

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Gareth Huw EDWARDS

1. My name is Gareth Huw Edwards. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1958. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Background

2. I have achieved O and A levels, a Honours Degree and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). I began my teaching career at King Edward's School in Birmingham. Following five years as head of department in Bolton School, I worked as Vice Principal in Newcastle under Lyme School. In 1996 I became the Rector and Principal at Morrison's Academy in Crieff, Perthshire. The last post I held was Principal of George Watson's College in Edinburgh. I am now retired.

Employment with Morrison's Academy, Ferntower Rd, Crieff, PH7 3AN

3. I became Rector and Principal of Morrison's Academy in August 1996 and held that role before moving on to become Principal of George Watson's College in July 2001. I was appointed by the Governing Body of the school to Morrison's Academy. The recruitment process involved an initial interview, three references requested and taken up then a final round interview in March 1996. On appointment I applied and received membership to the General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS). My first year in post was regarded as a probationary period with the school.
4. During my time at Morrison's Academy I was responsible to the Governing Body. I reported to them at regular twice-termly meetings. The equivalent of my line manager was the Chairman of the Governing Body with whom I had regular contact

on at least a monthly basis, if not weekly. He undertook an annual appraisal of my performance.

5. I attended training courses and seminars, mainly run by the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) and by the Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference (HMC).
6. There was no formal induction training for the post of Rector and Principal. However, for a few years while I was in post, my predecessor remained an employee of the school. He worked abroad on the recruitment of boarding students. He provided me with a degree of support as I took up post.

Policy

7. As Rector and Principal, I had overall responsibility for all aspects of the school, including residential care of pupils and advising the Governing Body on policy. Given the passage of time, I cannot be certain of specific wording of policy nor of changes made. I presume that the school may well be able to furnish historic copies of policies pertaining to this period. Changes would have been made in response to changes advised through professional bodies such as SCIS and in response to legislation being enacted. Policy would also be revised in response to the findings of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMI) inspection.

Strategic planning

8. As Rector and Principal, I had overall responsibility for strategic planning for the school. Providing a safe and nurturing environment for the pupils, both day and boarding, was always central to strategic planning. I cannot recall any specific focus on abuse.
9. At the time, the school's roll was falling, especially in respect of boarding students. The school was increasingly reliant upon overseas students, overwhelmingly from

the Far East. As such, cultural and religious aspects of the young people in the care of the school were very much part of the strategic planning for their welfare.

10. Much of strategic planning revolved around financial aspects and the need to rationalise boarding house provision to maintain economic viability. Additionally, I was charged with revitalising the day-pupil numbers from the local environs and a wider Perthshire and Stirlingshire catchment area.
11. I was aware of the pressures on all boarding schools in the eighties and nineties, given the reduction in the need to educate children of those in military service abroad, and the changing social attitudes towards sending one's children away from home to be educated. I also knew that Morrison's Academy had, like others, recruited significant numbers of students from the Far East. In this regard, Morrison's had been particularly successful, so much so that the balance of Far East students greatly outweighed those from the UK and other countries in Europe and other parts of Asia, making it less attractive to potential UK parents in particular.
12. Boarding numbers had been dropping during the previous decade and, when I arrived, one boarding house had already been mothballed and was sold quite soon after. During my tenure, we rationalised again and moved the boarding students from two single-sex houses into the remaining two single-sex houses, Dalmhor and Academy House.
13. One major factor in the reduction of boarding students during my time was the financial crash in the Far East of 1998. This saw the Malaysian companies, which sponsored several students, remove those students with immediate effect.
14. I was not at all surprised when the school decided to discontinue boarding in 2007. I'm very confident that, had I still been in post at that time, this would have been the decision also. Morrison's was not a fully-fledged boarding school in the 'public school' mould. Therefore, the competitor schools, such as Glenalmond and Strathallan always had an advantage in the breadth and depth of provision that could be offered as the majority of the school population was resident throughout the week and the weekend.

15. Curriculum planning involved maintaining a dual stream of Scottish qualifications alongside English A Levels which were required by students studying at the school under sponsorship by major Malaysian companies

Other staff

16. As Rector and Principal, I had overall responsibility for the management of all staff employed by the school. The management and recruitment of support (non-teaching) staff was delegated to the Bursar. Management of staff was further delegated to the Head of the Primary School and to the Heads of academic departments.
17. Staff who reported directly to me included the Bursar, the Deputy Rector, the Head of the Primary School and the Assistant Rectors. All those roles constituted the senior management team. Supervisory management of the boarding houses and their staff was delegated to the Deputy Rector who then reported on boarding house matters to me and the senior management team.

Recruitment of staff

18. My Personal Assistant (PA) and I acted as the HR department for teaching and child-contact posts. This included boarding house staff with responsibility for the care of children. I took part in interviews for all such appointments with letters of appointment coming under my signature.
19. All appointments, either externally or internally, required letters of application, CVs and names of referees. Recruitment would involve heads of department and at least one member of the senior management team in addition to myself. There was, in my time, a rationalisation of the senior management team, reducing the number of assistant rectors from three to two. The managerial structure at the heads of department level, however, never changed during my tenure. They constituted the

heads of the academic departments. In the case of the Junior School, there was no middle manager appointed as such, and so the Head of the Junior School acted as the sole manager for the Junior School as well as being a member of senior management.

20. Wherever practicable, some form of observation of candidates, for example teaching a lesson, would take place as part of the process. Often senior pupils would be asked to show candidates around the campus as visitors to the school. Decisions as to who would be appointed were invariably made after discussion between all involved in the interviewing process.
21. References were required in writing. These were expected to cover the previous and current experience of a candidate, their performance and results, their relationships and rapport with their pupils and so on. Latterly, in response to professional guidance, referees were asked to comment specifically on the fitness of a candidate to work with children. On some occasions I would follow up a written reference with a phone call to clarify a point or seek further comment. This was more common in instances where I knew the referee personally.

Training of staff

22. I was involved in training staff, mainly on Inservice Training Days. Sometimes I would be leading on the subject or this was undertaken by other suitable staff or by external trainers.
23. Other than formal appraisal (which I set out below), my role in respect of personal development of staff was more informal. I would visit classrooms to observe teaching and make comments to the teacher afterwards. I would also observe extracurricular activities and give support to the staff running these. In relation to personal matters, being a small school with a relatively small number of staff, some would wish to discuss directly with me issues concerning them whether professional or personal.

24. I do not recall the existence of any written policy directly relating to personal development of staff other than this being an intrinsic element of the appraisal schemes we ran.

Supervision / staff appraisal / staff evaluation

25. I was assigned the role of appraiser of all members of the senior management team and my PA. Middle managers were assigned to the other members of the senior management team. During my tenure, the appraisal scheme was reviewed in consultation with the staff and subsequently revised to make it more manageable and accepted by staff. It was still a relatively new concept in the world of school education. The teaching profession was coming to terms with the need to be, and to be seen to be, more accountable whilst accepting the professional development benefits of such schemes.

Living arrangements

26. I lived close to the school in the town in my own private residence. I was not a resident on school premises. Only boarding house staff, consisting of both teachers and non-teaching staff, and janitors were resident in school-owned properties (the janitor's lodge and the boarding houses).
27. Boarding students lived in the boarding houses which were off-campus in converted Victorian villas or in the purpose-built 'Academy House'. Morrison's Academy's historic status as a boarding school differed from many which were single-campus establishments with teaching and residential facilities. Nor did the school run a timetable in the same manner i.e. lessons continuing into the evening for all pupils (including day pupils). Rather, the model was that pupils were all day-pupils who went home at the end of the day. In the case of boarding pupils to their homes within the town.

28. Only boarding house staff and boarding students had direct access into the residential areas. Senior staff, notably the Deputy Rector and the Bursar, would be frequent visitors to the residences in the course of their duties but were required to report to house staff on arrival, often phoning ahead. This protocol was also followed by me when I visited the houses.

Culture within Morrison's Academy

29. Morrison's Academy was a very close-knit community within a small town in a rural part of Perthshire. Everyone knew one another well and it was a friendly environment.
30. The presence of an increasing multi-ethnic mix of students added to the culture and helped broaden the horizons of a mainly local day-school population. For example, the recruitment of many Muslim students resulted in the refectory ordering only Halal food which was prepared for the whole school community. Facilities were provided for students to pray at set times during the day in accordance with their religious observance. At the same time, the school was traditionally Scottish and, given its size, was able to generate a community life of its own. For example, year groups in the senior school had regular ceilidhs in addition to boarding house events.
31. Fagging did not exist at Morrison's Academy.

Discipline and punishment

32. Discipline within the school and classroom environment was the responsibility of all those members of staff involved with the care and welfare of the pupils. Similarly, boarding house staff were responsible for boarding students in the context of their residence in the boarding houses. As necessary, matters would be referred up through the heads of department to senior management (a member of which would have overall responsibility for pupil welfare which also encompassed discipline). Ultimately, where required, matters would be referred to me.

33. There were discipline policies which were reviewed in the light of experience. My memory is not good enough to specify the precise means by which such a policy, and indeed others, were published but I am reasonably confident that pupil and staff handbooks included such. Staff meetings often focused on discussion of current standards of behaviour. Focus group meetings with pupil representatives also allowed discussion on this topic. That said, during my tenure, discipline was not a major issue and relations between staff and pupils were very good. Most instances requiring sanction were relatively minor and mostly related to academic issues. There were more serious occurrences, but these were relatively rare.
34. Records of individual instances requiring the disciplining of pupils would have been kept on the relevant pupils' files. Senior management would discuss instances of ill-discipline.
35. Senior pupils appointed as prefects had a role to play, mainly supervising pupil areas outdoors. Staff were also on duty at such times. Senior pupils were not allowed to issue any sanctions other than reporting pupils and or misbehaviour to staff.
36. Senior boarding students were appointed to act in a leadership role within their respective houses and undertook certain duties under the supervision of boarding house staff. However, I do not think they were allowed to issue sanctions.

Day to day running of the school

37. As Rector and Principal, I had overall responsibility for all aspects of the school. The detailed day-to-day running of the school was mostly delegated to other staff but, being a small community, I was able to maintain a close awareness of procedures and the daily programme for the school.
38. A major aspect of my role was to be a visible presence around the school. Thus, I participated as much as possible in the daily routine, especially at lunchtimes when I would regularly walk the campus and after school observing and supporting

extracurricular activities. My involvement with boarding house activities would generally be at weekends.

39. I am confident that any abuse or ill-treatment of a child coming to the attention of staff would have been referred to me. As a small school on a small campus, issues that required investigation or action, minor or major, came to light quickly. The boarding houses had staff presence throughout the day and night.
40. As already stated, the school was close-knit and a relatively small community. As within the day school setting, the culture in the boarding houses was one which encouraged students to express their opinions and disclose to staff with whom they felt comfortable. This might be the housemaster or housemistress, their assistants, or a member of the domestic support team. Additionally, the (two) Deputy Rectors with whom I worked, who had supervisory responsibility for the boarding houses, were highly regarded by the boarding students who understood the Deputy Rector's role as confidant.
41. Whilst no-one can be absolutely certain that abuse would not go undetected, an HMI unannounced inspection of the boarding houses gave the school confidence that reasonable safeguards were in place and the school subsequently acted upon further recommendations made. I do not recall the specifics of those recommendations but there may still be a report on file at the school.

Concerns about the school

42. As stated above, HMI inspections raised no concerns regarding the way in which children and young people in the school were treated.

Reporting of complaints / concerns

43. Reporting procedures were in place for pupils to voice concern or make a complaint. The guidance structure in school included heads of year with pastoral responsibility

for their year group with support from senior management. However, pupils were encouraged to speak to anyone with whom they felt comfortable, regardless of status within the staff. Additionally, boarding students could avail themselves of staff at any level within the boarding houses, staff at the school itself, and, as previously stated, the Deputy Rector in particular.

44. I recall that some complaints were expressed but these were not in relation to abuse. They invariably were of the nature of complaining about house rules or disagreements with other students. With the passage of time, I am unable to recall specifics. A record would have been made.

Trusted adult / confidante

45. Boarding pupils had guardians to whom they might go to during school holidays. This was especially important for the majority of them as they were foreign nationals who would not return to their homelands more than once a year. The guardians might be relatives. They were often in some cases older siblings working or studying at university in the UK. They might also be local residents of the town who were happy to take on such a role with the agreement of the student's parents. The appointment of guardians was facilitated by the school but the agreements were made between the guardians and the families of the students.
46. Such guardians would have provided an opportunity for a student to voice their concerns to someone not directly connected with, nor employed by, the school. I do not recall children in practice raising major concerns in this way.

Abuse

47. I cannot recall the wording of the child protection policy at the time I was employed at the school. However, I am reasonably confident that its wording would have followed closely that of the advice provided by professional bodies such as SCIS and

that some form of definition existed. I am unable to answer when the definition of abuse was introduced with any degree of confidence given the passage of time.

48. As professionals in a school environment, all staff would be aware of the need to support children without imposing authority and discipline beyond what would be deemed acceptable. Morrison's Academy had a deserved reputation for being a caring school with good relations between staff and pupils and parents. I believe an understanding of what would constitute 'abuse' was implicit amongst the staff.

Child protection arrangements

49. Guidance on child protection issues would have been given through staff training sessions and relevant handbooks. The child protection policy would have been the cornerstone of such advice.
50. The advice would have been for staff to refer to senior staff any such reporting of abuse whilst providing support for the person disclosing. The inclination of staff would invariably be to seek the advice of, or to pass the matter on to, a senior member of staff. Staff would be allowed to act autonomously and at their own discretion in some circumstances but not when the issue might relate to what could be termed 'abuse' or ill-treatment.
51. In-service training for staff would have been provided to reduce the likelihood of abuse, ill-treatment, or inappropriate conduct by staff, or other adults, towards children at the school. Appropriate staff to pupil ratios would have been applied and situations where one adult would be in the company of a single child would be avoided. I am as confident as I can be that the arrangements worked, given the absence of such disclosures within a culture which encouraged openness.

External monitoring

52. I think the school may have been inspected by HMI in 1997. I am unable to verify this on the HMI website. This would have involved a full inspection of the school and its boarding provision. An unannounced inspection of the boarding provision definitely took place in either 1998 or 1999. The inspections would have included speaking with children, individually and in groups. I cannot recall whether staff were present but HMI practice in this century would be that such meetings would take place without staff present. Inspectors reported their findings to me verbally prior to a written report being published.

Record-keeping

53. Individual pupil files were well-maintained, especially by guidance staff who would record interviews with pupils either individually or in groups. Records were also kept by boarding house staff with cross-reference to pupil files in the school.
54. The record-keeping of the school on my appointment was satisfactory. Given the passage of time, I cannot recall there being a written policy but it may have existed. My judgement was that staff knew their charges well and I believe that relevant records were kept on all instances, of whatever nature, reported by pupils.

Investigations into abuse – personal involvement

55. I was not involved in any investigation on behalf of the school into allegations of abuse or ill-treatment of children at the school or into inappropriate behaviour by staff or others towards children.

Reports of abuse and civil claims

56. I was not involved in the handling of reports to, or civil claims made against, the school by former pupils, concerning historical abuse.

Police investigations / criminal proceedings

57. I did not become aware of police investigations into alleged abuse at the school. I have never given a statement to the police and or the Crown concerning alleged abuse of children cared for at the school. I have never given evidence at a trial concerning alleged abuse of children cared for at the school.

Convicted abusers

58. I do not know of any person who worked at the school was convicted of the abuse of a child or children at the school.


Leaving the school

59. I left Morrison's Academy in July 2001 upon being appointed Principal of George Watson's College in Edinburgh. That was my final role in education before retiring.

Helping the Inquiry

60. I believe that, in the past twenty to thirty years, there has been much greater awareness of the potential for abuse in any residential setting involving children. The populace in general, and certainly professionals in the field, are more aware of the high level of scrutiny that should and must be applied to maintain the safety of children and to prevent abuse.

61. The advent of robust Disclosure agencies has helped ensure that appropriate and safe recruitment is achieved and those choosing to undertake what is a rewarding and valuable vocation do so in the full knowledge, and their acceptance, that such accountability exists for the safety of all, both children and those caring for them.
62. 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..... 11 March 2021