

## **Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry**

Witness Statement of

**Saffy Mirghani**

Support person present: No.

1. My name is Saffy Mirghani. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1995. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### **Early Life**

2. For the majority of my childhood, I was brought up in Newington, Edinburgh. My father is called [REDACTED] and my mother is [REDACTED] both of whom are consultant surgeons. I have no brothers or sisters. My childhood was academically orientated and involved much studying. During primary school, I had the standard, quotidian schedule of school, homework and TV – a pretty normal life.
3. My parents worked most of the time. They settled in Scotland to study at the Royal College of Surgeons and were graduate students when I was born. They had to work strenuously in order to establish themselves as junior medics so as to secure a good livelihood.
4. I attended Towerbank Primary in Portobello, where we lived at the time, and I then moved to St Margaret's School for Girls at the tail end of my primary school years. My father believed that, as a single-sex school, it would be the most appropriate environment. It also happened to be adjacent to our new home in Newington, although that may have solely been a coincidence. I was happy enough and comfortable with the prospect of attending the school.

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## **St Margaret's Newington**

5. We moved to Newington in 2005, however I began attending St Margaret's in 2004. I stayed there until the school closed down in 2010. My experience at the school was fairly pleasant – I have positive memories of that time. I had good relationships with my peers and my teachers. I don't have any complaints in regard to my time there. I vaguely recall sitting an entrance exam upon admission which may have been partially written and partially verbal.
6. There were only a few boarders at St Margaret's and I was a day pupil. It was a fairly small school – there were only forty or fifty girls in my year group. I don't believe that the boarders were treated differently from the day pupils. I did board for a couple of nights, the reason for which I cannot recall, but I do remember that the pastoral staff treated us very well.
7. I believe that the quality of education at St Margaret's was good. I would say that my parents received what they paid for in terms of a solid, private school education with adequate exam preparation for their daughter. I sat my exams a year earlier than most pupils typically would in other Scottish schools. I think that this particular arrangement was introduced in order to provide students with a supplementary year to prepare for their Higher examinations. However, this didn't ultimately happen as the school went into liquidation. I obtained eight 'A' grades for my Standard Grades and Intermediate 1 examinations. An 'A' grade was the highest possible grade that a student could be awarded in the Scottish system – there were no 'A\*' grades.
8. There was only one teacher with whom I had a slight issue. On one occasion during a PSE (Personal, Social and Emotional Education) class we were discussing eating disorders. A white, female pupil was discussing an eating problem which she had developed in relation to her ballet practise. It was a mild form of anorexia. The teacher exhibited a very understanding attitude towards her.
9. Having witnessed this, I felt comfortable enough to share my own issues with eating at the time, however the teacher presented me with a disgusted look and offered no

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words at all. I hurriedly said, "but I'm OK now". She just seemed to have a different approach to us black girls. The teacher was Irish, blonde, in her thirties and a PE Teacher. I would have been about thirteen years old and I wouldn't say this affected me at all at the time.

### **Leaving St Margaret's**

10. There was a camping trip organised by the school, for which I had already packed. My father approached me the night before and told me that the school had gone into liquidation. We did complete the academic year, but with the knowledge that the school was closing down at the end of the term.

### **[REDACTED] Edinburgh**

11. I assume that I discussed with my parents where I would study next, but I have no recollection of it. It was decided that I would enrol in [REDACTED] Edinburgh. I sat a couple of interviews, as well as an exam and, on the same day, I was given a tour around the school. I attended [REDACTED] for one academic year between 2010 to 2011.
12. I don't recall any boarders at [REDACTED] and I believe that all the students whom I encountered were day students. There were 300 students in my year group and I was the only black female student. There was also a black male student and maybe half a dozen students of Asian heritage. I had a good education there: the teaching was of sound quality and a variety of academic subjects and extra-curricular activities were made available to students.
13. [REDACTED] was quite different from St Margaret's in that I had not previously studied with white male students. From the beginning, I became a source of mockery for many of them, although they would have probably called it 'banter'. I was strong willed and so I would stand up to them, which they seemed to deem unacceptable. I feel that a lot of my time during that school year was spent dealing with ridicule and derision directed towards me by many male students, although not all of them.

14. The male students wouldn't usually say anything overtly racist to me, but the fact that the only student against whom they riled was a black female, did speak volumes. On approaching my French class one day, I heard my teacher, a very nice man, speaking about me to another teacher. I don't recall either of their names.
15. He was saying that he believed that the male students were being racist to me and, while racist terms weren't explicitly being used, he felt I was being singled out because of my ethnicity. That can only be an assumption on his part and my own, given the lack of racially-oriented language used.
16. What I did hear was simply inane, puerile language which is perhaps quite standard for how some fifteen-year-old boys speak. I would say that I was singled out, but I don't recall what my emotions were at the time.
17. I told the teacher that I had overheard him speaking about me. I don't remember his precise words, but I do recall him saying he was concerned about how some of the boys were treating me. I don't think there was any subsequent, disciplinary action taken in relation to any of the boys involved.
18. I hadn't thought of the boys' behaviour as particularly racist at the time, but the teacher clearly did. I'm sure that I was annoyed and upset by the boys' behaviour. I would have simply preferred to have been left alone. I actually started to avoid the French classes so as to avoid those involved.
19. I did not discuss this with my parents, although there was one occasion during which the boys did use explicitly racist language and I reported them to staff. It may have happened more than once but it's only this one particular occasion which I recall. I wasn't comfortable with the way in which the matter was dealt by the school.
20. What happened was that I was speaking with a group of the male students when one of them said something offensive, which I now don't clearly recall. My reply was actually racially orientated and was rightly considered by the staff to be inappropriate.

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I think that the boy was partially of Asian heritage and I had said to him something like, "then you must be proficient with Mathematics" to which he took offence – understandably so.

21. The staff were not quick to deal with it and did not seem believe me. They finally arranged a meeting with two members of staff, myself and the boy in question, the following day. At the meeting, in response to any questions directed at him, the male student continually replied, "I can neither confirm or deny". I was given a detention because I had admitted to myself using racially oriented language by saying, "you must be proficient in Maths," while the boy who had directed racist language at me face no punishment, since he had admitted nothing, nor divulged what any of his friends had said since he was also a witness to their behaviour.
22. I thought that the outcome was unfair but I understood they had obviously followed some sort of procedure. I don't recall who the members of staff at the meeting were, other than the fact that they were both blonde women who were not teaching staff.
23. I think that by arranging the meeting for the following day, instead of the same day that the incident transpired, the staff unwittingly afforded the boy involved with some time to formulate his own strategy, although I do appreciate that the staff may have had other commitments that day.
24. I felt my own evidence was given no legitimacy. It was as if my allegation was just discarded because nobody corroborated what I said. Not only was it discarded, but I was the person who was punished. I couldn't understand why they didn't interview the other pupils who had been present during the incident.
25. I told my father about this incident. I had not previously related to him the full extent of the mockery with racial undertones which I had been receiving at the school. My father wasn't critical of the school but more so of the way in which I had dealt with it – he was likely more pragmatic than myself at the time.

26. My father did not raise the matter with the school and I think that he would have preferred that I had involved him earlier, since I don't think that he felt I had the capacity, at the time, to deal with the matter the way in which I should.
27. While not necessarily from the boys, racially orientated jokes were regularly directed at me during my time in [REDACTED]. They varied from female students saying "can I use your make-up? Oh no wait, I can't" to so-called jokes about lynching. I was quite habituated to this sort of behaviour and it had become normalised in my own mind, so it's difficult to say how it affected me at the time. It just made me feel like an outsider simply because I am black.
28. I believe that school had different mechanisms in place for people to speak out, but I never approached anybody.
29. I had to sit more Standard Grades and Intermediate 2 examinations at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] although in different subjects. I again obtained eight 'A' grades.

#### Leaving [REDACTED]

30. The mockery which I experienced from male students, as well as some inter-personal animosity which developed between myself and some female students, caused me to feel so uncomfortable that I decide to leave [REDACTED] after a year. We were afforded a couple of months following our examinations to prepare for our Higher courses, but I told my father that I no longer wished to attend the school and he consented that I could stay at home for that two-month period. I didn't tell him the specific reasons as to why I wanted to leave.
31. The staff didn't ask me why I didn't return for the last two months. One or two teachers might have questioned me about my plans to leave the school generally, but I simply told them that I wanted to pursue the International Baccalaureate Diploma. They did say that the IB programme was to be introduced at [REDACTED] that year, which meant that my argument was not a very strong one, but nobody questioned me further.

## **Fettes**

32. I joined Fettes in 2011. I chose the school because it had a prestigious academic reputation in Edinburgh. I researched Fettes and told my father that I wanted to study there. He was happy to support this and dealt with the relevant logistics. Given that it was my choice to go to Fettes, I was pretty excited about the prospect.
33. I had to sit a number of exams and attend several interviews. I had just turned sixteen. In my year group, there were about 120 pupils, the vast majority of whom were boarders, maybe as many as 80%. I was a day student. Whilst at Fettes, since it is a boarding school, I would spend longer there during the day than I would have at a day school.
34. Fettes is primarily comprised of a very large, striking edifice and the house in which I was allocated, College West, was located in its own wing of the building. There were three female houses in total: Arniston, College East and College West. The male houses were named Carrington, Glencourse, Morden – these are the only ones which I can recall.
35. The Headmaster at the time was Mr Michael Spence. I had an interview with him when I first applied and I would see him around the school at various events. He also signed off on our UCAS applications during his personal meetings with students in the Upper Sixth form.

## **Routine at Fettes**

36. I was required to attend registration in the morning. Prior to this, I would arrive at the school and head straight to a day-room which I shared with other day students. We would leave our bags there, attend registration and then go to chapel, followed by our classes. We attended classes in various buildings depending on the subject. After classes we would do what's known as 'prep' – a period of time allocated for the completion of homework – as well as various activities in the evening which we were expected to attend. There were many extra-curricular events which were largely



academically orientated, so I would often be at school from 8:00 am until 7:00 or 8:00pm.

37. On Saturdays, we also had a morning of classes followed by an afternoon of sports. Sunday was the only day of the week during which I didn't attend at Fettes. The sport activities were not optional but there were a variety of sports available. I tended to go swimming, although I did also get involved with Zumba classes.
38. I recall being censured for failing to exert myself sufficiently during these Zumba classes. The instructor leading the sessions would have to sign a note in order to attest that I had exerted myself sufficiently during the class. I believe that this was arranged by a teacher who was supervising the classes. The other students who seemed to be exerting the same amount of effort as myself didn't receive such a note.
39. I don't recall the teacher's name and the classes were held in a nearby sport's centre to which the school had access. This process of obtaining a signed note in order to attest that I was exerting myself properly continued for several months, certainly for the remainder of the academic term.
40. There was plenty of academic competition between the students at Fettes. This was encouraged by the staff since it seemed to lead to good exam results, which kept the school's grade average high, and consequently maintained the reputation of the school.

### **Prefects**

41. The common thread among all the prefects was that they were well liked by students and staff and were of good academic standing. I think that the students who applied for the position were then interviewed by staff who would eventually decide who obtained the roles. One female student in my house, a pleasant girl but not so academic, who expressed that she was considering to apply for the role was told by our housemistress that she would never be a prefect. This was typical of the blunt approach taken by many staff towards students.



42. QWR was the housemistress in College West. She was a member of the pastoral body and had no academic duties. Her role was to care for the students in College West and to monitor their academic progress. She was in regular communication with the teaching staff.
43. College West consisted of students in the senior school. I don't recall how many girls were in College West but I don't believe that it was a large number. I don't think that boarders and day pupils were dealt with any differently from one another.

### **Abuse at Fettes**

44. Things started to deteriorate from the very beginning. Fettes holds itself to a high academic standard within the context of secondary school education. I believe that I was admitted due to my academic prowess which I had exhibited by obtaining 16 'A' grades in my Standard Grade and Intermediate 2 exams – the Scottish equivalent of GCSEs.
45. The Fettes system is a well-oiled machine which was new to me. The fact that I struggled to acclimatise to their system for whatever reasons, but I think primarily due to my personal disposition, caused the staff and students to rapidly develop a number of negative assumptions about me which led to quite a damaging experience for me at the school.
46. I believe that I did not conduct myself in the way in which they would have liked: I committed small errors, which they obviously deemed rather significant, here and there at first. I wouldn't always complete my homework and sometimes, when I completed my work, it was a bit sloppy. I would also arrive late to class on occasions. These were the small defects in the way that I carried myself which certainly needed to be rectified.
47. However, their response to these blunders committed by a new student was very intense and rather disproportionate to my actions, almost as if they interpreted my

actions as an excuse to unleash whichever biases, whichever horrors they harboured inside of them. In this way, from the very beginning, I experienced that which I can only describe as an almost fanatical hostility from both students and staff. I was only a sixteen-year-old girl at the time.

48. What was strange about the nature of the aggression directed at me was that it wasn't simply exhibited by one or two people. The students and the staff exhibited this behaviour collectively.

### **Students**

49. I endured inhumane treatment throughout my two years at the school. From my earliest time there, I recall that a white male pupil refused to take a pencil from me during class because I am black. He didn't want to touch me or have contact with me simply because I am black and instead, I had to pass the pencil to a white female student sitting nearby, from whom he did accept it. He was perhaps the most racist student in the year group, which is saying a lot. His name is [REDACTED]
50. On another occasion, when we were on a school coach en route to an inter-school event, he refused to sit next to me, despite the fact that the only remaining seat available was next to him, because he refused to sit next to any black person. The other students on the bus accommodated his proclivity by reshuffling themselves so that I would have to sit elsewhere.
51. I remember at the leavers' ball during our final week of school, I was wearing diamonds that my mother had lent to me and a student asked me if I had stolen them. His name is [REDACTED] This may not sound like a very significant event but it was quite emblematic of the nature of the treatment which I received at Fettes.
52. On a daily basis, both overtly and covertly, students and staff alluded to what they considered to be my inferior intellectual capacity. The students commonly referred to me as stupid, dumb, idiot and retarded. The staff didn't use these words, however it was clear that they agreed with this assessment due to the way in which they treated

me. The students would openly express their belief that I was not performing well because I am black. When I would assert I am Scottish, I would be ridiculed by some of the male pupils.

53. When I told a student that my former school had gone into liquidation, he asked me if I had arrived from a mud hut. Another student told me that I was "cotton picking black". I remember that a student called me a monkey in front of our teacher and the other students. The teacher certainly heard the comment but said nothing. I was at a swimming session once during athletics when a student made the joke to me, "What do you call one black person on the moon? A problem. What do you call all black people on the moon? Problem solved".
54. Another student said that he thought Africa's greatest contribution to humankind was AIDS. Another asked me if I was from Uganda or Ethiopia, but then surmised that I couldn't have been from Ethiopia as I was apparently too fat. Another white pupil told me that I needed to be 'put in my place'. I was asked if a scar on my right eyebrow was acquired due to gang-related activities. A female student whose father taught at the school expressed surprise that I could read when she learned that I intended to read English at university.
55. Another female student asked if my ancestors had been slaves. Male students would point their fingers at me and imitated shooting me. [REDACTED] told me of his desire to attend a particular Scottish university where there exists a society whose members unofficially gather annually during the night in order to throw stones at a statue of Nelson Mandela. Two white male students said that black students were the dumbest students and that Muslims were parasites.
56. I remember that during our senior year when all the students stayed in Craigleith, some were involved in drawing posters during the Christmas period. One drew a black Santa entering a house via the back door. Under it he wrote "Black Santa takes the back door". This implied a connection between black males and anal sex. Not only was that poster not reported, but it was left on the wall for a considerable time.

57. The student boarders occasionally had a weekend off when they could leave the school premises. If a male student had kissed a black girl when the students went clubbing together, this would be the talk of the year group and he would be thoroughly ridiculed.
58. One German student was accused of harbouring romantic affections for me but he was thoroughly offended by this accusation. Once I entered class, he pointed at me and said, "We don't like that in Germany. How could I like that?" One student's father had a black girlfriend which incurred whispers of disbelief. It was even a notable event when some of the students would accept friend requests from black people on Facebook.
59. I know that a lot of these experiences which I'm relating are not necessarily of an extreme intensity. The Inquiry will have heard about experiences much worse than mine, such as physical abuse and things of that nature. I'm not trying to say that what I experienced is the absolute worst, but I just think that these experiences are relevant.
60. I would be sitting in class when students would shift their books and bags so as not to sit near me. One time I told a girl that I would like to have lived in Paris in the 1920s due to the richness of its culture, but she said that I would have been a slave. She said, "You would have been a slave but it's ok, you would have been my slave". Another said I could get disability cheques due to my appearance. On another occasion, a number of white male students were chanting some sort of white nationalistic refrain. I don't recall the precise words but I do recall that the song was of a racial nature.
61. One particularly difficult episode was when I had to take part in a science project. It was mandatory for any student enrolled in the International Baccalaureate to take part in this project. We were to demonstrate that we could work inter-personally with one another in an effective manner. That experience was rather insufferable. One particularly racist student named [REDACTED] seemed to have made it his mission to unremittingly hurl abuse at me over the four days, in front of students and teachers.

He was Eastern European. He was from [REDACTED] Everyone in our year group was familiar with this individual.

62. The project began with a number of students gathered around a computer and laughing at a video of a black man swimming very slowly. Over the next few days, [REDACTED] treated me in an inhumane way. He would say to me, "You should kill yourself. You don't deserve anything. Everybody hates you. You're a waste of oxygen. A homeless person deserves to be in this school more than you". The other students just laughed at these comments. Some remained silent. He told me that I didn't deserve my laptop. The teachers were well aware of the treatment which I was receiving from this boy as they witnessed at least a portion of it. I approached one of them and told her what was happening.
63. I told her that I wanted to leave the group but the problem was that, if I did, everybody in the group would fail their International Baccalaureate programme, which meant that I would be at the receiving end of even worse treatment. I asked if there was any way that I could leave the group without everyone else failing but she said no. I felt that they could have broken that rule just for that occasion, for the reasons I gave, but they wouldn't. She asked me who was bothering me and asked "Is it [REDACTED]?" so she obviously knew what was happening.
64. On the last day, I stood up for myself and repeatedly told [REDACTED] to shut up. The teacher looked at me in fear and surprise that I would speak to this boy in such a way. It was well known that his father is a [REDACTED] I argued back and forth with him and some strong language was used. The teacher simply decided to leave the room without addressing the situation.
65. I hadn't expected anything from this teacher as, on a previous occasion when I had failed to submit my homework, she said, "I don't know what it's like in the country you come from but in his country we have deadlines". I told another teacher about this and she whispered, "Yes, I think she's racist". It was strange to me that it seemed to be accepted, as if it were simply a normal personality trait, that she was a racist.



66. Myself and [REDACTED] continued arguing loudly and other teachers and students could hear us as the door was open. No teachers tried to diffuse the situation or discipline anyone since such a financially affluent student like [REDACTED] would be treated in a special way by the students and the teachers, simply because of his wealth. Any students could treat me anyway they liked, especially if they were wealthy. Months after the project, my biology teacher made a joke about [REDACTED]'s behaviour, so it was very clear they knew what he was doing but did nothing about it.
67. Why did they do nothing? They did nothing because the students would have failed the project, so the year group's grade average would have decreased, which would have been detrimental to the school's reputation, with the potential consequential effect that the school would receive a decreased influx of money as a result of fewer incoming students electing to enrol at the school. The parents would also have complained about their children not entering the universities for which they were paying the school considerable sums of money. I also suspect that the teachers were simply too unconcerned to involve themselves in the situation in order to protect one of their black students. To that extent, by doing nothing, the school sacrificed me.
68. At the time I was sixteen and it was frightening. You are sitting there with students, many of whom are known to be racist, while one of them is aggressively shouting and insulting you. Others are indifferent by sitting there silently or laughing while he's shouting at you saying, "Everybody hates you. You're a waste of oxygen. No one wants you at this school. You should kill yourself". Many of the others just laughed, including a student who had previously called me a monkey.
69. It was a crazy situation. I felt very alone and frightened, though that had certainly been their objective. There was no palpable sense that anybody in the room had any sense of morality. I didn't experience physical harassment, although in the dinner hall I had food thrown in my hair and paper thrown at me during biology class. I made sure that the biology teacher was made aware of the latter incidents but he simply ignored it.
70. In regard to [REDACTED] refusing to be seated beside me on the bus, I found it to be a surreal situation since I hadn't experienced such behaviour in my life. It was a clear

case of overt racism and the fact that the other students accommodated his behaviour was rather strange. It signified a collective bias held by many students. [REDACTED] was an ostensibly well-liked student who boarded at the school.

71. One weekend a student hosted a party, possibly at his home. I would rather not name him since I consider him to be a sound person of good character, as such I don't want his name to be involved in this Inquiry. The students were there drinking. A female student in my year group, whom we all considered to be black, was also at the party. During the event, [REDACTED] started kissing a bust. This girl asked him, "Why are you kissing an inanimate object?" to which he replied, "You're an inanimate object, nigger". Having spoken to her recently, I've now become aware that she doesn't consider herself to be black.

#### **Staff**

72. I've always been passionate about [REDACTED] In every educational institution which I have attended – excluding Fettes – my [REDACTED] teachers and professors had a very favourable opinion of my capacity in the subject. It was different in Fettes where a lot of the staff held many biases, many preconceived notions, towards me. I remember, as part of the IB (International Baccalaureate), we had to complete an [REDACTED] I decided to write [REDACTED] paper and I asked my [REDACTED] teacher, Mr [REDACTED]<sup>QWB</sup>, to supervise me for this endeavour.
73. When I approached him with a number of ideas which had in mind, and a pile of books, he expressed surprise that I read a lot. This surprised me as he had no reason to assume I was not well read, un-educated or ill-informed. On another occasion, every student in the class had to read from a paragraph from a particular [REDACTED] which we were studying at the time. One white male student read out a passage which happened to contain the word "nigger".
74. If that word is used as a part of a literary work, I don't necessarily have a problem with it, but the teacher immediately looked at me and stared at me for several seconds,



which caused some of the other students to look at me as well. It was clear that he quite strongly associated me with the N-word and I felt very awkward. That felt strange as I had been in other academic settings in which that word had been used as part of the educational material, but neither the teachers or students had dared look at me after the word had been uttered.

75. The staff also seemed to have a problem with my academic ambition. They considered me to be too ambitious. My housemistresses had spoken with my teachers about the particular universities to which I intended to apply. These happened to be respectable and reputable British universities. My English teacher sat me down and spoke with me about this fact. He said, "I don't think you're quite at that level" and asked me if any members of my family had coerced me to apply to such reputable institutions.
76. On another occasion, my male [REDACTED] teacher, Mr<sup>QWL</sup> [REDACTED] was explaining the function of the [REDACTED] to us. He then turned to me and said rather bluntly, "that's why you look the way you do". This was quite unnecessary.
77. Another time, during a class about [REDACTED], I asked how many [REDACTED] there were on average in the [REDACTED]. He ridiculed the question. [REDACTED] was in the class and this teacher allowed [REDACTED] to ridicule me after he did so himself. Instead of dissuading [REDACTED] from ridiculing me, the teacher was actively encouraging it.
78. On another occasion, this teacher asked the class a question and chose me to answer it. However, every time I began to respond, [REDACTED] would begin to emit animal noises. After my third attempt to answer the question, I decided to remain silent. [REDACTED] then laughed and this teacher remained silent, failing address the matter.
79. There was also an Art teacher who had said during my absence that I was deluded with regard to my academic ambitions. I became aware of this incident as one of the students who had been present at the time relayed it to me.
80. My [REDACTED] teacher, <sup>QWS</sup> [REDACTED], was an extremely biased woman. Once my performance began to ameliorate, more specifically after I had performed well in two

oral examinations, she announced to the entire class, "If Saffy can achieve this grade any of you can. We didn't think Saffy was capable of this grade when she started at the school". She then said, "Sorry, Saffy", which told me that she was quite aware of the inappropriate nature of her comment. Throughout my two years, she continued to predicted me a low final grade, barely a pass grade, despite my promising scores in various examinations. When I asked her why she did so, she replied, "The oral tests are only 5% of your final grade".

81. It was clear that she was deliberately electing to take a negative approach towards me instead of perceiving my grades as a promising indication of my capacity. I asked her why she had predicted me a low effort score – effort scores are awarded as well as academic scores – since I had clearly made an effort to achieve such grades. She replied, "It doesn't quite make sense to give a student a low academic grade and a high effort grade. It has to be uniform". She had obviously already engineered the situation against me by giving me low academic grade, despite my strong oral examination grades.
82. I had good reason to suspect that her own biases led her to grade my mock examinations harshly. I believe that she afforded me lower grades than a non-biased teacher would have when presented with my papers. I know this because I presented one of my mock examination papers to an external examiner for whose services I paid a fee and with whom I was not personally familiar. The grade which this external examiner awarded me was higher than the grade <sup>QWS</sup> [REDACTED] had given me. The comments which he made on my papers were also significantly less negative <sup>QWS</sup> [REDACTED] comments. One could say that this might have been coincidental, but I would disagree.
83. I find it strange that <sup>QWS</sup> [REDACTED] would fervently berate me in her classes for exhibiting a poor capacity to acquire [REDACTED] when I subsequently attended university in [REDACTED] where I studied [REDACTED] and completed academic modules in [REDACTED] experiencing no trouble picking it up under the helm of professors who had no issues with my performance. I am now [REDACTED] I would like to make it clear that the respectable final exam grade which I obtained at Fettes in the

██████ was not as a result of Mrs QWS ██████ teaching, but despite it. I was also recently informed by a fellow alumnus of the school that he developed PTSD from Mrs QWS ██████ teaching.

84. It was very clear to me that nearly all my teachers thought that I was essentially intellectually incapacitated. While many of the students overtly called me stupid, dumb and idiotic, especially ██████ the teachers also fuelled this narrative and certainly prescribed to this notion which I can surmise from the way in which they treated me.
85. I approached my History teacher for assistance on my essay after lesson. He was usually one of the more humane teachers. However, on one occasion, instead of helping when I asked him for assistance, he expressed a semi-concealed derision towards me. He laughed at me and mocked me under his breath, saying, "Well I don't know if there's anything I can do, there's nothing I can do with you, you know".
86. My ██████ teacher, Mr QWB ██████, is the husband of the ██████. I also believe that he held some pre-conceived biases. On one occasion, he stared at me to ascertain my reaction when another student had said the N word. In my opinion, associated me with the N word. It made me feel uncomfortable and I became aware that the other students had noticed that he was looking at me. I felt unprotected.
87. My male ██████ teacher, Mr QWL ██████ didn't properly handle any of the inappropriate occurrences at all. I don't think that these people are defective because they are racist, they are racist because they are defective. These people are not good people and are very closed-minded, which is why they exhibit racism, misogyny etc.
88. I don't recall the Art teacher's name. She had curly, grey hair. The female ██████ teacher, QWS ██████, should receive anti-bias training.
89. I did not witness ██████ exhibit the sort of behaviour which he afforded me to others. ██████ exhibited bizarre, rude behaviour to others but he was particularly brutal to me. He was once suspended for bullying another student on Facebook.

**QWR – Housemistress**

90. QWR, my housemistress, wanted to arrange a meeting with my father concerning my behaviour and academic standing. She called me into her office and asked me if my father could speak English. I was shocked by this. My father is a Consultant Vascular Surgeon, he has graduated from The Royal College of Surgeons and has worked for the NHS for over 25 years – of course he can speak English.
91. Instead of supporting me and taking a sympathetic approach towards me, she would take me into her office several times a week and strongly criticise me, always putting me down. It almost seemed as if it were a sport for her and that she thoroughly enjoyed it. There were times when I cried in her office and it seemed as if she simply wanted to break me down. She was trying to convince me that I was academically poor, as if she was personally offended by my academic ambitions. It was as if every error I made excited her. Almost every day like clockwork, she would write my name on a board, call me in for a meeting and harshly censure me.
92. She, herself, described the treatment I was received at the school as being punched in the face. She said to me, “You should change your behaviour as you don’t want to keep getting punched in the face every day”. Not only was this unprofessional language but it demonstrated to me that they were aware of what they were doing.
93. On Sport’s Day, I was in my sport’s kit and I was talking to my English teacher. I didn’t realise that QWR was nearby trying to speak to me. She suddenly started shouting at me in a mad pitch. She was quite psychotic. Everyone became silent, an entire pitch full of at least one-hundred-and-fifty of people. I was paralysed and frightened. Nobody has ever shouted at me in that manner. This was in my final year when she wasn’t even my housemistress at the time. I was later informed that even those boys who had been racist towards me felt sorry for me, which tells you how crazily she screamed.

94. QWR would never ask me what was wrong with me, she would just tell me what was wrong with me. She would say, "You're building quite a reputation for yourself at this school, you're making the teachers very angry". When I first arrived there, she said, "Female students never perform as badly as you have, it's always male students. You have set quite a precedent."
95. I was once informed by a fellow female student that she had witnessed QWR eavesdropping on a private conversation between one of QWR students and an individual – I don't recall exactly whom – who had been assigned the task of gathering evaluations from students in Mrs. QWR house regarding her performance as a housemistress. I was told that she apparently had her ear pressed up against the door in order to hear exactly what was being said. This clearly constituted an immoral breach of privacy and perhaps she didn't trust that her students would relate only positive things.
96. During my first academic term at the school when my performance had dropped from that which I was accustomed to at prior schools, QWR put me on what is called supervised invigilation. This means that any free periods which I had were obligatorily to be spent in a room under the supervision of a member of staff. However, even once my performance began to significantly ameliorate, QWR decided to keep me on supervised invigilation. She kept me on supervised invigilation for the entire time that I was in her house – one year. This was apparently not the norm.
97. My fellow students in my house expressed surprise and confusion that she continued to keep me on supervised invigilation since this was apparently not usually done after a student's academic performance begins to improve. I was told by a white, female student in my house whose academic performance was dropping that QWR had given her the choice of supervised invigilation, however I was never given a choice.
98. I was certainly aware of my performance dropping, and it was very largely down to what was happening to me at that school. I felt threatened at that school and I was in a constant state of fear because these people openly disliked me. They possessed a strong animosity towards me which was very manifest. The teachers were ready to



hold any error made against me and criticize me for it, so I lived every day in a state of fear. When one lives in a state of fear and doesn't believe in oneself, one often make more mistakes, sometimes of a greater magnitude.

99. I felt I was sequestered from the other students and I was treated very differently from the beginning. At Fettes, every term during the academic year, for each year group, something called "orders" are produced. This is a ranking of every student in the year group according to academic performance and their effort performance. They don't make the academic performance rankings available to the students but they do publicise the effort performances. Some of the male houses made it public by pasting it on a wall in their houses. It was ranked from 1 – 120. When I first arrived, I was placed right at the very bottom for effort. After this, they jumped on me like a pack of wolves, they had a field day. As such the teachers had decided, 'OK, this is an intellectually incapacitated student.' The students too thought I was the joke of the year. So that's how it all started.
100. I had certainly never been placed at the bottom of any academic list before Fettes. I had obtained sixteen As in my examinations prior to joining the school. It sort of sealed my fate and from then onwards, I was demonised. When I first arrived at the school, I had some personal issues, some familial issues, which perhaps affected my performance. I had also experienced social marginalisation, different forms of racism, in prior academic institutions, so these factors had functioned to mitigate my trust slightly in institutions, causing me to develop a little bit of resentment towards them. Yet despite these struggles, I had still managed to obtain the highest grades that I possible could in my exams taken in prior schools.
101. It also took me some time to acclimatise to the Fettes' system, more so than other students. Undeniably, however, the way in which they treated me had the greatest effect on my academic performance as I was forced to live and function every day with openly racist people who manifestly hated me. The teachers thought I was dumb, the students thought I was dumb – or at least that was the impression they gave me – and when I made a mistake it was magnified to an intense degree, but when I achieved something it wasn't recognised. I was struggling with all of these things. It was

institutional racism that I was experiencing, so I was obviously suspicious of Fettes and their teachers.

102. I didn't really have very many friends. I would hesitate to characterise the girls with whom I was friendly as such since the majority of them regularly made racist comments towards me which were disguised with humour. Very few of the female students with whom I interacted refrained from making such comments. The rest certainly did. I didn't witness anybody else treated that way which made it so strange. I was an outcast and I was singled out. I was told that in the past, students, white students had joined at the same stage that I did and similarly didn't receive good orders. However, they seem to have been forgiven and there wasn't any assumption made with regard to their intellect and they weren't demonised. They were forgiven, I wasn't.
103. When I was at the school, every term one student necessarily received the lowest order but these other students were never afforded the treatment I was afforded. No one ever decided that they were stupid. It was common for pupils to join the school in Lower Sixth they did not receive the treatment I got. The reasons as to why my treatment was such are multifactorial, they did see me as an outsider and maybe it wouldn't have happened so intensely if I had join at a much earlier age – however I would never wish that for myself.
104. [REDACTED] nicknamed [REDACTED] was the female student from the Caribbean who doesn't self-identify as black. She was the only other student in my year group with my skin tone. She was also the only other person who was at the receiving end of inappropriate comments of a racial nature. However, it was definitely not to the degree that I experienced. While she did receive plenty of inappropriate comments, she would take such treatment on the chin and laugh along with the white students who would make such comments towards her, which was clearly her way of dealing with it. She would laugh when they asked her if she ate fried chicken, watermelon and drank Kool-Aid, all clear racist stereotypes.



105. The abuse from [REDACTED] became so intense that I couldn't concentrate on my studies, so I reported him to the housemistress of Craigleith, whose name I don't recall. My father became involved in the matter. He came into the school and it was only then that the housemistress and her husband sat [REDACTED] down and spoke to him. After that [REDACTED] stopped speaking to me but his henchmen took over his duties on his behalf. The housemistress told me that [REDACTED] was informed that he was annoying a lot of people, although apparently they didn't name me specifically. I'm not sure if they did or didn't.
106. I was in Craigleith House one time when a woman, someone who was familiar with or related to [REDACTED] – perhaps his mother – walked in, saw me and exhibited an expression of extreme surprise. However, she quickly composed herself and asked me where the letter boxes were, informing me she wanted to hand a letter to [REDACTED]
107. The teachers tried to prevent me from pursuing the International Baccalaureate and to pursue the A Levels instead because they thought the IB programme was too advanced for me. The French teacher pushed me to study Standard French, instead of Higher French. The Art teacher pushed me out of Art as well. I ended up studying [REDACTED] which I had no interest in and had not previously studied. As such, I didn't perform amazingly at that. I was berated for not performing so well. My male [REDACTED] teacher, whose name I cannot recall, harboured a manifest dislike towards me. He mocked me alongside [REDACTED] in front of the entire class. There was nothing I could do to prevent it since he was a figure of authority. It was humiliating.
108. I remember there was a petite, blonde female geography teacher who was attempting to explain why there were low education rates among women in predominantly Muslim countries on the South Asian continent. Instead of providing us with some sort of educated explanation, she simply said outright, "Muslims don't believe in educating women, they don't believe females should be in school." I thought was a rather ignorant comment to be expressed by a teacher.

## **Mock Slave Auctions**

109. I'm not sure when the tradition of the mock slave auctions initially began but it was a long-standing one arranged by prefects in the Upper Sixth form. It only involved students in the Upper Sixth form. It involved prefects volunteering to auction themselves off as slaves. The student who made the highest bid could ostensibly control the prefect-slave for a couple of days, with the money raised going to charity, so the idea was that this was some sort of charitable event.
110. I didn't attend nor was I aware of the main event during which the students came together to bid on the prefects who volunteered themselves to be slaves. However, I do know that that event took place, though I don't know any of the details about it. One of the reasons as to why I'm aware that the teachers knew of these slave auctions is that the students involved would have had to liaise with the teachers to arrange for a room to use for a couple of hours in order to conduct the event.
111. The headmaster was also aware of these events. I know this due to an alleged incident during which a boy became the master of a prefect and tried to coerce him into performing fellatio. This rumour spread and reached the ears of the headmaster who called the boys involved for a meeting. I was told that, from that point onwards, it was decided that the slave auctions would no longer take place. This was in 2013. They didn't stop the auctions because of its racist overtones, but because there was an allegation of sexual coercion.
112. The year group below mine who graduated in 2014 didn't hold any slave auctions. But the auctions came back to life in 2015. I am aware of this because I have recently spoken with a student from the latter year group. I don't recall hearing about any auctions during my penultimate year but I was aware of them during my final year. The sums of money involved would amount to 10's of pounds.
113. Slaves would be expected to do silly pranks, demeaning activities or benign ones like carrying books etc. I didn't speak to the staff about the slave auctions. What was unnerving about them was that it was people like [REDACTED] who became masters

due to these auctions. There were jokes made that I should have been one of the slaves at the auction. This student named [REDACTED] was told by a female organiser that he couldn't go as far as he wanted to so he demanded his money back. I don't know what it was he had wanted to do.

114. [REDACTED] was a prefect and an organiser. I don't think she was a slave. I think it was mainly male students involved as masters and slaves. Those who were involved would be able to say more about these auctions.

115. There was no teaching in Fettes about religion, diversity etc.

### **Reporting of abuse while at Fettes**

116. Fettes is an institutionally racist establishment. As such, there was nobody with whom I could speak, in whom I could trust to properly combat the abuse that I was enduring. Ultimately, I didn't believe that there existed any scenario in which I could feel safe at Fettes. I was very much alone with my experiences. It was the school's endemic culture of racism that prevented me from disclosing my experiences to members of authority, even those who didn't participate in such behaviour.

117. The Fettes Equality Society is comprised of a number of students who gather to discuss issues concerning equality in the school. I have no further knowledge of the society other than having been informed by the incumbent headmistress of its existence. There also exists a staff-led equality group wherein the teachers apparently meet to discuss these issues.

118. I was astounded to hear that the same sort of students who could get involved in mock auctions could similarly be interested in an equality group. I also find it absurd that the teachers are deemed to be in a suitable position to dictate issues relating to equality and to ensure the welfare of students as it relates to equality, when it has been demonstrated that many of them harbour deep racism within themselves. They themselves require anti-bias training. The school needs the intervention of external persons in order to combat this problem. The Fettes Equality Society is run by students

presently enrolled at the school, however it didn't exist when I was studying there. I couldn't imagine such a group to have existed in that context. Many of the student would have openly ridiculed it.

#### *External Inspections*

119. I wasn't aware of any external inspections. Since the article was published, I have been contacted by other former students who have similarly endured quite dire experiences, mainly Asian students and Black students.

#### **Life after being in Fettes**

120. I continued studying for the IB diploma which I passed respectably, despite the two years of racial abuse which I endured while pursuing it. I pursued my Bachelor's degree in comparative literature at the American University in [REDACTED] between January 2014 and May 2017. Currently, I am pursuing a PhD at UCL London in Russian Studies. More specifically, I am conducting research regarding the influence of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoevsky, on 20<sup>th</sup> century African American literature.

#### *Newspaper Article*

121. I enrolled at Fettes in 2011 during Lower Sixth form and I studied there for two years. I was the only black African female student in my year group and I was subjected to racial abuse throughout my time there. In November 2020, an article featuring my experiences at Fettes was published in The Scotsman and Edinburgh Evening News.
122. I was inspired to go to the press by the "Black Lives Matter" movement and the surge of interest at a global level in the experiences of Black people as it relates to discrimination. Also, I came across an article in the press in which a number of private schools across the country had made public statements committing themselves to

decolonising their curriculums. They stated that they would use this reform as a catalyst for real change and Fettes was one of these schools.

123. I then noticed that Fettes posted a number of pieces on their website in support of “Black Lives Matter” and publicised their various equality societies and committees. I also saw on the website that virtually every third picture was of an ethnic minority student. QWR, my former housemistress and of the pastoral body at Fettes, posted various messages in support of racial equality, particularly black equality, on her Fettes-affiliated page. I found it absurd. I felt that somebody had to speak out about the farce that Fettes was making of anti-racist activism. In my opinion, Fettes is possibly one of the last institutions in this country which has the right to present itself as some sort of modern establishment advocating for equality.
124. I read about former Fettes pupils who had attended the school decades ago, who had suffered horrendous sexual abuse and had contacted the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry. I found some of these testimonies very shocking so I read further into The Inquiry and decided to come forward and give a statement relating to my time at Fettes.

### **Impact**

125. My experiences at Fettes, the unremittingly intense systematic racism that I experienced for two years had a significant effect on me. It had a psychologically traumatic effect. I held the false belief that studying at a university in would present me with the opportunity to flee from such memories and the accompanying painful sentiments, but I was unable to do so. While in I sought professional help from a psychologist, a mental health clinician, in order to overcome these experiences that continued to haunt me during my time in .
126. Subsequently, my undergraduate studies often figured as a period of intense pain as I struggled to overcome this difficult past, however I was ultimately awarded my degree with Honours. Once I returned to the United Kingdom in order to pursue my Master’s Degree at UCL, I was further unaware of the effect that returning to an educational

establishment in Britain after Fettes would have on me. While I suffered emotional distress throughout the programme, I also was very pleasantly surprised to find that my fellow students, the majority of whom were British, treated me as an equal, just the same way that they treated one another.

127. I saw the psychologist in [REDACTED] for two years. He said Fettes had been the nail in the coffin in terms of my psychological and emotional wellbeing. I was given a diagnosis of traumatic depression and anxiety.

### **Contact with Fettes since leaving**

128. I have received minimal contact from the school since the article in The Scotsman was published. More specifically, I received an e-mail from the Headmistress, Mrs Harrison, in which she apologised for the way I had been treated and for the experiences I had endured while at Fettes.

### **Records**

129. When I was in contact with the reporter from The Scotsman, he requested some form of official evidence substantiating my attendance at the school. I did have my IB diploma but I contacted the secretary or registrar of the school and obtained an official document proving that I had attended Fettes, but I have never sought any of my records.

### **Lessons to be Learned**

130. I obtained 16 A grades in my examinations prior to joining Fettes. At Fettes I experienced a dip in my academic performance. In the years since leaving Fettes, I have been awarded a Bachelor's degree with honours, a Master's degree with distinction and I am now pursuing a PhD with a Windsor Fellowship scholarship. This seems to reflect the fact that the problem was never in me – I remained the same person throughout – but was in the very institution where I experienced this atypical drop in performance.

131. Human beings are enormously shaped by their environments and what those environments sanction. Fettes sanctioned various forms of discrimination, racism and abuse which consequently became manifest in many students who had an underlying proclivity to engage in this sort of behaviour.
132. Many of the students with whom I studied – to my own disbelief – changed for the better once they entered wider society. They improved their behaviour and seem to have become more humane individuals after they left Fettes. Indeed, following the article's publication, I was contacted by several students, some of whom had previously used racist language towards me, who sincerely and admirably apologised to me.
133. Most importantly, what is to be learned is that Fettes cannot be allowed to continue to exist in its present format. It very urgently needs to be radically changed. In my opinion, if it cannot be radically changed and they cannot change their ways, they need to close their doors, regardless of any academic betterment with which they bestow the students who grace their halls. Indeed, a white student with whom I studied kindly contacted me after the article was printed and expressed this same opinion.
134. Fettes needs to implement a whole host of regulations and policies, including anti-bias training for teachers. The school should host educational workshops about 'race' and ethnicity for students – they are sorely in need of it. At the very least, so that they don't join wider society with an abysmal ignorance in particular areas of knowledge. The students who supposedly comprise some kind of educated elite of British and European society, as well as many of the staff, don't seem to be aware that biological races don't exist among the humans inhabiting our planet today – we are all Homo sapiens, that's it. The rest is a social construct. This is what our scientists tell us.
135. I think it's also important that they implement a robust anti-racism policy. I don't think that any anti-racism or anti-discrimination policies are enforced at the school. A great number of changes need to be implemented. Perhaps they even need a Director for Equality. I would go that far because it is quite a significant problem.

[APG]



**Other information**

136. I would say that Fettes is a very peculiar institution in dire need of radical, urgent change. I think the majority of British people would be rather shocked to hear about the goings-on in the school.
137. 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.....19/04/2021.....