

## **Submissions on Behalf of the Families of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe, Alice da Silva Aguiar)**

### **Introduction**

1. Bebe (6), Elsie (7) and Alice (9) were savagely murdered on 29 July 2024. The families are grateful for the “no naming” direction; they hope the Press and social media users will refrain from re-publication of AR’s mug shot, where his pose demonstrates his relish for notoriety. He deserves to be forgotten, his name and individuality erased, in the hope of reducing any chance of inspiring other dangerous misfits. His identity and image do not matter. What does matter is how a boy who in late 2019 repeatedly declared and acted upon his desire to kill, was never seen and risk assessed by a forensic psychiatrist who knew that from an early age he had wanted to maim and murder.
2. If AR’s case been handled properly there would have been a permanent flag, waving to all who engaged with him, that the dark episode in his 3<sup>rd</sup> year<sup>1</sup> in secondary school could not be ignored or (consciously or otherwise) and he would have been seen throughout his childhood as posing a high risk to others. He was let down by the health, education and social care system, and, unchecked by the safeguards that should have operated, remained free to carry out a mass atrocity with the devastating consequences that followed.
3. The obscene events of that morning not only took the lives of three little girls, 8 of their classmates, Leanne Lucas the organiser of the Taylor Swift themed dance class were attacked and stabbed, as was John Hayes, the landlord of the building who bravely confronted AR. The remaining 15 children and the dance teacher Heidi Liddle were severely traumatised, as were the police officers and members of the public who assisted in the arrest and helped to rescue the children. In a few minutes of preventable carnage, a grossly disturbed teenager devastated the lives of the Kings, the Stancombes, the Aguiars, leaving an indelible stain on his own family and

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<sup>1</sup> Year 9

exposing the fragility of the system of public protection that we all rely upon to keep us safe.

4. As the Prime Minister said when he announced this Inquiry in January 2025, Southport must be “*a line in the sand*”<sup>2</sup>. That phrase has become a touchstone for these families. It must mark a sea change in the way the State discharges its duty to protect the public, and above all its children, from foreseeable violence. On the evidence of this case, and countless others, the system of public protection and special needs provision is broken<sup>3</sup> and as now recognised at the highest level, it is a moral as well as a legal obligation that urgent action is taken to minimise the risk of this ever happening again.

#### The Human Cost

5. As they will say in their Victim Impact Statements, Bebe, Elsie and Alice’s parents carry wounds that cannot be healed. Their lives are often joyless. Work is difficult or impossible. Sleep is broken. Every day is a struggle. They endure for the sake of their surviving loved ones, and in memory of the children they lost.

#### Thanks

6. They wish to record their gratitude to those who acted with courage and decency that day: the paramedics, the police, but particularly Marcin Tyjon who administered CPR to Alice, striving desperately to save her life, John Hayes who confronted the perpetrator, Joel Verite for carrying Alice and then Bebe’s body to safety and to all other members of the public and first responders who intervened and assisted in the aftermath<sup>4</sup>.
7. They make no apology for the broad criticisms that follow, AR could and should have been stopped, his dangerousness should have been recognised. Their unbearable pain is amplified by much of the content of the 20,000 or so pages before this Inquiry and the confirmation that there is a compelling case that the Prime

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<sup>2</sup> <https://youtu.be/mnEQtpx6o0g>

<sup>3</sup> “Special needs support is broken – so are parents”. *The Times* (London, 8 September 2025)

<sup>4</sup> [MERP002833](#) (Merseyside Police Policy File Report 10.10.24)

Minister was correct when observing in January this year, that the failure of the public bodies who engaged with AR “leaps off the page”.

### Predictable and Preventable

8. This Inquiry is not about hindsight. The central truth is that the Southport murders were not only predictable, they were also preventable. At the age of thirteen, AR was already declaring his homicidal intent. He contacted Childline seven times in October 2019 complaining he was being bullied and wanted to kill. On 4/10 he asked, “*what should I do if I want to kill somebody?*”. On 6/10 he “*viciously attacked*” the alleged bully in class and was put into isolation<sup>5</sup>. On 7/10 he told the Childline counsellor: “*I want to kill someone .. there is someone I hate in school and I want to kill them ..*”. *I have took a knife to school before but I would only use it if that person really annoyed me in the moment ... “I feel annoyed and angry when I see this person .. when I see this person I want to kill him and I just get more angry when he pushes me and touches me.*<sup>6</sup>
9. His report was taken very seriously because his anger was escalating daily and Childline concluded there was an imminent risk to life so they waived confidentiality and referred the case to the National Crime Agency<sup>7</sup>. Lancashire Police traced AR’s location via his IP address. And when spoken to by the officers and asked if he had been willing to use the knife, he said ‘*pretty certain*’ that he would<sup>8</sup>. Nonetheless, the police did not arrest him as he promised never to again and appeared remorseful, instead he was advised of the seriousness of his actions and emailed his school, the Range.
10. So, on 8/10 the police and the school, made a high-risk vulnerable child referral. Following police advice, AR was searched, had no knife, but admitted to having brought one in previously and that he had intended to use it “*to stab someone.*” The Deputy Safeguarding Lead worried that social services were not overly concerned, despite knowing of an incident a few days earlier when in an overheard conversation

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<sup>5</sup> [MERP001413](#): [M.McGarry, head The Range w/s 14.8.24]

<sup>6</sup> [MERP000706](#). [Childline Director, Shaun Friel, w/s 18.9.24, see internal page 4]

<sup>7</sup> [MERP000428](#)

<sup>8</sup> [LANC000177](#)

about teachers getting stabbed, AR had said “*that’s why teachers get murdered*”<sup>9</sup>. The high risk referral was stepped down to “Early Help Support” as LCC had already acted on the police referral on 7/10. There appeared to be little appreciation of the urgency and risk; to compound matters an Early Help Worker was not identified for another seven weeks, until 29/11/19.

11. The DSL and Head at the Range School are to be applauded for taking immediate action as AR was permanently excluded the next day on 9/10. The Head’s letter recorded “*Axel has been excluded due to the fact that he admitted to being in possession of a knife over a prolonged period whilst in school. He also claimed that he was quite willing to use it if he thought it necessary.*”<sup>10</sup> An appeal to the Governors failed<sup>11</sup>. The Head gave evidence that AR “*appeared to show no remorse, regret or emotion*”, trusted no one and refused all support. AR admitted he had brought a knife in on 10 previous occasions<sup>12</sup>.
12. AR was then placed at a PRU (Acorns School) on 17/10/19, this was not a specialist school for children with challenging behaviour or with autistic traits. AR had already been suspected of having ASC / ASD and a GP referral had been made in August, but no progress had been made<sup>13</sup>. The diagnosis was not made until 30 December 2020, 77 weeks after the original referral on 14 August 2019 (see Boggan w/s para 65).
13. Acorns was not a suitable placement for AR, and it was soon clear that he was out of control and that the placement was not appropriate to meet his acute special educational and behavioural needs<sup>14</sup>. There are multiple documents tracking the escalation of his disruptive and dangerous behaviour<sup>15</sup>. On 15 November 2019 AR

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<sup>9</sup> [RAN000006](#) (Range School Record of Concern)

<sup>10</sup> [SEF000011](#)

<sup>11</sup> [RAN000014](#) (Governor’s decision)

<sup>12</sup> [LCC000010](#) [Acorns School chronology - see p1, 2nd entry]; [MERP000772](#) [Janet Lewis, DSL Acorns School 28.8.24, see page 1]; [MERP001413](#) [w/s M. McGarry, Head Range School 14.8.24 - see page 5]

<sup>13</sup> [AHCH000091](#) [GP referral letter to community paediatrics querying autism & ADHD];

[AHCH000252](#) [Lynsey Boggan w/s, head of Neurodevelopmental Services Alder Hey]

<sup>14</sup> [LANC000116](#) (PC Harrison, Lancashire Police, the officer who told the Acorns to make the 1st Prevent referral); [LC000105](#) [Acorns School Annual Review 20.5.2021 - see p11 of 12]; also see MERP002558 which emphasises PC Harrison’s view that this is a worrying & high risk case.

<sup>15</sup> [MERP000772](#) [w/s Janet Lewis; Designated Safeguarding Lead Acorns School]

was found by a teacher searching for American school shootings online in ICT class<sup>16</sup>. On 20 November Acorns DSL (Jan Lewis) referred AR to Lancashire CAMHS but the referral was not accepted as he had a Sefton GP. He was referred to Sefton / Alder Hey CAMHS but there was no therapeutic intervention, they offered some advice and engaged in multi-agency discussions and strategy meetings whilst AR's behaviour escalated and presented with more worrying behaviours. On 29 November he was observed during a class to be walking about punching his hand hard, jumping and energetically punching a laminate hanging from the ceiling. During a discussion about running a business in a new area he said it was not a good idea for him as people may think he was going to kill them, he was fixated with anger and violent thoughts. 03/12/2019 he was seen by fellow pupils watching acts of graphic violence online, during an art lesson he questioned why he was able to draw images of guns but not search them on the internet and then asked '*can we have a picture of a severed head then*' and on the same day in another class was overheard talking to a pupil about watching videos of people hurting themselves and making a graphic comment about a drill bit breaking and killing someone<sup>17</sup>.

14. These were all indicators of real risk to others; a few days later on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2019 instead of taking the taxi to the Acorns School he pre-booked his own taxi, travelled back to the Range School<sup>18</sup> was seen by the Head wielding the hockey stick and was pursued, as he was being chased off the premises, he attacked another pupil.<sup>19</sup> He was intending to hit the victim with the hockey stick and finish him off with the knife; he was not bothered by the prospects of prison. His relaxed attitude to extreme violence was obvious, as were his intentions. This was a repeat of the earlier incident that led to his exclusion, when asked why carry a knife, he had bluntly replied "to use it"<sup>20</sup>. These statements were delivered with a chilling candor that underscored that he was a very dangerous and disturbed individual. Worryingly,

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<sup>16</sup> [MERP000772](#), [AHCH000120](#)

<sup>17</sup> Teacher Simon Brown [MERP002039](#), [AHCH000120](#); email headteacher to police re worrying behaviour; [LANC000058](#)

<sup>18</sup> [RAN000026](#) (M.McGarry Head The Range w/s 14.8.2024; [MERP001307](#)

<sup>19</sup> Although in interview he denied that he would have used it

<sup>20</sup> See [RAN000026](#) page 5

his random victim was a friend, a boy he liked. His family didn't help, according to the Head, AR's father attended on 11th December but was calm and didn't appreciate the gravity of the incident<sup>21</sup>. It was recorded by Merseyside Police that AR had deteriorating mental health, that he would be subjected to a full mental health assessment and they knew he had previously taken knives to school, used the internet to research school massacres & how to behead other students and had previously taken a knife to school. When in custody (11/12/19) AR was interviewed & assessed<sup>22</sup> by Stephanie Hallaron (Criminal Justice Liaison Mental Health Practitioner, he said he:

*"wouldn't have felt sad if he hurt him. He reports not planning to use the knife but states that he would have if the Hockey Stick did not work. Axel states that he had wrapped tissue paper round the handle to get a better grip. Axel was asked if he was planning on killing the student and he replied "I did want to kill him but I don't think I would. Ideally, I wish I did it. But they were in assembly so it wouldn't have happened". He is clear this was revenge ... the Head Teacher and someone else was chasing me and I'm not going to get taken to the Police Station for nothing so I thought I would hit him". Axel reports that he liked the student he hit and had never had any problems with this boy. Axel reports it doesn't bother him that he assaulted the boy as he didn't get hurt that bad.* <sup>23</sup>

15. Telephone advice was given to Ms Hallaron on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2020 that given the high risk, the weapons, the interest in mass killings, beheadings, ISIS; the knives and the hockey stick attack, the lack of remorse & low empathy, that part of the safety plan should be to check his bedroom for potential weapons. Had there been a legal power to do this between 2020 and 29<sup>th</sup> July 2024 this massacre would have been avoided as the arsenal of weapons he was hoarding would have been discovered<sup>24</sup>. Whether this is possible under current legislation or whether changes should be made should be considered, although perhaps in Part 2.

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<sup>21</sup> [MERP000186](#)

<sup>22</sup> [MERP002881](#); Hallaron 11.12.19, Criminal Justice Mental Health Liaison & Diversion Practitioner; Custody Suite Contact Form

<sup>23</sup> [MERP002881](#)

<sup>24</sup> Ricin seeds on 19/1/22 [PREM000002](#); bows and arrows on 28/3/22 [MERP000577](#); bottles and ingredients for Molotov cocktails on 30/4/22 [MERP007551](#); hunting knives 15/10/23 [EVRI000002](#); sledgehammer and machetes on 10/6/23, [JIMB000002](#); [SPRB000014](#); another machete on 3/10/23 [MERP001253](#), and the murder weapon on 13/7/24 [MERP000830](#)

16. Stephanie Hallaron realised the dangers and referred the case immediately to FCAMHS for assessment for a suspected conduct disorder and how to manage his offending behaviour given the risk to others.<sup>25</sup> LCC held a strategy meeting on 17/10; the meeting was told by Skott Morgan (CAMHS) that although AR had no sign of a diagnosable mental illness,<sup>26</sup> he presented a clear and credible risk of re-offending; Hallaron was in no doubt it was a "high risk forensic case" but the record of this meeting stopped short of formally describing it as 'immediate' or 'high'. It warranted immediate management through school exclusion, bail conditions, CAMHS/FCAMHS referral, Prevent involvement, and close CSC monitoring. Escalating risk factors identified were clear intent to kill; lack of remorse and inappropriate affect (laughing during interview); repeated knife carrying leading to a violent assault; fixation on grievances (bullying claims). ARs lack of empathy was noted so ASD was a working hypothesis, not yet the accepted cause; ASD traits were *underpinning his risk* only solidified later, once CAMHS/FCAMHS had given input.
17. Whether AR's homicidal intentions and violence were connected to mental illness (which appeared unlikely) or a behavioural condition such as a conduct disorder had to be determined as a matter of urgency. If his dangerous behaviour was driven by personality issues it increased risk; the absence of a diagnosable psychiatric condition (mental illness) did not mean an absence of risk. His mindless attack on his friend, in the absence of his true target, demonstrated just how dis-regulated and dangerous he was.
18. So, post the hockey stick attack the system did react, but there were too many failures by individuals and systemic inadequacies. AR was bailed with stringent conditions, one of which was not to attend Acorns, which led to his unlawful and

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<sup>25</sup> [AHCH000231](#) [Referral form to FCAMHS] & [MERP000178](#) (page 12/62]; also page 29-37 of 62: "Axel is currently open to PREVENT for concerns around radicalisation and is thought he has been accessing beheading videos, mass school shooting videos and information about ISIS on his devices." p31]

<sup>26</sup> [LCC000234](#) & [LCC000237](#): see Child & Family Assessment by Anna Jameson, Social Worker (Assessment & Safeguarding Team, West Lancs). Skott Morgan (CAMHS Mental Health Practitioner's advice) on 16.12.19 during LCC Strategy Meeting; "Information provided by Skott Morgan, CAMHS Practitioner at the strategy discussion on the 16 December 2019 stated that there was no evidence of Axel experiencing any mental health difficulties."

unofficial exclusion Acorns (although he was reluctant to attend anyway); Acorns made a Prevent referral (followed by two further abortive in 2021); Merseyside Police made referrals to LCC who arranged a strategy meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2020 but this led to no action, to FCAMHS for an autism assessment, the Acorns DSL, Janet Lewis, made the first of the 3 Prevent referrals but that came to nothing. He was charged with assault & possession of an offensive weapon and a bladed article & received a 10-month Referral Order to the Youth Offending Team. It was a rehabilitative measure aimed at addressing his behavior and providing YOT support.

19. The need to forensically assess for a conduct disorder pushed by Ms Hallaron was confirmed by a Child Behaviour Checklist carried out on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2019 but the conclusions were never followed through. AR fulfilled the criteria and should have been assessed and diagnosed as having a conduct disorder or possibly Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD), which had he been an adult would have fitted the criteria for a DSM-5 / ICD-11 diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder. This is the parents' working hypothesis and despite obvious time constraints it is hoped the Inquiry will explore this theme & consider instructing a leading forensic consultant psychiatrist.
20. The CBC checklist was completed by AR's mother and administered and interpreted by Skott Morgan. It showed AR on the Conduct Problems scale in the borderline clinical range (93<sup>rd</sup> to 97<sup>th</sup> percentile), his scores on other scales relevant specifically to conduct disorder, such as Oppositional Defiant Problems and Aggressive Behaviour, were in the clinical range above the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile. These were findings strongly suggestive of significant behavioural concerns that align with traits associated with conduct disorder and Skott Morgan recommended he needed a full DSM psychiatric assessment.
21. Thereafter, the further multi-disciplinary strategy meeting (initiated by the police) took place on 6<sup>th</sup> January and discussed AR's ongoing risks, including his lack of

educational provision and the potential neglect of his needs. It was determined not to escalate to a full s47<sup>27</sup>.

22. Despite the severity of AR's behaviour and the acknowledged high risk, FCAMHS were only briefly involved. A meeting was convened on 21st January 2020 to discuss the case and AR's risk, but the recommended forensic assessment was not discussed or arranged for the inadequate reason that an ASD diagnosis had to be confirmed first (despite a two-year waiting list). FCMHs decided it was sufficient that the paediatric team should be made aware of the case and contribute to the risk management plan. Skott Morgan (CAMHS not FCAMHS) was to oversee how CAMHS could escalate to paediatrics<sup>28</sup>. It appears that this did not happen. The FCAMHS lead<sup>29</sup> seemed relaxed, his team normally handled more serious cases considering higher risk and offending<sup>30</sup>. Post meeting, he would decide whether their service would be able to offer anything and meet with AR and family, so FCAMHS didn't meet AR; he said to Jo Hodson (Acorns head) [gist] *"I've been thinking about what you said before, I don't have a crystal ball, none of us have! We can't say whether he's likely to offend again. There are kids who have carried out serious offences, they still have a right to an education."* She replied [gist] *"that might be so, but she wasn't prepared to explain to a parent why a child at our school has been seriously injured."*
23. Ms Hallaron / Jo Hodson & PC Harrison appreciated that the risk was very high, particularly given the unprovoked attack on his friend. There was an urgency to get AR assessed, get him appropriate education, psychological interventions; all in order to protect the public and try to meet his needs. But sadly, the FCAMHS process was closed off to AR (& the public) by letter dated 11 February 2020<sup>31</sup>; the case would step down to early help via LCC (i.e. family and social support); professionals could

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<sup>27</sup> [LCC000023](#)

<sup>28</sup> [LCC000234](#) & [LCC000237](#): Skott Morgan (CAMHS Mental Health Practitioner's advice) on 16.12.19 during LCC Strategy Meeting; ([LCC000020](#)) FCAMHS meeting notes , 21.1.20

<sup>29</sup> John Hicklin

<sup>30</sup> ([LCC000020](#)) FCAMHS meeting notes , 21.1.20. Also at [MERP000696](#)

<sup>31</sup> [AHCH000231](#) [John Hicklin, Clinical Nurse Specialist to Stephanie Hallaron]

contact them again if there were significant changes in circumstances or risk behaviors.

24. AR's 10-month community (referral) order was handed down on 19<sup>th</sup> February and on 20<sup>th</sup> February LCC completed a Child & Family social work assessment (not a full core assessment pursuant to s47 CA89)<sup>32</sup>. The adequacy of this assessment and whether it should have been a core not a CIN assessment needs to be examined carefully. Instead of closing AR's case on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the Department should have remained as the lead agency<sup>33</sup>. There was no other agency with an overall view of risk, LCC were in charge of safeguarding, social work support and above all special educational provision. There was no coherent or effective planning and he was no longer treated as constituting a risk (let alone a high risk) as acknowledged in late 2019, to either himself or anyone else. There were no competent risk assessments (there could not be one without a full psychiatric assessment as recommended by Hallaron and Skott Morgan). His case was downgraded and he received no significant intervention into his offending behaviour.
25. The closure record noted that AR had been referred to the YOT and CAMHS for support with his emotions. All that was offered was a period of s.17 CIN support before a step across to light touch welfare and social support via the Early Help Service<sup>34</sup>.
26. In the years that followed, his obsessions deepened. LCC failed to find him an appropriate educational placement, Covid complicated matters in 2020 but he rejected what was on offer and immersed himself in material about school shootings, mass killings, and genocide. He attempted to manufacture poison. He ordered weapons and weapon-like items online: machetes, sledgehammers, bows and arrows, bottles and ingredients for Molotov cocktails, even seeds to produce ricin.

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<sup>32</sup> CYP PLAN [LCC000032](#); CIN assessment: [LCC000237](#)

<sup>33</sup> Swathes of statutory & non-statutory guidance exist: [Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK](#); [Keeping children safe in education - GOV.UK](#) [current]; [Prevent duty guidance: England, Scotland and Wales \(2015\) - GOV.UK](#); [Information sharing advice for safeguarding practitioners - GOV.UK](#); [Searching, screening and confiscation in schools - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>34</sup> Referral to Early Help [MERP002384](#), [LCC000040](#)

27. He was violent at home, threatening his own father with a knife. On 17<sup>th</sup> March 2022 he went missing as found on a bus with a knife, telling police: “*I want to stab someone.*”<sup>[1]</sup> The police located him after a 999 call by the bus company; they thought he had mental health issues and took him home. He told them that he wanted” to *stab someone*”, that he had thoughts about poisoning someone; there was no particular target. When his mother was told about poison, she said he had spoken about poison to her previously. We know in fact that AR had bought ricin on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022<sup>[2]</sup>: so it was presumably in the house on 17<sup>th</sup> March. All of this when allied to his past (if it had been) would have alerted the arresting officers to his re-emergence as a threat to public safety. Bizarrely AR claimed at the time that if arrested police would be able to delete embarrassing social media posts<sup>[3]</sup>. See PC Fairclough’s statements<sup>35</sup>.
28. These are not scraps of evidence discovered after the event. They were known, or certainly should have been known at the time, by different arms of the state. The tragedy here is not that the signs were invisible, but that they were ignored, treated in isolation, or subordinated to the perception that AR was primarily a vulnerable boy, rather than an obvious risk to others.

### Missed Opportunities

29. There were many mistakes and missed opportunities. The early indicators in late 2019 of a willingness to use extreme violence were “near misses” & despite the initial responses were either disregarded, forgotten or not passed on to professionals who could have altered the outcome. The failures fall into patterns.

### Risk Underestimated

30. Despite the initial acceptance that the risk was very high (particularly by the police, the Diversion and Liaison Service, safeguarding at Acorns School and possibly Skott Morgan) he was never subjected to a full forensic psychiatric assessment with benefit of the full background. First, risk was consistently underestimated. A forensic child mental health service concluded that AR posed “no risk to children”

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<sup>35</sup> [LANC000019](#), [LANC000023](#)

and only “medium risk” of harm to others — despite his known history of carrying knives and making threats. That conclusion was flagged by a clinician as unusual, but nothing was done to correct it<sup>36</sup>.

#### Information Not Shared

31. Second, information was not shared. Critical reports were not scanned into records<sup>37</sup>. Later psychiatrists were unaware of his true history. Those who did know did not communicate effectively with those who might have acted. The system treated each incident as isolated, rather than part of a clear trajectory towards serious violence. There is no space to develop this point, but it is fundamental as it explains why Dr Ram & Dr Molyneux from 2022 had no idea about the past history, although they should have asked & showed no professional curiosity. They had therefore no idea of the compelling arguments to assess for signs of a conduct disorder and a dangerous personality.

#### Education Failure

32. Third, education failed. AR disengaged from mainstream schooling. He became absent, isolated, spending uncontrolled hours online consuming violent material. Yet the local authority did not discharge its statutory duty to ensure suitable education for a child outside school. Being missing from education is itself a safeguarding red flag. This will developed in due course and is a central component to this tragedy.

#### Weak Criminal-Justice Response

33. Fourth, the criminal-justice response was weak. Police and youth offending teams could not have considered applying for a Knife Crime Prevention Order<sup>38</sup> as though KCPOs were already on the statute book they had not been commenced or piloted.

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<sup>36</sup> [AHCH000229](#) & Dr Killen para 28

<sup>37</sup> FCAMHS / Liaison & Diversion documents re high risk were forwarded to Dr Killen on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2020 who same day shares them with Sam Coppard. These **ESSENTIAL** docs dealing with the risk AR posed to others, particularly children were not uploaded onto the system. Dr Killen asked for them to be scanned but they were not – she goes on in her s9 stmt to accept that this was an omission .. “Reviewing the records in 2025 I believe the FCAMHS records were not available to practitioners after Sam Coppard on the basis that they were not uploaded. This is an omission.” The Trust is now formally investigating this failure.

<sup>38</sup> [Offensive Weapons Act 2019](#)

This would have been a crucial safeguard in AR's case<sup>39</sup>. Despite repeated possession of knives, criminal offences like the instant case were often met with safeguarding measures alone, here the response was wholly inadequate, but a KPCO could have been the answer. Opportunities to prosecute or to impose structured controls were missed, KCPO need to be rolled out urgently.

### No Coherent Plan

34. Fifth, there was no coherent multi-agency plan. Formal MAPPA did not apply because he was under 18. But tools did exist to keep AR's case and appreciation of high risk on the radar of all the agencies: referrals should not have been closed: properly used Child in Need plans & core assessments, Child Protection conferences, local multi-agency risk management panels were not convened, or if convened, not used effectively.
35. In short, the agencies that knew of AR treated him as vulnerable with ASD / ASC as his major presenting difficulties, but not as dangerous. His needs were prioritised over the risk he posed to others. That judgment proved catastrophic & given the graphic (suppressed) history is very hard to understand.

### The Family's Silence

36. Within AR's family home, the risk was equally plain. Knives were hidden from him. His violent obsessions were visible. A week before the murders, his father stopped him taking a taxi to his former school, carrying a rucksack he suspected of containing weapons, likely a knife<sup>40</sup>. He paid off the driver. He knew what was happening. Yet he told no one. Dion, his brother, has written about the fatal day: *"I ran into a friend and someone mentioned there had been a stabbing in town. I then started to worry it might be my brother....[Later] we were told about five people had*

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<sup>39</sup> They can be imposed on adults and children aged 12 or over; Orders are civil (preventive), not criminal: they can impose conditions (e.g. restricting movement, association, use of social media, curfews, attendance at positive interventions); breach of an order is a criminal offence; the orders are designed to be flexible: tailored to prevent further knife-related offences, protect the public, and steer young people into support.

<sup>40</sup> [MERP001060](#)

*been killed. I believed by now that it was my brother who was responsible. I wasn't told directly, but I knew it was him.*"<sup>41</sup> How could he be so sure?

37. The silence by the family was a final, fatal failure. The law already imposes a duty to report information about terrorism. Section 38B of the Terrorism Act 2000 makes it a crime to withhold knowledge of terrorist plans. But no equivalent duty applies where the threat is serious violence unconnected with ideology.
38. The families submit that there must be such a duty. Not a blunt instrument criminalising parental misjudgement, but a carefully drafted obligation targeting deliberate silence where there is credible knowledge of imminent risk. Parents and carers are often the first to see the danger. When they know, and wilfully keep silent, lives are endangered. Teachers, doctors and social workers already have safeguarding duties that require them to disclose risk. Why should parents be the only actors excused from such an obligation, when they are often best placed to intervene?

### The Three-Legged Stool

39. This case exposes the fragility of the safeguarding system which could be seen as akin to a "three-legged stool": the two main element consist of public law and criminal law powers, duties and sanctions; but the third is or should be, via a loosening of the recent judicial strangulation of private law duties on public authorities, a more liberal approach to the imposition of duties of care in negligence.

### Public Law

40. Public law supplies duties and framework guidance such as *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and *Keeping Children safe in Education* which sets out clear responsibilities for local authorities, police and health bodies. The Prevent duty, imposed by the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, requires schools, councils and health services to act where there is risk of radicalisation. The education legislation is a complex web which requires local authorities to assess and provide

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<sup>41</sup> [MERP001217](#)

for educational special needs, to monitor and intervene when children are missing from education. The failures in this case were legion.

41. Above all, the Human Rights Act 1998 gives domestic effect to Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights — the right to life . Strasbourg jurisprudence, most famously in *Osman v UK*, makes clear that where authorities know or ought to know of a real and immediate risk to life, they must take reasonable operational steps to prevent it.
42. These are not aspirational duties. They are binding obligations. And yet, in AR’s case, they were not given effect. If the high thresholds under the HRA were not met, there should be recovery at common law, but that is not (strictly) for this Inquiry.

#### Criminal Law

43. Criminal law supplies the tools of compulsion and deterrence: offences for carrying bladed articles, powers of arrest, bail conditions, Knife Crime Prevention Orders. But the crucial duty to disclose information applies only in terrorism. There is no equivalent for serious violence.
44. That omission left a gap. Parents could know of imminent plans to commit murder, and yet be under no duty to report them. That is untenable.

#### Private Law

45. Private law supplies accountability, learning and the imposition of duties in negligence enhance standards but negligence law has defined limits, as reaffirmed in a series of recent Supreme Court judgments (*Robinson / Poole & Tindall*). Generally, omissions are not actionable unless a duty has been assumed or the authority has made matters worse.
46. But those limits do not relieve this Inquiry of its task. Even where civil liability may not arise, the Inquiry can and should map the failures, highlight the gaps, and consider recommending reform if the conclusion is that the current law is too restrictive and public bodies need to be “encouraged” to raise their standards.

### The Definition of Terrorism

47. The families also invite consideration of how the law defines terrorism. Under the 2000 Act, terrorism requires a political, religious, racial or ideological purpose. But the Southport murders were in every practical sense indistinguishable from a terrorist outrage: mass killing of children in a public space, intended to terrify a community.
48. To insist upon ideology is artificial. In a digital era, perpetrators may be driven by grievance, nihilism, or online radicalisation unconnected with any coherent cause. The effect is the same: terror in the community.
49. The law should reflect that reality, while preserving safeguards against overreach. The families invite careful reform so that deliberate acts of indiscriminate mass violence intended to terrify a community are recognised as terrorism, whatever the perpetrator's ideology.

### Prevent and Compulsion

50. A further structural weakness lies in Prevent. Engagement is voluntary. Where a young person refuses to cooperate, there is no mechanism to compel intervention. That is a loophole<sup>42</sup>.
51. The families invite this Inquiry to consider proportionate, judicially supervised powers to require engagement in defined high-risk cases. Voluntariness cannot be the limit of our protection when life is at risk.
52. It is no answer to say that compulsory intervention is stigmatising. The greater stigma lies in a child being left to fester in isolation, armed with knives, immersed in violent fantasy, until he carries it out.

### How easy it was for AR to indulge his cruel obsession

53. On the day of the attack, AR left the house in a taxi, as he had tried to do a week earlier. He arrived at Hart Street, went through open doors, ascended a flight of stairs and through another pair of open doors. He then killed and maimed as many children

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<sup>42</sup> Also see para 56, last two bullets

as he could with a knife he bought from Amazon two weeks before for £8.39. He was still, just, a child himself. But he had been free to indulge his cruel obsession for years from the comfort of his bedroom: watching what he liked online (beheadings, extreme propaganda), ordering what he liked online (machetes, ricin seeds, bows and arrows, a sledgehammer). He deployed the simplest ruses to bypass any age restrictions: fake IDs and VPNs.

54. The Inquiry will have to consider if there should have been greater checks to have at least hindered AR's path to destruction. As Dr Molyneux says, *"The internet has come to operate, unchecked, as a kind of Wild West, and the malleable, impressionable, developing minds of our young people are incredibly vulnerable to its unprecedented and frighteningly under recognised dangers.....With regard to Southport, I wonder if the most valuable learning of all, might be to rethink our entire approach to how we regulate the internet in this country, and set about building a nation that provides psychological safety and security for our children."*<sup>43</sup>
55. What does exposure to this sort of material do to those with an underlying conduct disorder? It turns them into AR. Will the Online Safety Act 2023 go far enough in barring access to this sort of material to people like AR?

### What Should Have Happened

56. The answer is not mysterious. From 2019 onwards, a proper response required:
- That risk to others was integrated into every assessment of AR.
  - That a structured multi-agency plan was created, with a lead authority with named professional ownership and accountability.
  - That the youth-justice system considered and used its powers, including Knife Crime Prevention Orders.
  - That the education authority ensured suitable full-time appropriate provision and acted decisively when it failed.

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<sup>43</sup> [AHCH000253](#)

- That secure or specialist provision (if necessary, purchased from the private sector) was considered once community management and maintained was ineffective or unavailable.
- That forensic psychiatric assessment was obtained when homicidal ideation was declared and conduct disorders suspected.
- That parents and carers had a clear statutory duty to disclose credible knowledge of imminent serious violence.
- That an effective MAPPA-equivalent existed for under-18s.
- Broaden Prevent’s remit or create a parallel pathway for non-ideological violent risk
- Require a statutory CAMHS/forensic psychiatry assessment before closing any Prevent referral for someone under 18 where violent ideation, weapons, self-harm, or severe social withdrawal are present.

57. In short, the path required was one of joined-up, multi-agency risk management. Instead, we saw siloed responses, competing priorities, and a refusal to see the obvious.

### Conclusion

58. AR will spend most, perhaps all, of his life in prison. But the parents of Bebe, Elsie and Alice live with life sentences of grief. Their request is simple: that this Inquiry should face the failures plainly, learn from them, and recommend reforms so that others are protected.

59. They ask for candour, not defensiveness. For institutions to set aside reputational concerns and confront their omissions. For the system to acknowledge that it placed AR’s supposed vulnerability above the obvious danger he posed to others.

60. Failure, in this case, to repeat “leaps off the page”. The families ask that you make sure it does not happen again.

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WILLIAM CHAPMAN

9 September 2025