

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

PQB

Support person present: No

1. My name is PQB. My name at birth and as a child was PQB. My date of birth is 1973. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I lived at home in Wick with my mum, dad and my brother who is two years younger than me. My dad was working as a fisherman at the time and my mum looked after us.
3. Both my mum and dad were from large families so I grew up with lots of family around. I had a really good family upbringing. Before going to the blind school I spent a lot of time with my aunties and uncles and cousins.
4. At that time, although I was aware there was something wrong with my eyes, I wasn't made to feel any different than anybody else. The only person who did make me feel a bit different was my paternal grandmother and we didn't have a great relationship.
5. I started school in Wick and attended North Primary School which was a mainstream school. I was there for Primary 1 and 2. I had a helper who was basically a parent of another pupil in the school and she would help me with my reading. She sat beside me and would go over anything the class were learning from the blackboard. I don't think she had any formal training other than she had a disabled daughter. Apart from having this parent helper I wasn't treated any differently and I got on ok at school.

6. There were occasions I struggled with my eyesight. I remember one task we had to do was using a small pointed tool to cut out a shape and I really struggled to do it.
7. Just before I was due to go into Primary 3 it was decided, I assume by an Educational psychologist and the council, that I would go down to Edinburgh to school there. I don't remember any involvement from an educational psychologist.
8. The first thing I knew about going to the blind school was my mum and dad saying that I was to go to a school in Edinburgh. I remember my mum and dad finding it a bit of a struggle financially to get everything together for me going to school but they did it.

The Royal Blind School, Edinburgh

9. I went to the Royal Blind School at [REDACTED] Primary 3 so I was still seven years old. My mum and brother took me down to the school. My dad didn't come and to this day he still says he couldn't have taken me because I was upset. He said that if he'd been there he'd have taken me home again.
10. The primary and secondary school were both in the same place. The secondary school was a big listed building that was attached to the primary school. Including the secondary school I think there were over 100 pupils.
11. The primary school had a big conservatory along the front which was a hallway and off of that there were five or six classrooms. The first classroom as you went in was for the Primary 1's and had a play area in front of it. The main corridor in the school had a wee booth where you could go and do quiet work. At the far end of the corridor were the toilets, staff room and head's office. There was also a baking or practical room at the end of the corridor.
12. The classes were split into Primary 1 to 7 but the ages weren't necessarily the same as mainstream would be as it was also dependant on needs and ability. There were

some day pupils as well as boarders but not very many. I wouldn't say the day pupils were treated any differently.

13. The secondary school was attached to the primary and you could go through the gym hall doors and that would take you into the main school. You could go out of the conservatory doors and walk around the path or across the grass and that would take you to the secondary school too.

Routine at Primary School and Drever House, Royal Blind School, Edinburgh

14. Drever House was the boarding house for primary school aged children. There were about twelve children there and I was the youngest. It was for boys and girls but there was a girls' bedroom and a boys' bedroom on each of the two floors
15. There was a gate to the left hand side of the school and Drever House was there. It was separate from the school and as you came into the house you had a sitting room to the right hand side and a dining room to the left hand side. Through the back just off the dining room there was the kitchen, next to that the laundry and next to that the playroom.
16. You went up the stairs and through a door on the left hand side and there were two children's bedrooms, one children's bathroom, two staff sleeping rooms and a staff toilet. If you came out of that door and turned right you went up some more steps and again there were two children's rooms, a child's bathroom and a staff sleeping room.
17. The members of staff that looked after us in there were Miss PQC and Miss Bryce who were the senior members of staff and Miss Mhairi who was the junior. We had to call the senior staff by their surname and the junior staff by their first names.
18. None of the staff showed you kindness. If you were upset, they never offered you a cuddle or comfort.

First day

19. I hadn't ever visited the school before my first day and the staff weren't warm or accommodating.
20. When I now watch a film like 'Annie', that's what the blind school was like. They didn't welcome you or make an effort to settle you in. They told my mum not to call me as it would upset me and I'm not sure how long it was before I was allowed to speak to my parents. That was the first time I'd ever been away from home and I absolutely hated it.

Mornings and bedtime

21. The senior staff slept over and they would get you up and it would just be whichever staff was on. You had your own single bed with a locker and wardrobe. You could keep your own clothes in your locker although we weren't allowed to wear our own clothes at school.
22. We'd get up about 7:00 am or 7:30 am and we had to get washed and dressed. The staff didn't offer to help you. You just had to hope you'd done everything right. I remember one time I was struggling with my socks and they just said to go back into your room and don't come out until they were right.
23. I shared a bedroom with two other girls, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and they were recognised as having additional support needs and they didn't get any help.
24. We went downstairs to have breakfast and afterwards you were sent three at a time from the table. This was in order to move your bowel and you weren't allowed to flush the toilet after you had been. Staff would go and check if you'd done the toilet. As you got older you tried to fool them by putting toilet paper down but they would know.
25. If it was deemed that two or three of you hadn't gone to the toilet, they would line you up after breakfast and you would get a spoonful of rosehip syrup and a spoonful of

milk of magnesia. It was off the same spoon for everybody. This supervision of what you had done in the toilet was only at Drever House.

26. You then had to go and brush your teeth and go over to school. You didn't get any help to brush your teeth. They would only help you if you struggled with your toothpaste. There was only one sink in the bedroom so you had to wait your turn.
27. Once we were all ready we went up to the school.
28. At night time you would get your supper and get into your pyjamas. You were sent to brush your teeth and come back downstairs for a story. You'd have to say prayers whether you wanted to or not. It wasn't something we did at home, it wasn't something my family would've chosen for me to do.
29. After that it was lights out as straight as you went upstairs. If you were caught doing anything you got into trouble. You were sent to bed early the next night or you would miss an activity the next day.
30. Bedwetting wasn't an issue for me when I was at school. I don't remember it being a problem for others either.
31. If you woke up through the night after a bad dream or if you were upset you had to go and knock on one of the staff's door. You'd obviously be waking them up and they would just ask what it was and send us back to bed. There was no comfort or reassurance offered. I didn't ever do it as I'd seen other people going to them and being sent back and realised it'd be of no benefit to me.

Mealtimes/Food

32. Breakfast was in Drever House and we usually had cereal and toast or rolls. You only got what cereal was there, there was no choice. I think on Tuesday and Friday you got bacon or sausages. The tea was made in a big metal teapot and the milk and sugar were added into the teapot too, so if you didn't want sugar, too bad.

33. We would go back to Drever house for lunch. We had lunch at 12 noon and would have two courses, usually a main course and a pudding. After that we would share out our sweets. After lunch you'd get to play out in the garden for a wee while before going back to school.
34. The food came over from the main school and was prepared by the chef Terry. The food was ok but there was no choice. We got things like chicken fricassee and fish and chips which I liked. I didn't like the roast dinners as I don't like gravy and we got them quite often. My mum did give a list of things that I didn't like but I think that was just a courtesy thing for my mums benefit.
35. Tea was similar. We had it in Drever house and you would get one course and you'd always get a cake afterwards. Something like French toast and sausages or bacon or fried eggs and chips and then a rock bun or fairy cake. The staff ate with us.
36. On a Thursday night we got a treat as Top of the Pops was on and we'd get a fizzy juice and some crisps but that was all.

Washing/bathing

37. You had a bath or shower every night. There was a bath and a freestanding shower in each of the two children's bathrooms so if I was in the bath one of boys would be in the shower or vice versa. When I look back now I cringe at that. A member of staff would be supervising in the bathroom. You would have to sit on your bed with your toilet bag and your towel until it was your turn and you were called through. The water was pretty cool. I can't remember if they changed the water between baths.

Clothing/uniform

38. We weren't allowed to wear our own clothes. You had a school uniform given to you and separate play clothes. We were only allowed to wear our own clothes at the weekends or when we were going home.

Leisure time

- 39. In Drever we had a lot of toys to play with and there was a TV but I only remember it being on for Top of the Pops on a Thursday night.
- 40. Some children went home at weekends but there were some of us who stayed there. It tended to be those that lived further away that stayed. If you were staying for the weekend we stayed in Drever House.
- 41. At the weekends we maybe went for a walk to the duck pond but not much else. I was lucky that if I ever had any family down my parents gave permission for me to go out with them.
- 42. One of my classroom assistants was really nice. She had a daughter about the same age as me and my parents gave permission for her to be able to take me away to her house for the weekend. That was really nice.

Schooling

- 43. It was small classes, maybe six or so in each class. You had your teacher and a classroom assistant and it was good. It was totally different to my time at school in Wick. We learned how to read braille and practice our handwriting properly.

Healthcare

- 44. If you were unwell their answer was to go to bed with only water for 24 hours. It didn't matter what was wrong with you. Water, paracetamol and no food no matter what was wrong.
- 45. There was a school nurse and you went to her if there was anything wrong with you but she just implemented the 24 hours in bed with water and paracetamol. She was lovely but I don't think there was much for her to do. She would take to you to appointments out of school but she was more interested in stopping at the wool shop

on the way back. She would also get sent to pick me up from the airport. She was more like an extra helper at the school.

46. There was an eye doctor who came into the school on a Tuesday and a GP that came in on a Thursday every week. We also got taken by the nurse to see a dentist out with the school.
47. There was one time when I'd been making toffee apples at the craft club and the lady had put them on the table. They had forks stuck in them and I was picking them up to pass them to people. I accidentally put my hand around the apple and burnt my three fingers. I had to go back and forth to the hospital a few times to get them looked at and the school nurse took me.

Religious instruction

48. In Drever House we had to say prayers every night. It wasn't something we did at home, it wasn't something my family would've chosen for me to do.

Birthdays and Christmas

49. In Drever House there was a bakers round the back and you would go round and get a cake that looked like a domino on your birthday.
50. I was never there for Christmas as I always went home for the holidays. I flew home for school holidays. I would get taken to the airport but I would then go by myself and just get handed over to the air hostess at the airport.

Personal possessions

51. I brought clothes and some toys and pocket money. We were allowed sweets but that was on the condition that we didn't keep the sweets to ourselves and they went in a cupboard and got shared out amongst everyone at mealtimes.

Review of care

52. While I was at primary school I wasn't aware of any review of my care. I was never asked about it.

External Inspections

53. Jim Fraser, who did all the photographs for the school would come round a couple times a year with the board of governors who were responsible for the day to day running of the school. Being a blind school we sometimes got famous people coming around the school and Jim would facilitate that too.
54. When the board of governors came they didn't speak to any pupils as far as I'm aware. Jim would ask us how we were getting on.

Family contact

55. I wasn't allowed to go home for seven or eight weeks. I had only ever left Wick with my family before so it was difficult being on my own. I wasn't allowed to phone home at all. My mum and dad had to phone the school in the evening and someone would come and get me. They tried to call about once a week. My dad didn't like phoning me as I would say I wanted to go home.
56. My mum and Dad couldn't visit me very often as it was just too far away. There was always a show at the school in December and parents were invited but the weather was always too unpredictable for my parents to come.
57. My Auntie [REDACTED] and Uncle [REDACTED] came down to Edinburgh a few times. Auntie [REDACTED] and I were very close and apart from my mum and my maternal grandmother, my Auntie [REDACTED] was the only one I would stay with at home. She would come down with Uncle [REDACTED] who had family in Edinburgh and they came to visit me and took me away for the weekend. I was always upset going back and saying that I didn't want to go back. She tried to make me feel better but said that I had to go back.

58. Uncle [REDACTED]'s family, who were actually friends of his family, would come and visit me for a couple of hours on a Wednesday night.
59. All the way through my primary years, although I missed home, I was quite settled there.

Discipline

60. Apart from the incidents with staff at Drever House I don't remember there being a lot of discipline.

Abuse at Primary school, Drever House, Royal Blind School, Edinburgh

61. In Drever House there was a boy called [REDACTED] who was deaf and had some behavioural problems. He had this fixation about bruises. He would sit and hit himself with his slipper to get bruises. On a Wednesday in Drever the staff would check your toilet bag to see if you needed soap or toothpaste and [REDACTED] would sit and eat his soap. One week Miss PQC [REDACTED] caught him eating his soap. She used to wear a big overall, like a coat with pockets over her clothes. She had really long hair and wore Scholl sandals with a buckle on the top. She hit [REDACTED] on his legs a couple of times with the bottom of her Scholl sandal. It must've been sore as I could hear the cracking. [REDACTED] was shouting out at the time. That was the only time I saw her doing that.
62. When I went to the school my mum had to give a list of the foods that I didn't like and one was cooked tomatoes. I remember one night, it must've been winter time as it was dark outside and we used to get our dinner at about 4:30 pm, it was bacon and cooked tomatoes. They knew I didn't like them but served them anyway.
63. I held them in my mouth and then asked if I could go to the toilet. I went to the toilet but you weren't allowed to flush the toilet as the staff would check every time you went to the toilet to check what you'd done. Obviously I'd spat the tomatoes down the toilet and staff checked and saw them so I was brought back to the dining table and given

them again and told that I had to eat them. I honestly can't remember if I did eat them or not. I think I would've vomited if I'd eaten them. I was made to sit for ages, maybe half an hour or longer while they waited for me to eat them. I was only eight or nine at the time.

64. I was still in primary school so maybe ten or eleven years old but I had been moved up to stay in the dormitories in the main school by that time. We'd had the dental hygienist in during the day and we got to take a teddy to school for a teddy bears picnic. We'd had picnic food like cheese, cucumber and crackers.
65. Miss P Q D came into the dormitory at nighttime. We were in dormitory three and she asked who wanted something from the picnic. We all said yes because we thought we'd get a bit of apple or cheese and it was really uncommon for us to get something like that out with mealtimes.
66. She picked me to go first and she put a heaped teaspoon of malt into my mouth and I had never tasted it before. I spat it into the sink and Miss P Q D slapped me on the face for spitting it in the sink. I had never tasted malt, it was absolutely disgusting. I got such a fright as I had never been hit by an adult before.

Routine at Secondary School, Royal Blind School, Edinburgh

Transition to secondary school

67. I really struggled when I was doing my transition between primary school and secondary school. I told my mum that there was a better school in Inverness. I didn't even know if that was true but I really didn't want to go back. I remember it being a traumatic time and even when I was back at school I was still really upset. They had to phone the last teacher that I'd had at primary school to come and try and calm me down. I would've done anything to go back to primary, I just didn't settle well. I don't know if it was moving from class to class or not having the familiarity of the same teacher but it was a struggle.

68. The secondary school boarders stayed in the main school in dormitories. It was split into girls and boys floors. There were 24 girls on the girls floor and 2 members of staff on each shift. It was dormitories of six and you had your own single bed. P Q D and Miss Clark were in charge of the girls and there were P Y A and Moira too who were junior staff. Miss Clark was the most motherly out of them all and would give you a cuddle if you were upset. I remember I moved up to the main school dormitory when I was still in primary school.
69. There were also two separate houses, one for boys and one for girls when you got to age fourteen or fifteen. These were out of the school grounds a couple of streets away. I think this was to get you ready for leaving school. When you were boarding there you were only allowed to access them after 6:00 pm.
70. By the time I went there I was aged about fourteen. One of the houses had been closed down so there was only one mixed house that we called the hostel. There was one member of staff and the girls lived upstairs and the boys downstairs. There was a waking nightshift staff member called Helen. There were five girls and six boys when I was there. We were pretty much left to our own devices there. You were allowed out at night until 9:45 pm or you could ask for a late pass once a week until 10:15 pm.
71. At the bottom of the school drive there was also a wee house and when you were in fifth and sixth year two of you were allowed to stay in that house for two weeks at a time. You were given money to do your own shopping and get yourself up and to school but that was it. I didn't actually get to go there as a couple of people had abused it so they stopped it.

Mornings and bedtime

72. In the main school dormitories you'd get up about 7:00 am and get ready and go the dining hall. It was on the floor that the girls lived on so you'd go along for breakfast. You got a bit more independence and you'd help yourself and there were choices of cereal and tea on the table. The boys and girls mixed at breakfast and the relevant houseparent supervised. Sometimes if teachers were in early they would pop in.

73. The younger end of the school were in bed by 9:00 pm and the older end by 10:00 pm.
74. When I first went there were sleeping nightshifts but while I was there, there was an incident where David Penman one of my classmates and a boy called [REDACTED] sneaked up to the girls floor. That probably wasn't their first time doing that or they weren't the first boys to do that but they were caught. I was maybe fourteen or fifteen at time. I became aware of the incident through my friend PQR [REDACTED]. She is adamant that I was there at the time as I shared a dormitory with her but I honestly can't remember it happening or them coming in as I would've done something. David tried to get into PQR [REDACTED] bed and [REDACTED] tried to get into someone else's. Looking back now I'm sure that happened on more occasions but at the time it was the only one I was aware of.
75. PYA [REDACTED], a member of staff on the girls floor, slept in the room next to the two senior dormitories and she must've heard them so they got caught. After that it was decided that there needed to be a waking nightshift there.
76. It was fine for the first couple of waking nightshifts but we then got a really creepy lady called Jean. There was just something about her demeanour. The Police had to be called a several times because a member of staff thought that Jean and her boyfriend were actually living somewhere in the school. Jean did leave her post after that.
77. I was petrified living in that school, I was petrified to go anywhere.

Mealtimes/Food

78. The meals were the same as Drever House as they all came from the school kitchen although there was a bit more choice and independence in the secondary school. We ate all meals in the main school.
79. When I moved into the hostel you got breakfast there but for all other meals you had in the main school building. After school you had a designated time to go and do your

homework between 4:30 pm and 5:10 pm and then tea was at 5:30 pm. You could go up to the hostel anytime after your tea.

Washing/bathing

80. The girls were in dormitories two and three. They referred to that as the wee end which was the juniors. They had a bathroom that had two baths and two showers. At the big end where the seniors were, there were two baths and one shower. If I wanted to go and have a shower at the same time as my friend PQR was having a bath we could choose that or you could choose to go in by yourself.
81. We had a bit more independence and weren't supervised. We weren't allowed to lock the door due to some people having health conditions and for safety reasons. The only time you were allowed to lock the door was when you were going to the toilet. The bath arrangements were fine. It wasn't like Drever House where you waited to be called for your turn. You would just go and say to PYA that you were going for a bath or shower and there was no issue.
82. We had to do a lot of care if there were people with additional support needs on your floor or in your dormitory as there was only two staff on. We had to help them with self-care. I liked the mothering role so it was fine for me but it wasn't my job.

Clothing/uniform

83. It was the same as at primary where we wore a uniform through the week. You could wear your own clothes at the weekends.

Leisure time

84. When you went into secondary school we were all given tape recorders and I think we were allowed to listen to tapes if we wanted to as long as it was quiet and everyone agreed. There were board games and on the girls floor we had a TV that we could put on after tea.

85. There was also an ex teacher who used to come back on a Tuesday night and she taught baking and sewing for those that wanted.
86. When I had moved into the hostel there was nothing apart from a pool table and a piano. By that time I had got myself involved with some activities outside of the school. I went to venture Scouts which was just along the road and I had quite a few sighted friends from there. I think I found out about the venture scouts myself and I really enjoyed that. It meant I could meet up with my friends from there at different times of the week too. They went to other local schools and all lived round about. My friend PQR would come with me too and we could go out as long we were back by curfew.
87. In the secondary school at the weekends you all stayed in the main school. At that time some of the pupils would've been living in the hostel and they would come together in the main school.
88. For those of us that stayed at the weekend the staff would quite often get a caravan and take us away for the weekend.

Schooling

89. Secondary school was like mainstream as we moved around learning different subjects. It was small classes and my class was just me and four boys.
90. When I was there we got paired up with Firhill High School and went there to learn science. Standard grades had just come in so we could chose between general science, physics, biology and chemistry. I wanted to do chemistry but I wasn't allowed to as Mrs Meek said it was too dangerous. The teacher at Firhill High School was quite prepared to teach me.
91. There were a lot of sports on offer at school like golf and football but I did swimming and cycling. The school had a swimming pool and the teacher was Mrs Lawrie. I really liked swimming and I learned to swim while I was there.

92. I enjoyed all of my subjects at school. We had an exchange school in Paris and I got on well with the French teacher Mrs Thackery and I went to Paris a couple of times. I was always involved in things when the Paris students came over here too.
93. Very early on in my secondary schooling I decided I wanted to work with children. When I was about fourteen or fifteen I'd said to Mrs Meek that I wanted to work with children. She was now the Head Teacher having been the Deputy Head. She said something like "For goodness sake, nobody is going to employ you. I wouldn't employ you". But on the back of that she did set up some childcare modules for me to do and found me placements to do them out with the school. If I had free periods I would go over and help with the nursery.
94. I was lucky that I had a really good home economics teacher Mrs Habgood and I did my O-Grade and Higher. I was fortunate that I was interested in that so got my skills from there.
95. Mr Cave Brown monitored the homework for everybody and you had to sit in your class with your form teacher to do your homework. As I was in a class with four boys, some nights it was just chaos and you'd get nothing done. David Penman was one of my classmates and he was just an absolute pest. Half of the time you didn't even get your homework done in the dedicated time.
96. I was encouraged in all subjects and passed seven O-Grades although I sat my maths twice and got the same grade both years.
97. We had a careers fayre at school but to be honest we weren't given any positive careers advice after that fayre. You were just left to get on yourself.

Healthcare

98. Healthcare in Secondary School was the same as a Drever house. It didn't matter what was wrong with you it was water, paracetamol and no food for 24 hours. Miss

Clark would come in and check on you and would sometimes offer you a wee drink of juice.

99. My family had told me about periods so I knew from home but other kids didn't. To access sanitary products you had to go to the duty room at break times where everybody was sitting to have their snack. You had to go in and ask staff for a sanitary towel. You weren't given a pack to keep in your locker, you had to go and ask for them one at a time. Eventually when we were a bit older and were getting our own money we would buy our own sanitary stuff.
100. We got sex education in science but nothing else. Really just the biology of it. When I was twelve or thirteen I remember having to sit down with some of the younger girls with additional support needs and explain to them what your periods were. That wasn't my job but there wasn't anybody to do that job. The house staff didn't take on that role or responsibility.

Religious instruction

101. When we went to secondary school we had a lovely man Mr Doig who was a church minister.
102. We had school assembly on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays each week. Tuesday and Friday's assembly was a broad spectrum one and would cover current topics. Mr Doig's assembly on a Wednesday had a religious slant to it although not heavily religious. He would talk about events from the bible so it did have a Christian reference. The school did acknowledge other beliefs as there was a pupil who was a Jehovah's witness and he didn't come to any assembly at all.
103. Mr Doig also taught us religious education and it was very good. All religions were equally explained. I remember going to visit a synagogue and a mosque.

Trips and holidays

104. We did go to Perth leisure pool and ice skating and they did offer activities. This would be during the week. You could do the Duke of Edinburgh if you wanted too.
105. When we were leaving school we were asked what we wanted to do and we went to Butlins.

Work

106. Other than making our beds there were no chores.

Birthdays and Christmas

107. When you went into the big school as we called it there was nothing special done for your birthday. Someone would maybe bang the gong in the dining hall at lunchtime and sing happy birthday to you but that was about it. On my 18th birthday I did get a present from Mrs Meek.

Personal possessions

108. We didn't have many personal possessions. We didn't have any family photographs although this wasn't something we ever discussed.
109. I think people would try and take smaller things from each other. They would take things from the totally blind people but I don't remember any of my things going missing. They would take things like deodorant, sweeties or crisps and they took advantage of those more vulnerable people. The staff were possibly aware of this.

Visitors

110. There were people from Saughton prison that came in to fix the Brailers and photocopiers and things. The school had it own maintenance team but the prisoners

just seemed to help out around the school too. Looking back on it now, these were convicted criminals being left to wander around the school.

Review of care

111. I don't ever remember there being a review of my placement at the Royal Blind School. I did have a social worker but she was in Wick and she never came to visit. I did see her when I was home on school holidays and she would ask me if school was ok but she never seemed that interested. I think she was just ticking a box. There was certainly never a review meeting as I know it now.

External Inspections

112. The visits from Jim Fraser and the board of Governors continued throughout my time at the blind school.

Family contact

113. Family contact continued to be limited at secondary school. There was no change from the way it had been at Drever House.

Discipline

114. I don't remember there being a lot of discipline. You would get lines and people would get sent to the head teacher or deputy head to be dealt with but I didn't ever have to go there. I think they just got a talking to as far as I'm aware.

Running away

115. There were a few people that had a few attempts to runaway. I'm not sure how that was dealt with by staff.

Abuse at Secondary School, Royal Blind School, Edinburgh

David Penman

116. David Penman a fellow pupil made me feel very uncomfortable. I think I was in second year of high school when David arrived and it pretty much started straight away and he was just a total all round pest to me. He would always try and cuddle or touch me and I would tell him to get off. He would make up rumours, saying things like "I've told so and so I'm having an affair with you" and I'd just rubbish what he was saying and say "I wouldn't look at you if you were the only person on earth". He'd bring gifts for me and I told him I didn't want anything from him.
117. I was the only girl in the class with four other boys. He was sleazy and I remember his voice was like the snake out of the jungle book. He was smelly and he used to think that he was important and walk about with a briefcase and nylon blazer with loads of pens in his pocket. His Dad was in the military and I think he did have a tough background. He used to say how he'd been left to look after his younger sisters at the weekends and he used to smack them. He was just a horrible person.
118. He tried to kiss me once and I pushed him away. He was always like that. When we used to get the minibus to Firhill High School for our science lessons he would always try and sit beside me so I made sure I sat in an outside seat or in one of the single seats. He was always trying to get close to me .
119. He stayed at the weekends too and he would always try and sit next to me in the dining hall and if he managed to get next to me he'd put his hand under the table and try and touch my leg. I always tried to stay away from him and keep my distance.
120. One time when I was fourteen or fifteen we were sitting in assembly and he put his hand on my leg above my knee. I had my tights and a skirt on at the time and tried to push his hand away. He wouldn't move it so I punched him on the leg. He shouted out and moved his hand but I got pulled up by the home economics teacher Linda Bain after the assembly.

121. He tried to do similar things to a girl [REDACTED] but she could fight her own corner. He tried to pin my friend [REDACTED] against the wall in the smoking room, we called that room the 'Tech'. She managed to kick her way out of it.
122. One night [REDACTED] was lying crying in her bed and I asked her what was wrong. She said that she was upset about her dad dying but it was strange as that had happened quite a long time ago. Not long after I remember going down to the laundry one day with PYA or Kerry who were staff on the girls floor. I would quite often chum the staff to the laundry because it was a really creepy place in the basement.
123. They had a big old fashioned sink that was full of water and it had something pink and something light blue in it. I thought they were [REDACTED]'s clothes as she wore light clothes like that. I assumed she'd had her period as that's where they would soak everything but then I remember thinking there was an awful lot of blood if it had been her period. Those two instances happened very close together so I don't know if something had happened but obviously we weren't told anything and she didn't want to talk about it. She was a similar age to me and had additional support needs. She was very vulnerable.
124. I remember another vulnerable person [REDACTED] coming to me and saying that she was getting a baby. I thought she meant her mum was having a baby but she said it was her having the baby. She had additional support needs too and she was adamant that she was having a baby so I'm not sure if something had happened to her.
125. Staff were aware of what David was doing to me as I'd say to them to let me on the bus first as I didn't want to sit next to him. I regularly told the staff how uncomfortable he made me feel. He'd bring me presents in class and he'd say that I was his girlfriend and nothing was done by staff. The deputy head Alison Thompson was aware but seemed to turn a blind eye to it or that was how it seemed to us anyway.
126. I remember another incident involving David. One night a few of my friends from Venture Scouts had come up to play football with some of the guys from school. There was a coloured guy that I was really friendly with and David was really racist towards

him. He said something like "he looks like a monkey. He should be going back to where he belongs". Luckily [REDACTED] wasn't bothered but I went chasing after him and I did give him slap.

127. When we were staying in the hostel one of my really good friends from school [REDACTED] had a boyfriend called [REDACTED]. He shared a room with David. He said that David would open the window at night and sneak out. There was also a cupboard that his bed was up against and they allegedly found loads of used condoms in Davids cupboard. That was after David left but when I was still at school.
128. The first time David was suspended was because he had to go the Young Persons Unit at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital one afternoon a week, although it might have been more. He was supposed to go there for counselling and he got a taxi there but it turned out that rather than going in he was going shopping. I'm sure he got suspended at least twice.
129. My craft teacher Mr Adams really didn't like David. One day in class [REDACTED], [REDACTED]'s boyfriend, decided that he would sort David out as he had been winding up [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] shared a room with David and really didn't like him either. Mr Adams came into the classroom and [REDACTED] had what I think it was a hammer in his hand. Mr Adams asked him what he was going to be doing with that and [REDACTED] said he was going to smack David with it as he was getting right on his nerves. Mr Adams said to wait a minute as he had to go through the back to do a job so to wait until he was gone. [REDACTED] didn't actually hit him with it. Nobody liked David.
130. I remember the day David got expelled as were in craft class with Mr Adams. He told us that David wouldn't be coming back to the school and sent us off to the shop with some money. It was a bit of a celebration. I think I was sixteen at the time.
131. I think the reason he finally got expelled was because of the incident with [REDACTED] when they both went up to the girls floor and got into the girls beds. They both got expelled. It was decided Alison Thompson would take David back home to Inverness and Andrew, another staff member, would take [REDACTED] home to Dundee.

132. The school was a place where everybody knew about everything. I'm surprised that the level of abuse that I now know about was able to go on. I'm surprised that no one knew about David and the high level of abuse that he committed. You couldn't sneeze in that place without somebody knowing about it.
133. I'm really surprised that no one knew where it was happening or when it was happening. If any of the girls or any of the boys who didn't have additional support needs knew that it was going on, the boys would've dealt with him. I'm pretty convinced that none of us knew what was going on.
134. I did know that he seemed to be protected by Alison Thomspson, the deputy head. I don't know what sort of hold he had over her or if he was a pet project of hers but they had strange relationship. He was given so many chances when he was doing so many things wrong.
135. I feel that Mrs Meek, the head teacher was the type of person that if she had known something was going on, she would have done something about it. At the same time I can't believe that she wouldn't have known. Mrs Thompson definitely knew something was going on.

Frank McGeachie

136. There was a house parent on the boys floor, Frank McGeachie, who was sexually abusing boys. He would be on night duty on their floor. I didn't witness the abuse but became aware of something going on because Frank had been seen by somebody else leaving the school. He had a room in school that he used to stay in quite often but was seen walking down the driveway of the school with his bags. He wasn't in school the next few days and he actually didn't ever come back.
137. The next thing I knew my dad phoned me and was asking if Frank had touched me but I didn't know what he was talking about. It must've hit the press by then. I think that was in the late 80's so I was thirteen or fourteen at the time.

138. I never liked Frank, he was a regimental type guy. At the weekends the chef would come in and make the meals but Frank used to make soup for everyone too when he was on at the weekends. It had everything in it and you had to eat it whether you liked it or not. He used to take the boys away camping quite a lot too when he was working at the weekends.
139. I later found out after I left school that one of the guys in my class had been sexually abused by Frank but never said anything about it at all. I wasn't present when he abused someone and no one spoke about it at the time. After Frank left the staff didn't ever speak to us about it. There was a bit of chat amongst the boys but no one told me anything specific.

Staff

140. When I was thirteen or fourteen I remember a girl [REDACTED] and she would have a lot of temper tantrums and violent outbursts. I'm not sure what was wrong with her. The staff would do nothing to help her or protect us from her. I remember going behind a wardrobe to hide from her but the staff did nothing. Staff would actually say things to wind her up to get her to have a tantrum. They were almost encouraging her to kick off and we would run into a hiding space.

Reporting of abuse at Royal Blind School, Edinburgh

141. After that incident with David Penman when he touched my leg the home economics teacher Linda Bain asked me what had happened. I told her that he'd put his hand on my leg and I didn't want it there and he wouldn't moved it so I'd punched him. She just said "OK" and that was it, there was nothing more said or done about it. When I spoke to the Police later in life, they said that this was a sexual assault and he was charged with it.

Leaving Royal Blind School, Edinburgh

142. As you moved up through the school most of the staff were supportive of you. I was very fortunate that I was able to go out of the school and find activities to do with people in the outside community with no disabilities. I was able to go and meet new friends, have experiences and integrate myself into the wider community. At the school we could go to Girl Guides every Thursday but it was all people from school so I didn't feel like I gained anything.
143. There wasn't anything done really to support our independence. Everything we learned was through home economics. We got mobility classes, which was taking you out and about and showing you how to use a white stick but that was all.
144. When I finished sixth year I left school. The school was good at helping people with their UCAS forms but I'd said all along I wanted to go back home and do my nursery nurse training. Mrs Meek had said that no college would take me but I was determined so I applied and was accepted by Thurso college to do my training there.

Life after being in care

145. I completed my nursery nurse training at Thurso and went on to be a nursery nurse.
146. In 1993 I went back to school for a reunion and I met my eventual husband [REDACTED] there and I moved back to Edinburgh. I had known him before as we used to fly back and forth together as he boarded at the blind school but he went to a different school in Edinburgh.
147. After [REDACTED] and I got married although I was still working as a nursery nurse, I applied to Moray house to do my social work degree. At the same time we decided we would start fostering as I had such long holidays and could offer respite care. I got two girls who came to me from Craigmillar who had been very badly neglected and it was

apparent that they weren't going to be going home that year so I decided to defer my place at Moray House.

148. I was really enjoying what I was doing so gave up my place all together and began fostering full time. Until I decided what age group suited me I fostered children of all ages. As I had know what it was like to be away from home and how upsetting and scary it was, that made me determined that no child would ever feel like that in my house. I went out of my way to make sure that they were comfortable and happy and would always put a special teddy that was theirs on the bed. I encouraged them to put photos of their families in their rooms if that was appropriate and what they wanted and I spoke about their families.
149. I moved in caring for babies with neonatal abstinence syndrome. I would generally foster two babies at a time. I discovered early on in my fostering career that I couldn't have children of my own. I fostered a wee boy [REDACTED] who was born at 23 weeks gestation and had been in the neonatal unit for over a year. He had a lot of health problems and we ended up adopting him.
150. I worked as a foster carer for twenty years. The support as a foster carer was mixed. You got equipment and you had a social worker that you could talk to but sometimes they weren't that great and the advice wasn't very helpful.
151. My husband and I separated in 2014 and I stopped fostering in 2016. I was having a difficult time with [REDACTED] after his dad and I separated.
152. In 2016 things had calmed down a bit with [REDACTED] as he was living in supported accommodation which was where he wanted to be. I decided to apply through the open University and did my social work degree.
153. Sadly in [REDACTED] 2018 we lost [REDACTED]. Although he was able to go out by himself, he had quite severe learning difficulties and didn't understand things. I wasn't very sure of his friends and I later found out that they had persuaded him to take some [REDACTED] tablets that weren't his and he passed away as a result of that. He was 21 when he died. A female was charged with culpable homicide and we did go through

a court process but it was found not proven. I still do believe that if there was an explanation for the jury that meant they could actually understand what lack of capacity, low IQ and vulnerable adult meant, then I think we might have been given a different verdict.

154. I qualified as a social worker in May 2023 and have been working as an adult social care worker since.

Impact

155. My dad will still say to this day that it broke his heart sending me there and if he'd known I was upset I wouldn't have been there. I say to my mum and dad regardless of how I've described it, it was really the best thing they've ever done for me. If I'd stayed at home I would have been wrapped in cotton wool. I remember my dad seeing me peeling potatoes when I was fifteen and he got such a shock seeing me and told me put the knife down as he didn't want me to cut myself. Sending me to the blind school really helped my independence and was the making of me. In hindsight it was the best thing they could have ever done.
156. When I was younger I felt my brother and I did have different relationships with my mum and dad because my brother was there all the time. Although I'm exceptionally close with my mum and dad now and I speak to them daily.
157. My brother was never going to be on the phone every week. I don't think it changed my relationship with my brother, we always bickered like brother and sister do. I've supported him and his family recently through a challenging time.
158. Probably when I was seven and went to the school it had the biggest impact on my mental health. I think that impacted on when I had another big change moving from primary to secondary school. That's partly why I didn't cope with it well as that had never been addressed the first time it happened and it was happening again.

159. The situation with David Penman was frightening and it was constant. Now if I was an adult and I had someone in my life behaving like that I'd be saying to the Police that someone was stalking me. That's what it was like. I don't think there has been an impact on my relationships.
160. There will always be sex pests like fellow pupil David Penman but now people know more about them and how to deal with them. I wish he was taken out solitary confinement and put onto a normal wing, he doesn't deserve any special treatment.
161. I think going to the blind school had a positive impact on my education as I don't know if I had stayed at mainstream school if I'd of come out with Highers and O-Grades.
162. I don't think of the school very often. Sometimes something will come up and I'll say to my friend do you remember that and we'll talk about it. Some of my friends from school are still quite impacted from their time there. PQR constantly has to talk about her time at school and doesn't seem to be able to move on. She can't seem to leave it behind.
163. I do have a recurring dream about leaving the blind school to go back to Wick where my Dad's going to meet me and I have all my furniture with me. I wake up quite panicked but I don't know what it's about.
164. 90% of the time I look back on my time at the blind school fondly. There's that 10% where I can't believe that when you were ill you were left lying in your bed all day and nobody came to see you or nobody came to read you a story. I would be praying for it to be breaktime or lunchtime just so my friends could come back so I could speak to them.
165. I don't know how ladies like Miss Bryce, Miss PQC and Miss PQD could have gone into their elder years thinking that they'd done good for us because they didn't. They failed us miserably. The whole institution failed us miserably. To think that these ladies were going into their communities where they worked and were getting praised

for what they were doing when they were just being horrible. They worked in caring role but weren't caring.

166. I feel that the school through their lack of support have enabled me to go way beyond what my original expectations would have been. I just won't accept no. I wouldn't ever want to go and train for a job that would put someone at risk but I feel they've enabled me to come out as a strong person. I still have the compassion for people that I've always felt. Growing up or when I was home for the holidays I was always out with somebody's baby in a pram. They brought out that caring part of me through not caring for me. Part of my caring nature is in relation to their lack of care.

Treatment/support

167. There was no support or follow up from the blind school. The only time I got support from the school was when my Auntie recommended me for a [REDACTED] award [REDACTED] and I won it that year. Some staff from the school got in touch with me then but they never supported me at school, so why now?
168. There are some pupils that have reunion every year but I'm just not interested. I would rather choose to be in touch with who I want from the school.

Reporting of Abuse

169. I didn't have a relationship with my social worker at home so I didn't ever mention anything about what was going on at school. I felt like I had dealt with the incidents at school and they were finished.
170. I have spoken to my friends [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] PQR about David Penman and his behaviour but I never really gave it a thought.

171. In late 2014 early 2015, I was making the dinner one night and the phone rang and it was Nick Wood from the Public Protection Unit and he said he was phoning about the blind school. He asked if I could think of anything that happened while I was there. I automatically assumed it was relating to Frank but Nick asked if I could think of anything else and I mentioned David. After that Nick arranged to come out and take my statement. He took my statement over a couple of days. I don't know how they got my name or knew to contact me. They were really good.
172. I felt ok giving my statement as I hadn't really seen what David did to me as a crime. It didn't evoke any bad memories or anything like that. I had read reports in the papers about David. I read that he held a disabled woman at knifepoint and attempted to rape her but she'd managed to get away. There was a politician who'd said 'How can I get this man out of my constituency?' I'm convinced that one of the articles I read reported that David said he'd keep offending and I can imagine David saying that. I can also imagine him now sitting in solitary confinement which I think is disgusting. He was visually impaired when he committed the crimes so he should be serving his time on an open prison floor. He shouldn't be being protected.
173. Mum and Dad didn't know about my abuse until I had to tell them when I was going to court and I reassured them that he never touched me apart from over my clothes. He was a sex pest but he didn't do anything to me. Compared to what others went through it is negligible and I was able to fend him off. I wish that some of the others has been able to come and say what he had done to them at the time. My mum and Dad were supportive of me giving my evidence.
174. Prior to the Police approaching me I hadn't ever reported it before. I'd made Mrs Bain aware at the time when he touched my leg but I didn't really see it as a crime.
175. After I gave my statement I was called as a witness and gave evidence at Edinburgh High Court. Lord Uist was really reassuring and made me feel comfortable. There were other people who I knew from school who also gave evidence.

176. David was found guilty of quite a lot of the charges. I think the charges were up in the thirties in number. As far as I'm aware he's in jail with a lifelong restriction order. I was glad as he doesn't deserve to be part of society and he doesn't have anything to contribute to society. He openly said that he will continue to offend so I was quite pleased that Lord Uist was taking it seriously and protecting the public. My experience of reporting was a positive one at the time.
177. Not long after the court case I was contacted by Digby Brown to take a case forward. However, I have recently found out that both the school and Highland Region have disclosed to Digby Brown that there are no records to show that I attended the Royal Blind School. My solicitor Emma also advised me that the charge relating to me against David Penman had either been dropped or contributed to a plea bargain so there was no record of my individual complaint. Emma also advised me that the blind school said that as I was not abused by a member of staff, they hold no responsibility for what happened to me at the hands of a fellow pupil. I was under 16 when this happened and feel strongly that the blind school had a duty of care and at that time were also in loco parentis. Furthermore, I was actually assaulted by a member of staff when I was a pupil at the blind school.
178. I think I'd maybe heard something on the radio about the National Confidential Forum in Glasgow and I thought they might want to know how barbaric in my younger days the blind school was. In your older years when you were able to stand up for yourself and be a bit more life savvy it wasn't as barbaric. If you were feeling upset you could go and get a cuddle from your friend or there were some teachers you could approach.
179. I didn't approach the National Confidential Forum because of what had happened with my classmate David Penman, I just felt my experiences in my younger years at school should be heard. Knowing what I know now through my life skills, I can see how barbaric the place was and if there had been child protection measures all those years ago, the place probably would've been shut down.

180. I actually thought I'd spoken to Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry and I think it was Digby Brown who asked if I'd give evidence to yourself and I realised it was the National Confidential Forum I'd spoken to before and that's when I applied.

Records

181. I've never tried to access my records but I would be quite interested to see them. I'd be interested to see their written take on how upset I was when I first went to school and how they dealt with that.
182. However, I have recently been made aware that there don't appear to be any records of me attending the Royal Blind School held by the school or the Highland Region. The only evidence that my solicitor could find was my SQA certificates.

Lessons to be learned

183. I think there are a lot of child protection things that can be learned and a lot of humanitarian things too. I think it's very important for kids in care to be shown affection and positive emotions within the parameters of child protection guidelines.
184. Particularly in my primary school years I should have been allowed more contact with my family as well as having more structure around what a family life should be like. When we were at Drever House it should have been like living in a family. It should have been homely and nurturing rather than just being cold. In the school you gravitated to whoever was going to give you the nurture that you missed out on. That could've been a cleaner or a teacher or just somebody who was going to listen to you and show you that affection and accept that you were upset.
185. In secondary school especially with everything going on with David Penman if there had been some sort of counselling process or someone that you could go and speak to it would've made a difference. You could go and speak to a teacher if you had worries but you didn't have a dedicated member of staff. Some were more

approachable than others. The school really should have had a social worker or a counsellor working there full time.

186. I think regular reviews would have made a difference. I could and should have been part of those too. I don't remember my mum and dad talking about any reviews at all. My social worker at home didn't seem to want to go past Highland region. That was where her role started and stopped and I think there should have been a more formal input into the care and check of how it was going.

187. I just hope that the experiences that I had, particularly when I was younger, won't ever happen to anyone else again.

Other information

188. 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.....PQB

Dated.....27/03/2024.....