

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

QRS

Support person present: No

1. My name is QRS. My date of birth is 1955. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Background

2. I am a chartered teacher and obtained both a Bachelor of Education and a Master's degree in education. I started teaching in Scotland, but went to teach in the Third World in 1980. One "local" contract was followed by various contracts with the Overseas Development Agency, interspersed with teaching in Scotland. I returned to Scotland permanently at the start of 1995.

Employment with Queen Victoria School, Dunblane

3. I started my employment at Queen Victoria School in January 1999. I remained there until I was suspended in October 2004. My role was boarding housemistress, which involved being in loco parentis for approximately eighty girls aged from eleven to seventeen, eighteen years old.
4. I was recruited by interview. References were provided by the headmaster of Biggar High School, David Chalmers. He was contacted later that evening by the headmaster of Queen Victoria School, Brian Raine, to ask if the reference was genuine. He informed him that it was and that I would be great at the job. I am not sure of who I would have included as my second referee. It would probably have been a headmaster

[APG]

or head of department from my last overseas job, which was at a boarding school where I was the boarding housemistress.

5. I do not recall any mention of a probation period. From my perspective, registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland may have been required but it was not necessary for a boarding mistress to be a teacher. After I left, that was the route that Queen Victoria School took and they employed non-teachers in the boarding mistress role. There was no time allowance to fulfil a teaching responsibility and the role of boarding housemistress.
6. I received no induction training. There was no monitoring as such. However, after about a year in my post, I was handed a letter by a secretary. The letter was from the headmaster and stated that my performance was not up to standard. When the bursar heard about the letter he was horrified. In the presence of the headmaster, my union representative and myself, he stated that it was unacceptable and that it would be withdrawn. The bursar's name was Ian, but I can't recall his surname.
7. My original line manager, Alice Hainey, had little contact with me, if any. Her replacement, Evelyn Smith, was more hands on and visited the boarding houses regularly. She acknowledged that the girls' boarding houses faced challenges that the boys' boarding houses did not, with over eight girls and an age range of eleven to eighteen.
8. There was a "boarding" qualification available at the time. Various members of staff went on this course, but I was not allowed to go. It was this decision that prompted me to study for my Master's in Education and study appropriate modules with the Open University. I did have to deal with a fair amount of funds, but no financial training was provided by the school. The only training provided was a Ministry of Defence training course in Maximising Attendance.

Policy

9. As [REDACTED] boarding house mistress for the girls' boarding house, I made the decisions about routines and schedules. It was very challenging. The "rules" were not the same for the boys as for the girls. The staff rota was also not equal. For a Ministry of Defence establishment, the complaints procedure did not function, not for me in any event. I used the Ministry of Defence procedures to prevent harassment and ended up being sacked. The staff involved filled in Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education questionnaires, highlighting a breakdown in relationships and no doubt all sorts of other damning comments.
10. On the maximising attendance course, one of the Ministry of Defence presenters linked up with me. I was a [REDACTED] teacher, and he was interested in where the best place to study [REDACTED] would be. He became aware of my mental state and stress, which was hindering my participation on the course. The course required me to take the lead at times. I confided in him about my work situation. I was being targeted, bullied and harassed by the boarding house team. Teachers had been awarded a wage rise and the headmaster felt that boarding staff should contribute more to the duty rota because of the wage increase.
11. The staff were of the opinion that because I earned more money than them, I should be doing more duties. The headmaster did not provide me with any support. Brian Raine remained in the post of headmaster throughout my employment at Queen Victoria School. The Ministry of Defence employee recommended that I submit a letter, asking the staff to back off because it was taking a toll on my health and my health had to come first. I did submit the letter, but the knock on effect was catastrophic. There was a complete breakdown of relationships. I was off school for months. I think there were reports prepared by two Ministry of Defence personnel from Rosyth. They were about my health and wellbeing, since I was off with stress and anxiety. I can't really remember what they said or even if I saw them.
12. Record-keeping for me consisted of keeping "the books", which contained the girls' pocket money and banking. Discipline of the children tended to be in-house and involved extra chores. Serious discipline would have been for a girl to be "grounded".

The school discipline was a system of “days” run by prefects, which involved the pupils getting up early and going out before breakfast to do chores. I objected to this. If a prefect came round at 10:30 pm to tell me that a pupil was on a “day” in the morning, I advised the prefect that I was not going to waken a pupil for that reason. I felt that the pupil should have known before bedtime for the next day.

13. One punishment that I introduced was cleaning shoes. There was a “no shoes upstairs” rule, to help keep the carpet clean. The shoe lockers were at the foot of the stairs and the girls swapped slippers or trainers to change into when they left their school shoes. Originally, there was a misunderstanding because the girls thought they were to “bull” the shoes, which means spit and polish them, military style, which I was not aware of as a new member of staff. However, my intention was just to give them a brush. I hoped that would put them off going upstairs with their school shoes on.
14. Whistleblowing was frowned upon. The attitude was, “Keep everything in house,” “We can deal with it,” “It’s my train set – if you don’t like it get off.” I did pass on information to the original line manager, Alice Hainey, about inappropriate comments by staff when senior girls moved into the primary boys’ boarding house as prefects. She thought it was appalling, but I am unaware of any further action that may have been taking. It related to a comment and suggestion made by male staff concerning some of these girls. Pupils had passed information to me about Mr CKC saying something to them about seeing a lovely wee top that would look great on one of the girls in particular.
15. A member of my boarding staff, Jill Adams, came to me to pass on information about a male teacher and a pupil. I did not doubt her because she worked in the same department as the teacher and was friendly with both him and his wife. I can’t remember the exact details about the information from Jill Adams, but it related to a male member of the boarding staff in the [REDACTED] boarding house. His wife believed that he was having an inappropriate relationship with a pupil, [REDACTED], who also boarding in the house where he worked. I remember that [REDACTED] played the drums and her birthday was on [REDACTED]. I believed what she was telling me so I passed it on. I passed it on to my line manager, Evelyn Smith, who had only just started at the school. The consequences of that was a talk to all staff about “appropriate professional behaviour” by her, as instructed by the headmaster.

Living arrangements

16. I lived in a flat attached to the boarding house. It was easily accessible to the girls if they needed to contact me when I was not in the boarding house. The assistant boarding housemistress lived in a flat above me. The matron also lived in a flat attached to the boarding house. Other boarding staff mostly lived on campus with the occasional person living off campus.
17. All boarding staff had access to the residential area. Initially, the senior girls' living room would be used for classes with boys during the timetabled day. That stopped. Parents felt free to access boarding areas when they collected their daughters at the weekends, helping them with luggage, washing and that kind of thing.

Culture within Queen Victoria School

18. The school had a very good reputation in Scotland in general. The public image is that of the pipe band, red jacket and kilts. It's impressive to see children perform like that. A lot of work and kudos was given to pupils who made the grade for the band and dance teams.
19. Academically, I was disappointed with the school upon arrival. All pupils had a set schedule, which involved prep. When I arrived, older girls were making tea and visiting friends. They weren't really taking advantage of the opportunity for quiet study and homework with teachers always present to help them. I worked on that and felt that there was a good improvement. I was not aware of fagging being in existence at the school.

Discipline and punishment

20. At school, any issues were passed on to the housemaster and housemistress, unless it was a repeated and challenging issue. Mostly, the punishment involved grounding.

The prefects also had some perceived disciplinary power and they worked a system of “days”. This involved early morning chores of litter picking and such like.

21. It has been many years since I worked at Queen Victoria School. Personally, I cannot remember a discipline policy or any policies for that matter. Knowing the headmaster, I believe there would have been policies for everything. They would have been a tick-box exercise, but they were not working, living documents.
22. I can't remember keeping records about discipline. I don't think that I did, but I would have done so if there was a requirement to do so. I would not be involved in any serious disciplinary decisions, like suspension. I am therefore not aware what records were kept in that regard.

Day to day running of the school

23. My main role in the day to day running of the school related to the running of the boarding house. Most of the day was scheduled with meals, chapel, lessons and prep. My role was to make sure we kept to these schedules. I organised outings to the cinema and shopping, mostly at the weekend and theatre trips, which were mostly midweek.
24. I do believe that if there was any ill-treatment of the children, I would have gotten wind of it. The girls confided in me as much as they felt appropriate. For example, one girl came to me to tell me that her friend was having problems at home. She would not tell me who it was and I can't remember how much she told me. At the next parade day, I realised who the father was and that it was an issue with drink, just by meeting with him.
25. I do recall one of the senior girls, [REDACTED], being very upset. It was during good weather because she was out on the grass, crying inconsolably with her friend. The girl had a particularly bond with the previous housemistress and was never really close to me. I did say to her that although she probably didn't want to speak to me, she should speak to someone. I wanted to help but she intimated that she could not

let me know what the problem was. I now believe that this incident was related to a member of staff, which is why she felt that she could not confide in me. I didn't know that at the time, but as time passed I put two together, albeit I may have come up with three.

26. I do think with the combination of staff and pupils would have become aware of any issues. Someone would gossip and pass on information. Staff were well aware of their responsibility to pass on the information.

Reporting of complaints/concerns

27. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] was a pupil at the school. In June 2004, I found out about an incident involving [REDACTED]. He left his boarding house and came to me. He was very small for his age and an easy target. He told me that a group of boys had jumped on him. I believe that one of them had a bicycle pump and used it in a sexual manner, a mock rape. I don't know the names of the boys involved in assaulting [REDACTED].
28. I immediately contacted the depute with the remit for child protection, Evelyn Smith. Unfortunately, Evelyn was a friend of mine and the perception was that she was taking steps because of the friendship and not because of the seriousness of the incident.
29. I cannot remember the time scale for this incident, but the police were supportive. I did not witness any contact that the police had with other pupils. [REDACTED] was examined by a doctor, who was of the opinion that there had been no anal penetration. The headmaster was furious that the police had been contacted. He was of the opinion that the matter should have been dealt with "in-house". My concern about his response was that he did not view what had happened as a serious incident and considered it to be just a bit of fun. The outcome of was that [REDACTED] never returned to the school. Evelyn Smith and I were suspended and ultimately sacked from our jobs.
30. It is very difficult and challenging for me to think about my suspension and departure from the school. I have spent sixteen years trying to forget about the whole incident and recover from the trauma. Reputation, credibility and track record are everything in

teaching and I had my whole career wiped out. I appreciate that the Inquiry is focused on child abuse. However, I believe I am a victim of the culture within Queen Victoria School.

31. I found out about my suspension just minutes before parents' consultations. These were always scheduled on the Friday before the October break holiday. I can't actually remember how it happened, but I was escorted to my flat and told not to enter the boarding house. The reason for the suspension was the inspectors' report, which graded me as unsatisfactory. That is it in a nutshell. My "conduct" was apparently such that I could not do the job.
32. I know nothing about a suspension. I was given no warnings or advice. All I had was a very unmanageable team because of the complete breakdown in relationships and no support from management. There was no restorative practice – nothing. I returned to work in August and the inspection was in September. I had been absent for six months prior to the summer holiday.

Helping the Inquiry

33. I do not feel that I am in a position to comment on lessons that can be learned to protect children in a boarding school, now and in the future. From my perspective, clear and transparent guidelines which are used and referred to would have improved the situation.
34. 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..... QRS

Dated..... 8 Jan 2021