more openly. You also have to engage with the parents either face to face or via questionnaires.
53. Our Inspectorate system is recognised around the world as a good role model. I believe the Care Inspectorate are now using the same sort of grading system which helps. Internationally, we have a good reputation.
54. As an inspector, I would look into complaints and complaint processes. This would include where a school had no complaints at all though that would cause me concern as it would suggest perfection which would be unlikely. Some schools I have seen have a tremendous way in which they communicate with the children and how such communication is noted.
55. If I was now going into, for instance St Charles hospital, I would have a totally different approach. If people who were there in the 70's told me now that they had had a good time and that there had been no unreasonable treatment of children, then I would be asking "Did none of the children EVER complain? Did no member of staff EVER have a problem? How did the school interact with the local community? Were the children ever taken out? Was it a welcoming school?".
56. I don't recall the names of the priests in St Charles though I recall meeting some of them.

57. I would say the specialist schools that I was visiting would have had roughly 30-40 children in each place. They wouldn't have been like the big children's homes which could have had hundreds of children.

74. I have no objection to my witness statement being published as part of the evidence to the Inquiry and I would be willing to give evidence at the Inquiry if asked. I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed.....

Dated..... 22 December 2017