

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

David PENMAN

Support person present: No

1. My name is David Bruce Penman. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1975. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Background

2. I had problems with my vision more or less since I was born. From a very young age I could only see for about a metre and a half in front of me, beyond that it was just black. As I got older my sight got worse and I completely lost my sight in 2020 during Covid. I am registered as blind.
3. My primary schooling was in many army bases around the world because my father was in the army and we travelled around with him. The time then came where Inverness was going to be my dad's final posting or so it was supposed to be. I was to then enter the public sector for education. It was decided I would be better off going to the Royal Blind School as opposed to mainstream education. I couldn't see a blackboard and things like that. It wasn't really my choice, I was only eleven and it was seen as the best thing for me.

The Royal Blind School, Craigmillar Park, Edinburgh

4. I was at the Royal Blind School in Craigmillar Park, Edinburgh from August 1986 when I was eleven until 1992 when I was seventeen. I did go there for a day visit in June

1986, before I started. On that visit I met the class I was going to join and discovered I was going to be the only boy, it was all girls. I was quite surprised by that, it wasn't what I was expecting. It was a small class and I was the only boy. I also got to look around the main building on that visit and I remember it was quite a big, imposing building. I had vision back then and I remember the rooms were big and well-lit. It seemed to be geared up for visually impaired and blind people.

5. The Royal Blind School consisted of the main building and four other Victorian style houses that were attached. One was the primary school, which was like a conservatory and ran along the side of the main building. One was called Drever House which was a stepping stone to the main building and the other two were for specialised pupils who had additional needs beyond vision. There was a separation between those pupils and the visually impaired pupils. There was also a hostel building which was just for the older kids.
6. The school main building had a basement, a ground floor, a first, second and top floor. Predominantly the classrooms were on the ground floor but there were classes in the basement, the first floor and the top floor. The boys' rooms were on the first floor and the girls' rooms were on the second floor.
7. I don't think anything stood out, about any of the staff, when I first started. As time went on I learnt more about different staff. For example, there was one member of staff, Frank McGeachie, who was convicted for abuse. I'm not aware of any others being convicted of anything but there were instances where staff crossed the line. Generally I would say that most of the staff were okay and were there for the right reasons. Most of them did try to go that extra mile.
8. One of the things I've picked up on, from the allegation statements I've been provided with by the Inquiry and from my trial in 2017, is that over time some people have forgotten what certain members of staff did at the blind school. Some people have forgotten what roles some staff had and who was where, things like that.

9. During the trial, we had a lot of time to prepare and focus on things, so things like the layout, what staff did and what their roles were are still very fresh for me. I think for some people that isn't the case. Over the passage of time some people haven't quite got a lot of things right in terms of their recollection.
10. I'd say that the relationships between children and staff depended on the child. The vast majority of staff were there for the right reasons and were prepared to go the extra distance to assist a pupil although there were obviously circumstances where that was not the case.

The Royal Blind School

11. Before starting at the Royal Blind School I had to do a visual assessment by a specialist eye doctor. I also had to do an assessment to be placed on the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) register as I couldn't go to the Royal Blind School unless I was on the register. I also did a OT assessment to determine my ability. There were things to do with finance, as well, but I had nothing to do with them. I know it wasn't cheap to send me to the Royal Blind School. I was in primary seven at Raigmore Primary School in Inverness before I went to the Royal Blind School. I'm sure that throughout that last year at Raigmore, things were being planned and assessed for me going to the Blind School.

Staffing

12. There were different staff for different functions at the Royal Blind School. Each class had a form teacher. There were teachers who taught subjects, you had support staff and there were house parents.
13. When I started in August 1986, [PXJ] was [SNR]. He was [SNR] [redacted] August 198 [redacted] Myra Meek [redacted]. She had been [SNR] [redacted] When Myra Meek became head, Alison Thomson became deputy head.

14. I can remember a lot of the teachers. Helen Laurie was the swimming teacher, Mary Dallas was PE, Susan Howard was contemporary or modern studies, Margaret Thackery was French, Gordon Leibschnier was maths, Archie Doig was religious education (RE), but he was primarily the school social worker, Margaret Silvani was Italian, Miss Hughes was geography, Margaret Mitchell was English, Pam Barker was typewriting, Jonathon Ross was computing, a guy called Pat took art, I can't remember his surname and I can't remember who took home economics or science but they were both women.
15. We also had different classes, like mobility, which was taken by Linda Bain. Myra Meek taught history when she was the deputy and the head but I can't remember Alison Thomson teaching any classes at all.
16. Houseparents were four to a floor. When I started, on my floor, they were Frank McGeachie, Margaret Hitchins, Andrew Murdoch and PWN. I can't remember PWN's surname. On the floor above us, the houseparents were PYA, Kerry Redpath, Susan who was Norwegian and Lillias. The housing staff changed over time but that was the house staff when I started.
17. Each floor also had a minimum of two Community Service Volunteers (CSV's). On the boys' floor the CSV's were Karen Donnelly and Sarah, I can't remember her second name. I don't know who was on the girls' floor. There was also a full time nurse who was based on the girls floor but covered the whole building. I can't remember her name.

Children

General

18. I couldn't tell you the number of children at the primary school or Drever House as the interaction between them and the main building, where I was, was virtually none. The

only time we saw anyone from the primary school was at lunch time when we all went to the dining hall. I can only speak to the main building.

19. On the boys' floor there were three dormitories that could sleep six in each, then a wing with two singles and four doubles. That's a maximum of 28 but the dorms weren't always full. Upstairs on the girls' floor there were three dormitories of six and two specially adapted single bedrooms, so a maximum of 20 girls. That's a maximum occupancy of 48 in the main building alone. Although I can't speak to exact numbers, the primary school and main school all came together at lunch time. There were eight tables of eleven, so about 88, less about fifteen to twenty staff, so around 70 pupils. Then there were the pupils in the specialised houses, who didn't come to lunch. I would say about 100 pupils in total. Although the school was primarily residential there was the odd day pupil who would live in and about Edinburgh thereby allowing them to go home every night.
20. They did try to keep classes together by age. In the main school the ages were from about eleven to eighteen. It was consistent with secondary school ages. Some people stayed for a couple of years then moved to another school and some were there for a few years, it just depended on individual circumstances.

Mealtimes

21. The food was reasonable. If you look at the standard of the school dinners I had at primary school before going to the Blind School, I'd say we did better than most. I remember always getting tapioca at primary school and we never got soup. At the Blind School there was more variety and we did get soup. We also got a cooked breakfast, something I never had at home. We also had a tea and a supper so I'd say we were fed better than most.
22. There was always a choice, a vegetarian option and two meat options. If someone had a special diet they would always be catered for as well. There were two people in the school who were gluten free so they got special breads and biscuits. One or two people were diabetic and they were catered for as well.

23. All the primary and secondary pupils sat together in the dining hall for meals. For breakfast and tea, which was at 5:30 pm, you could sit wherever you wanted, but for lunch you had a set table. You sat at your table every lunchtime for the school year then it changed the following year. They wanted you to expand and interact with other pupils and teachers, yet 99% of the time you did everything within a class format.

Sleeping arrangements

24. I was fortunate as I got a single room in the wing. That's another thing I've picked up on from reading the statements the Inquiry provided me with. A lot of people seem to have forgotten where they were in terms of the school. One person, PQB, said I was in their class but they were actually a year above me. I was the only boy in a class with four girls. The four girls were [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. They did try to keep classes as dormitories, if they could, but as I was with four girls I was given a single room to myself and the four girls were kept together. If I'd been in a class with boys I'd probably have been in a dormitory.
25. The staff had their own wing in the main building and some staff stayed there permanently. That could be houseparents or teachers. Staff who were on shift would also stay but they had separate rooms on the floors. On the boys' floor there was a member of staff's room on the wing and a member of staff's bedroom next to the dormitories on the main floor. The CSV we had also had a bedroom next to one of the other dormitories on the main floor, so there was always someone sleeping in close proximity to each of the sleeping areas. It was the same up the stairs for the girls.
26. In 1989 nightshift staff were brought in. When that started they stayed up all through the night.

Washing and bathing

27. I don't know what washing and toilet facilities the girls had but on the main boys' floor, one side of the dormitories had toilets, so urinals and cubicles, and the other side had

a square room with sinks all around it. Beyond that was another room with baths and showers. In the wing, where I was, there was a room with a single bath and a shower room with four or five shower cubicles. In the wing there was privacy and you could lock each shower cubicle. On the main floor the sinks were all communal but the bath and shower room was more open plan. There were two baths so you could talk to the person in the other bath.

Schooling

28. Swimming and PT were excellent given the fact that nine out of ten people that did them ended up competing in national events.
29. The art classes were quite innovative, given the fact that you're talking about people who couldn't see. The amount of stuff that was made in art was quite impressive. Home economics was designed to try and teach people the basic skills of independence, to cook without burning themselves, and I would say it achieved that.
30. We didn't really have any science classes, I think for obvious reasons, but we did have geography, modern and social studies, a choice of three languages; French, Italian and Latin, and Maths and English, so we did quite well. I would also say that the mobility skills that Linda Bain taught us all, were in many respects, lifesaving for a lot of people.
31. There were nine periods in the school day with an hour break for lunch. We had a half day on a Friday to facilitate people travelling home.
32. I think with some subjects they did really well, from an educational point of view, but they also lacked in other things. The classes were very small, no class was more than six.

Leisure

33. For the vast majority, evening activities were provided for different things. We had the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and a lot of the swimmers and PT pupils who were going to national events had the opportunity to train in the evenings.
34. We had student volunteers who came in from Edinburgh University and took pupils for sports and games. I think there was Girl Guides and Scouts and the school had its own clubs like chess and things like that. In general, it wasn't the case that there wasn't anything to do. I would say there was plenty for anyone to get involved in.
35. You could have sat in your room if you wanted to but there was a lot of supervision and after tea, at 6:00 pm, you were required to go to the duty room. Each floor had a duty room and a member of the house staff would have a clipboard and would tell you what activities were on that night. Every pupil would pick an activity and the member of staff would record what that was, so they knew what everyone was doing. They did check up on that, there was a monitoring process.

Trips

36. Every class used to organise day trips. There was an adventure week that each class got an opportunity to attend. It was at a place called Barcaple which is somewhere in Dumfries. Depending on the time of year, we also sometimes got a trip to Dundee or Perth, just a night out or something like that. I would say the ones that stayed over at weekends got a lot more trips.
37. I only stayed at the weekend twice. I would have been residential at weekends but I was very fortunate in that I had one auntie that stayed in Fife and another that stayed in the Borders so rather than having to go all the way back to Inverness every weekend I got the opportunity to go and stay with either of them.

Chores

38. A lot of stuff was done for us. We did have to make our beds but that was about it.

Visits

39. We did a Christmas concert and an end of term concert every year so family could attend those. The school also held parents' evenings twice a year. The school was also a charity so we held fund-raising days to generate money for the school. My family came to the parents' nights and the plays, that was about it.
40. I'm not aware of any professional visits by psychiatrists or psychologists or anyone like that. The school did have a social worker, Archie Doig, who was the RE teacher and he took assembly so it was part of a multi-task role thing he had going on, we didn't have a full-time social worker. I'm not aware of social workers ever visiting for any reason.
41. Each region did have an educational rehabilitation officer, I know that Highland region's officer was Kenn Dutton. I believe he was involved in the decision making process about me going to the Royal Blind School in the first place. I think I saw him about twice the entire time I was at the Blind School but he did see other people from the Highlands as well as me. He must have been some kind of local authority contact or representative for the school.

Discipline and punishment

42. Generally, if you misbehaved you were sent to the headteacher's office. You might get lines, be excluded from an activity or, if it was serious enough, be suspended from the school. The Blind School didn't have rigid rules or anything like that, just rules that made sense. Swearing at a teacher could get you lines, for example, and if you were caught sneaking to another floor during the night that would be a suspension.
43. That happened to me and I was suspended for two weeks for doing that.

44. Most staff were fair but there was one member of staff, Frank McGeachie, a houseparent on the boys' floor, who abused children. Frank had ways of determining whether or not a pupil was someone he could target for abuse.
45. One way was to find a reason to try and smack you, I suppose it was a way of seeing if you would go running off home, or to another member of staff, to tell someone what he'd done or if they would shut their mouth and say nothing about what he'd done. If they didn't run off and tell someone he would target them, which led to further abuse.
46. Frank did that to me once when I was eleven. It was just short of my twelfth birthday, he tried to put me over his knee, to smack my backside, but it was stopped when PWN, a houseparent, came into the room we were in, which was the duty room on the boy's floor. He stopped what he was going to do, she took me out the room and nothing was said between the two of them at that time.
47. Another thing Frank did was to rub himself up against pupils to get aroused and if the pupil also became aroused then I'm assuming he took that as an indication to take things further.
48. Frank did that to me as well but he was interrupted again, and again it was PWN who interrupted him. It happened in the common room which was behind the dining hall. There were a lot of motion sensor lights in the school so when someone entered a room the lights would go on. He was rubbing himself up against me in a sexually motivated way, that's all I want to say. Then all the lights came on in the dining room, which Frank could see from where we were in the common room and he stopped what he was doing.
49. I was alone with Frank in the common room and PWN knew exactly what he was doing. PWN told me to come and stand beside me and I did that, I stood more or less behind her. He just walked out, as he'd stopped by the time she reached the common room door. Two days later PWN was doing the nighttime bed checks and as I was getting into my bed she told me outright that Frank wouldn't be doing anything else to

me. I assumed, at the time, that she'd told Frank to back off and after that Frank never abused me again.

50. The other thing was his photography. That was his hobby, and he had a room all set up for photography but I think it was just an excuse for him to photograph pupils. If anyone said anything then he would stop, but if they didn't say anything, he saw that as an opportunity as well. I can't say for sure but it was always suspected and believed by pupils that Frank was taking photographs and sharing them with other predators.

Restraint

51. I didn't ever come across an instance where restraint was used by any staff on any children and I was never given or aware of anyone ever being given any medication to control their behaviour.

Reporting of complaints/concerns

52. During my first two or three years there wasn't much of a complaints process. That all changed after everything came out with Frank McGeachie. The school was scheduled to open as normal in August 1988 but it didn't actually start until October that year because there was so much going on surrounding Frank. When it did open there were quite a few different processes put in place about complaints and allegations and how to deal with them. I think that was all off the back of everything that was happening with Frank and was to keep the school open.
53. There was actually a period of about four months in 1989 where the school was about to close because every local authority, and all the parents, were up in arms about the case. There was major press attention when Frank was charged and the trial happened.

54. After 1989 pupils were encouraged to go to house staff or form teachers with complaints but the school also brought in a counsellor type person, a Pupil Support Officer. It was basically someone you could go and talk to. It was a sweet old lady called Mary that did that, and basically you would go to her and she would either take it to the appropriate level or go with you to speak to the head teacher, who was Myra Meek at that time.
55. More robust processes were then put in place. There were protocols for how allegations would be dealt with and the floor diaries were more meticulously maintained. The boys and girls floors always had floor diaries during my time at the blind school but after Frank they were filled in meticulously by all the houseparents. The diaries detailed every type of event. Pupils movements, arguments between pupils, someone being upset after a phone call with a parent, basically everything was logged in those diaries. After Frank they were also checked more frequently, by either Myra Meek or Alison Thomson. They were huge books. My defence did try to get a hold of them for my trial in 2017 but because they were paper records that were over 30 years old, they weren't kept.
56. In the classrooms, each class had an A5 blue book which was called the register. Someone was designated in each class to carry the register from class to class and every teacher would then not only mark attendances and absences but also record any observations or concerns or any action that needed to be taken in relation to any pupils. Basically if something happened in a class, and you were all moving to another class, it was a quick way of letting the next teacher know what had happened, that kind of thing.
57. I remember a girl who had epilepsy once took a fit in a class so that was recorded and passed on to the next teacher to ensure she knew about what had happened and who was involved, stuff like that.

Trusted adult/confidante

58. Before we had Mary, the Pupil Support Officer, I would say that most pupils would speak to members of house staff. In terms of houseparents I don't think there was a pupil who didn't trust Kerry Redpath. That includes staff and pupils, everybody trusted her, she was the senior houseparent for the girls' floor. A lot of pupils also trusted Linda Bain but that was because she was the mobility officer and was teaching life-saving skills. Archie Doig was also respected because of his RE and social worker role.
59. If you were to take a poll of pupils from back then 99% would have said Kerry Redpath or Linda Bain would have been people they could have spoken to if they were worried about anything. I would have spoken to either of them.

Abuse

60. Nobody sat us down and told us what we were supposed to do or how we were supposed to behave. The staff were all very different and I feel that sometimes the wrong message was sent out by certain members of staff.
61. We had one member of staff, ^{PWM} [REDACTED], who would make the hair on the back of your neck stand up when you were having a bath or a shower. She would come in to the bathroom, sit in a chair and watch you while eating a packet of crisps. She did that with me, she did it regularly with many pupils and when anyone complained about it she would say she was supervising us in case someone slipped, because they can't see. She was so well known for doing that, that she was actually given the nickname ^{PWM} [REDACTED] on account of the crisps that she always ate.
62. Quite a few pupils put in complaints about her but I don't think anything was ever done. In short she was using that excuse to manipulate the disability needs of pupils to justify her being there. Her behaviour actually escalated to her drying boy pupils, which she shouldn't have been doing. She didn't do that with me but I was told by boys that she had done that. I was told by a boy called [REDACTED], I can't remember his second name, that she had been drying him but was only drying him around his crotch area and was

basically using it as an excuse to fondle him. I understand he was taken out of the school for that reason.

63. That was all around 1990 and our house staff had changed then. We still had four members of house staff. Andrew Murdoch and Margaret Hitchins were still there but PWM and Jackie Harvey had replaced Frank McGeachie and PWN, PWM and Jackie never saw eye to eye and then Jackie left after about six months. There was talk of a big fight between the two of them.
64. When I was at college, after leaving school, I crossed paths with Jackie once and I asked her why she had left. She told me it was because PWM's behaviour was becoming too much like Frank McGeachie's. She told me that in the presence of two other students from Jewel and Esk Valley College. That was all she said but it did get me thinking. PWM was still at the Royal Blind School when I left, in 1992.
65. I told you about Frank McGeachie smacking me and rubbing up against me and that it was PWN who interrupted on both occasions. I didn't realise then that it was going to lead to other things. I thought PWN was a member of staff who was saving me, so to speak. However, it did lead to other things.
66. Some staff had a full time room and stayed permanently in the school. PWN was one such member of staff. There was an unspoken rule that no pupil was ever allowed in the staff wing. Pupils just knew that.
67. I used to have a red cassette case with all my music cassettes inside. I carried that about with me because I loved my music. PWN liked to tape things and loved her music as well and she knew I always carried my cassette case and Walkman about with me. One time she invited me through to the staff wing and into her bedroom. It was on the pretext of her looking at my tapes. This was before Frank left, so probably 1987, when I was twelve. PWN was about 26 years old.
68. I believe that on that first occasion PWN was testing me to see if I would say anything to other pupils. I was then invited back to her room when I was staying at the school

over a weekend. I was the only boy staying that weekend but there were three girls staying. I thought I was going to be sleeping on the floor but I didn't, I ended up sleeping in the same bed as PWN. That was the first time I'd ever seen a woman naked. PWN encouraged me to touch her. That happened more than ten times, I'd say double figures, and always in her room, other than one occasion which was in the swimming pool. Ultimately it progressed to sexual activity. I could describe that room in great detail, it's so clear and real in my mind, when I think about it, it's as if I was in there this morning.

69. On the occasions I was there at the weekends there was never any more than five or six pupils and one member of staff. I was usually the only boy so if the girls went off to do their own thing I would be left with PWN. I do believe PWN engineered some of her shifts to be there at the same time I was there because it was very rare that I stayed weekends. This being said there were some instances when I saw her through the week.
70. I never really saw what happened with PWN as abuse, at the time, and even now part of me doesn't see it like that. I've always found it very hard to talk about PWN as my feelings are quite mixed, it's very hard to explain why. I know some of the horrible stuff Frank did to some boys and she saved me from that. That's how I saw it at the time, that she was protecting me from that. I don't know if it makes sense but I think what she did is viewed differently from a male taking advantage of a female. I'm having difficulty finding the right words to describe what happened with PWN. I've spoken about Frank so many times but I've never really spoken about PWN before this Inquiry. I can speak freely about Frank but I have difficulty speaking about PWN.

External monitoring

71. We occasionally got Board of Governor visitors at the school and twice a year there was a collection of all the designated educational officers from across Scotland. I think there was one for every region and Ken Dutton was ours, he covered Highland region. They helped people who came to the school from their respective regions. When they

all came they would go around the school and, I suppose, make sure the local authorities were getting value for money.

72. There was also an inspection by what I think is now known as the Social Services Council, but back then it was known as something else. That inspection happened only once but it coincided with a Royal visit from the Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson, so that was a hugely publicised visit. Everyone came to look at the school on that occasion.
73. After Frank McGeachie left there was a parents panel that had about six parents on it. They would meet with our head teacher and, I think, James Fraser who was the head of the Board of Governors. They would make improvements or discuss things that were picked up from parents' nights and things like that.
74. I was never spoken to during any inspections. After a visit Ken Dutton would sit and talk with all the pupils from his area, Highland region. I think all the regional representatives did that with the pupils from their areas. There were about seven of us from Highland region and we would all sit with Ken Dutton and talk about anything from travelling to and from the school to contact with our parents to the transition of leaving the school. We covered a variety of stuff. As much as that could be productive I also think it was a tick box exercise.

Allegations of abuse

75. There were allegations of abuse made against me in 1989 when I was at the Royal Blind School. It was one of the charges that I went on to face at my trial, the same charge that was on my indictment with [REDACTED]. The allegation at the time was that I was supposed to have touched [REDACTED] and exposed myself. I was suspended from the school in February 1989. There was then a multi-disciplinary case conference in the May and I was exonerated following investigation. Linda Bain and Gordon Liebschner carried out that investigation. Neither the police nor the Children's Panel were ever brought in for that investigation.

76. [REDACTED] was adamant it had happened at a specific time on a specific date but that was shown to be impossible because it was at a time and date when I was at Barcaple on a school trip.
77. I returned to school after the investigation and [REDACTED] was suspended. When he returned he was taken out of the main school and, although he was allowed to continue at the school, he was not allowed to stay in the main building. He should have been expelled but he wasn't because he couldn't see and his local authority had nowhere else to accommodate him. There were quite stringent conditions attached to him returning and I don't think our paths ever crossed again.
78. That's another frustrating thing about my trial years later because that allegation was reported to the police and was part of my indictment. I was then convicted for that. If my trial had happened 25 or 30 years ago things like the report for that investigation and the floor diaries would have been available and used as evidence. The investigation and report into the allegations made by [REDACTED] was, by all accounts, really robust and detailed but because everything was recorded on paper back then, and it pre-dated the Data Protection Act, they have all since been destroyed.

Convicted abusers

79. The only convicted abuser I know of, who taught at the Royal Blind School when I was there, is Frank McGeachie. He was convicted in 1989. There was a police investigation. The police sat down with every single pupil and asked everyone if any other teachers or house staff at the school were touching people. It was just Frank that was identified.
80. Some of the stuff on my 2017 indictment is from 1987 and 1988. The police spoke to the whole school in 1989 and no one reported abuse from anyone else. As I've told the Inquiry the abuse didn't stop at people who were convicted.

Leaving the Institution

81. I left the Royal Blind School in 1992 when I was seventeen, because I was expelled. I was staying in the hostel at the school, at the time, doing a work placement. I was working at the Citizen's Advice Bureau in Dundas Street. I got involved in a relationship with a student from Queen Margaret University, who was also doing a work placement there, and I was sneaking out the hostel to go and see her at her flat. I was caught and expelled.
82. I had been warned three times before I was expelled. I had a verbal warning then two written warnings and then I was expelled. All for the same thing, sneaking out. The hostel had full time nightshift staff. It was basically one big house so it wasn't as easy to sneak in and out as the main school.

Allegations that have been made to the Inquiry about me

PQR

83. I remember PQR, she started at the blind school in 1988 or 1989. She was after everything that happened with Frank McGeachie and PWN.
84. PQR was two years ahead of me. Her first class consisted of and I think that was it. She was then put back a year so was just one year ahead of me. It's really her sister that I know better, I had very little to do with PQR.
85. I don't actually recall PQR staying in the main school, what I recall is her staying in the girls' hostel. She has said in her statement that she was in the same dormitory as PQB but I don't remember that at all. PQR was quite highly strung and frequently ended up getting into trouble. As I recall she spoke before thinking but my interactions with her were very limited.

86. One thing I picked up on, which I found quite disturbing was that both PQR and PQB say they were with people who were less capable than them and they had to do the job of looking after those people. I have to say that's nonsense. In all my time at the Blind School I have never heard of any pupils being asked to care for other pupils like that.
87. PQR has given a statement to the Inquiry and the allegations she has made are basically the same as the ones that were on my indictment from 2017. They are described on page 14 at paragraphs 69 and 71 of her statement and relate to me getting into PQR's bed. Quite a few of the charges are linked and basically there's an implication that I've jumped from one bed to another. The two dormitories that are being spoken about were right next to a member of staff's room. That staff member was PYA, who is now PYA.
88. I did sneak up to the girls' room on four occasions with PQR. PQR was definitely not there on any of those occasions because she was located in the hostel. PQR was in a relationship with PQR as she is now. At the time, October or November 1989, I was going out with PQR. We were all eventually caught by Kerry Redpath, Kerry Livingston as she is now, and we weren't even in the dormitory, all four of us were on the top floor drinking Woodpecker cider. All four of us were suspended for two weeks. We also had to do two or three weeks extra prep and we were all told that if there was one more instance we would all be expelled.
89. Straight after that the school put an alarm on the doors for the dormitories so there was an extra precaution as a consequence of what we had done. I did go up four times and I did climb into PQR's bed but that's because we were boyfriend and girlfriend at the time.
90. What PQR is saying is absolute nonsense. PQB says in her statement that she was told what happened but she didn't remember it. I find it hard to believe she wouldn't remember it when you look at the ways it's been described.

91. I don't deny sneaking up the stairs and there will be a record of my suspension for that and why I was suspended. It will also show that three other people were suspended along with me and why.
92. I don't know why PQR has said what she's said, I can't speak for her. I do know that she applied for criminal compensation before my trial even began. When I look at stuff like that it concerns me.
93. The jury for my trial were made aware of what I was already in prison for, and to be quite frank I think that if the jury had not been made aware of that, I don't think I was getting guilty.
94. On page 14, at paragraph 72, of her statement PQR says *"I didn't tell anybody about what had happened. Later on that week, I was summoned by the deputy head teacher, Alison Thomson, to her office. She told me they were considering suspending me because I had encouraged David and to come up to the dormitory that night. She said that my behaviour was unacceptable. I told her that I hadn't invited them and explained that I had been woken up with the hand on my mouth. I told her that I had had to wrestle David off of me but she didn't seem to believe me"*.
95. I don't agree with a lot of what PQR says about Alison Thomson. Alison Thomson called a spade a spade, what you saw was what you got with her, there were no hidden agendas and you knew where you stood with her straight away. I think most people who knew her would come up with the same assessment.
96. I don't have a problem with the Inquiry asking me about someone like PQR, I'm quite happy about that, but it would bother me if the Inquiry didn't then speak to someone like Alison Thomson. I'd like to think the Inquiry would interview Alison because she did provide evidence on my behalf for the defence.
97. On page 15, at paragraph 75, in her statement PQR goes on to say, *"A while later I discovered that they'd both done it again in another dormitory. One of the girls*

told me so I told ^{PYA} the member of staff. They both ended up suspended and they were taken home for a few days. They came back to the school after a week or two. ^{PYA} was moved to the hostel and allocated a night nurse who patrolled all night. It wasn't mentioned again".

98. That suspension wasn't for a few days, that was all four of us, as I've already said, and we were suspended for four weeks. That's well documented.
99. On page 15, at paragraph 76, in her statement ^{PQR} states "One day I ended up calling David a paedophile. I was called into Mrs Thomson's office. She told me to apologise to him but I refused. I knew that other children were being abused. I would see him with his arms around some of the other girls. One girl would have been about twelve but mentally she was about eight or nine years old".
100. I don't know who ^{PQR} is talking about there and I don't know why she is saying that. She never made any of that statement when she was giving evidence at my trial. She said in her evidence that I put my hand over her mouth, I tried to pin her down, I was more or less naked when I was climbing into her bed and ^{PYA} was supposed to have caught us red handed. There is no consistency there, if she's going to say I've done something she should be consistent and she hasn't.
101. I'm not going to get to the point of saying she's a liar, that's not my style. Like I said I haven't got a problem with you asking me. I just hope you speak to Alison Thomson.
102. On page 15, at paragraph 78, of her statement ^{PQR} goes on to say "I tried to just blank him out over the years and just got on with it. I wasn't in David's class again until the last year because I repeated sixth year. I had my own life out of the school by then. ^{PQB} and I would spend a lot of time out of the school to avoid him. He would try to belittle me and play mind games so I avoided him as much as possible. I was disgusted by him".
103. ^{PQR} didn't need to blank me because, as I've said, we weren't in the same year and she was in the hostel. I don't remember her being in the main school building. I could

see her point if she was saying I was trying to get at her through her sister, which I never did, but what she's saying just doesn't make any sense. We didn't have any contact in any case.

104. On page 19, at paragraph 99, of her statement PQR goes on to say, *"I gave evidence against David in the High Court in Edinburgh last June. He was found guilty of sexually assaulting me that night in my bed. There were a lot of other charges involving other people. He was found guilty of committing crimes against seven other people. My sister, gave evidence in the case too. He was only sentenced a couple of weeks ago. I think he was given seven years imprisonment and as such, it will be very difficult for him to get out of jail. He was made subject to a Lifelong Restriction Order. I recently found out from the Procurator Fiscal's Office that he is appealing against his sentence"*.
105. PQR's sister did give evidence, but she didn't say anything that was damaging. In actual fact I would say her sister kind of contradicted her.

PQB

106. I remember PQB, she was PQB when we were at school. She was in the year above me.
107. PQB has given a statement to the Inquiry. On page 13 at paragraph 74 of her statement, she has said, *"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 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 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 bed and 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"*.

108. During my trial, several things were thrown out where PQB was concerned. She consistently changed her statement, so we could show certain things didn't happen and we were able to prove that I wasn't even in the same class. PQB wasn't even in the same class as me, he was two years ahead of me.
109. There's a bit where she's talking about me but she doesn't know whose bed PQB is getting in or what he is doing. If you're going to aim a bullseye aim it at both of us. She doesn't know what she's saying.
110. On page 20, at paragraph 116, of her statement PQB goes on to say, *"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 she has said"*.
111. From page 20, at paragraphs 118, 119, 120 and 121 of her statement PQB goes on to say, *"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. 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. 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. He tried to do similar things to a girl PQB 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".

112. On page 21 and 22, at paragraph 126, of her statement PQB [REDACTED] goes on to say, *"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 a slap"*.
113. On page 28, at paragraph 159, of her statement PQB [REDACTED] goes on to say, *"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"*.
114. As I've said, when we went through the trial we were able to establish, where PQB [REDACTED] was concerned, that she'd made a lot of mistakes. We weren't able to trace Linda Bain which would have been a bonus, but there were mistakes in what PQB [REDACTED] said.
115. We had a basic science class on the bottom floor at the Blind School, so we never went to Firrhill for anything like that, in fact we never went to Firrhill. We proved that it was only on very rare occasions that I stayed at weekends and when I did there was all that stuff with PWN [REDACTED] going on. PWN [REDACTED] was almost always the one that was working.
116. To be honest I don't feel I need to answer anything where PQB [REDACTED] is concerned. She sat in court, at my trial, and said she had never said some of the things that were recorded in her police statement. She had two charges against me, on my indictment, and they were both tossed out because virtually everything she was saying was incorrect.

Convictions

117. On 23rd June 2017 at Edinburgh High Court I was convicted of one offence of assault to injury and rape of a child, one offence of the attempted rape of a child, three offences of the indecent assault of a child under the age of 16, one offence of the indecent assault of a child and five offences of indecent and libidinous behaviour against a child.
118. I was found guilty of a charge on my indictment relating to PQR and there were two charges relating to PQB, as she was then, for which I was found not guilty.
119. My position is that I plead not guilty and deny having committed any of those offences. I do not accept those 2017 convictions. I've tried to explain how things were at the school with the lack of availability of records and things like that and there were some people we just couldn't find as defence witnesses. I maintain my position of being not guilty and as far as I'm concerned my conviction was courtesy of the fact that the jury found out I was already in jail for a sex offence. That was from 1999 when I pled guilty to a rape charge. I was sentenced to 18 years and I was just finishing that sentence in 2017 when we had that trial.
120. What happened was the 18 years was composed of a 10 year custodial sentence and an 8 year extended sentence. I did the requisite 6 years and 8 months for the ten years then got out in June 2006. I was then recalled in 2008 as I broke my electronic tag. I wasn't at home during my curfew. I have been in prison since.
121. In 2006 Northern Constabulary, as it was then, fully investigated my life history, that whole chronology, including looking at everything to do with my schooling and absolutely nothing was found. That was all part of an inquiry that was being carried out to do with how the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) were set up following the Management of Offenders Act. People who were being released from prison for sex offence sentences of above ten years had to have a thorough risk assessment by the police in terms of managing them in the community. They also had to examine whether there were other risks to be managed which encompasses them looking at not just the offence that you're in custody for but looking at your entire life

history and investigating your whole past. In my case that police investigation was termed Operation Amble.

122. They interviewed many people. All of the people who were on my 2017 indictment were interviewed in 2006 and not one person said anything, no one made any allegation about me having done anything then, yet ten years later I was on trial.
123. It was only towards the end of my trial in 2017 that my conviction came out and was made known to the jury. We couldn't lead that when all the witnesses were giving evidence in 2017, we couldn't ask why they hadn't said anything to the police in 2006 because that would show there had obviously been something that happened in 2006.
124. Had we known that was going to happen then we would probably have approached the trial differently. We would have brought the facts out about having already faced a police investigation and being cleared but we were never going to put that in front of a jury before, so my defence were stuck, the opportunity had already passed us by.
125. You're not supposed to disclose previous convictions at a trial but it was basically insidiously done. In PQR's statement there's a bit where she calls me a paedophile. When she was giving her evidence she said she called me that at the time but then went on to say that I was one right now and that the court knew that. The Advocate Depute said that was correct, without thinking about it, and that was obviously all heard by the jury. The jury then had to be told or it was a mistrial. We argued for a mistrial but we were told that if we wanted to we could lodge an appeal. We did appeal, for both sentence and conviction, but they only took my appeal against sentence forward as opposed to my appeal against conviction. It should have been the other way around. In short my QC, as she was at the time, didn't progress the appeal correctly and we lost that appeal.
126. I haven't given up the appeal routes. I now have Active Justice First, who are based in Manchester, looking into my case. They specialise in cases similar to mine where someone has gone on trial for a historic sex offence and there's been a lack of records,

an inability to find witnesses and other catastrophic mistakes. They're like another version of the Miscarriages Of Justice Organisation.

Helping the Inquiry

127. I think there needs to be better training. When I went to school there were a lot of very young staff. I don't think they had a lot of qualifications. I think a lot were employed on the basis of references so they could be trusted but I don't think many had any social care qualifications. The laws have also changed about equality and diversity so there's a lot more stuff about that now.
128. When I do look back at my time at the Royal Blind School, there are a lot of positives, but sadly there are negatives as well. When I did my social sciences course I went from a class of five at the blind school to sitting in a lecture theatre with sixty people and I wasn't ready for that. I went from one extreme of getting a lot of assistance and specialist help, to mainstream and further education where you don't get that at all.
129. In many respects, although the Blind School met a lot of educational goals, it didn't really prepare people for the stark reality of what would happen after they left the school. As much as specialised education meets people's needs it doesn't really prepare you for life beyond that. That is a downside and needs to be addressed.
130. As far as my time at the Blind School is concerned, there's still a lot I haven't really processed so when it comes to talking about what lessons can be learned that's a difficult question.
131. Today everything is digitised but back when I was at the Royal Blind School there wasn't anything like that. When we were preparing for my trial we were looking for records, all in paper format, which we knew existed, but they just weren't available anymore. We did get an admission from the Royal Blind School, that all these records existed at the time, but we were asking for them 30 years later and they just didn't have them or know where any of them were now.

132. These are the types of things I'd like to think the Inquiry would be interested in and try to go after. One allegation statement I have been provided with was taken in 2018 so I'd like to think that in the last six years the Inquiry has spoken to Alison Thomson and other members of staff that worked at the Royal Blind School. They would talk about the same type of things as me, about how things were recorded, so hopefully you can pursue that.

Other information

133. I have no objection to my witness statement being published as part of the evidence to the Inquiry. I confirm that this statement has been read out to me and I understand the contents and I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed.....

Dated.....20th August 2025.....

Statement Taker Declaration

Witness Statement of [REDACTED]

I am a statement taker at the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry. I confirm that I have read the contents of this statement to David Penman who, having (a) appeared to me to understand the statement, (b) approved its content as accurate, and (c) appeared to me to understand the declaration of truth, signed the statement in my presence.

Name: [REDACTED]

Signed [REDACTED]

Dated: 20th AUGUST 2025