

Witness Name: Janet Lewis

Exhibits: JL1 – JL11

Dated: 5 September 2025

## THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

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### FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF JANET LEWIS FORMER DESIGNATED SAFEGUARDING LEAD OF THE ACORNS SCHOOL LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

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I, Janet Lewis, will say as follows:

#### **Background**

1. I make this statement in response to a request by the Inquiry Legal Team dated 6 August 2025 in connection with my previous role as the Designated Safeguarding Lead (“DSL”) and Attendance Manager at The Acorns School (“Acorns”).
2. I started my career in education in 1985 as a Teaching Assistant in a special school for children with severe learning difficulties. I did this for 19 years before moving into Children’s Social Care to work as a Nursery Officer. I then became a Community Family Support Worker. In March 2005, I went back to teaching as a Level 3 Teaching Assistant working with young offenders at Red Bank Secure Children’s Home.
3. I joined Acorns in September 2009 as a Level 3 Teaching Assistant. Due to my background in Special Educational Needs (“SEN”), I held various roles at Acorns. From September 2017 to February 2019, I was the Higher Level Teaching Assistant (“HLTA”) Nurture Coordinator and Assistant Special Educational Needs Coordinator (“SENCO”). From March 2019, I took on the role of DSL and Pathways Coordinator. During the period being considered by the Inquiry, I was the DSL and Pupil Support Manager. I left Acorns in August 2023. I intended to retire and set up a business as a dog groomer. In early 2025, I decided to return to working in education part time and I now work as an Office Manager in a local primary school.

4. I have previously provided a statement to Merseyside Police, dated 28 August 2024, which I attach as Exhibit JL1/MERP000772. I confirm I have reviewed this statement which I made without reference to any documents. Having referred to it now, with access to the documents provided by the Inquiry, I can confirm that I have accidentally mixed up some of the dates of the Prevent referrals. When I made my statement to the police, I thought I had made a Prevent referral on 5 December 2019 and a further Prevent referral after the incident at the Range High School on 11 December 2019. It was very difficult at the time to remember when exactly the referrals were made. I now know that I made a total of three Prevent referrals on 5 December 2019, 1 February 2021 and 21 April 2021.

### **Chronology of involvement with AR**

5. AR transferred to Acorns after he was excluded from a mainstream school, the Range High School, for carrying knives. I was not involved in AR's transfer to Acorns as this did not form part of my role, but I was aware of the reasons for his exclusion. Acorns is a Pupil Referral Unit ("PRU"), so it was not uncommon for us to have pupils who were known to carry weapons or other prohibited items. For that reason, all pupils at Acorns were wanded on arrival to school. They would enter the school into a holding area, hand in their mobile phone, be searched with a wand and then go through to the school. They would not be allowed into the school if they refused to hand in their phone or any other prohibited items. This system was effective and did stop pupils bringing prohibited items into school.
6. As the DSL, any safeguarding concerns or risks concerning pupils would be raised with me via the CPOMs system. Any concerns logged would automatically come to me as the DSL and also the back-up DSL, the Headteacher and the Deputy Headteacher. CPOMs was an online system that allowed staff to log a concern which automatically came to me to review. I would log on every morning and review any concerns raised. I would then consider what actions needed to be taken and assign any actions to staff. I did not have a lot of personal interaction with AR, but I was made aware of concerns about his behaviour via CPOMs. I was also present for some of AR's lessons which I will address later in this statement.
7. AR first became known to me as the DSL in November 2019 after he had been discovered researching mass school shootings during an ICT lesson. The concerns were shared with me via CPOMs, which I would have reviewed [Exhibit JL2/LCC001346]. Sharon Evans, the teacher who reported the concern, spoke to AR's father about this and asked him to reinforce that this was not appropriate. She updated CPOMs to reflect that AR's father had

stated that AR had only copied the behaviour of another pupil and that he had clicked on a link to a news story. There is reference in the CPOMs entry to obtaining AR's internet search history.

8. There was an escalation in AR's behaviour over the following few weeks including AR refusing to do work, punching himself, making comments about murder, talking about internet searches for guns and asking about severed heads. I felt concerned by the accumulation of incidents and spoke to Jane Eccleston, former Headteacher, about making a referral to Prevent. She agreed with my suggestion of a referral and submitted this to Prevent on 5 December 2019 [Exhibit JL3/LCC000383]. In the referral, I set out the background to AR's permanent exclusion from the Range High School leading to his referral to Acorns. I then set out entries from CPOMS dated 15 November, 29 November, 3 December and 4 December 2019 concerning AR's behaviour in school, including correspondence exchanged with PC 554 Paul Harrison of the Community Safety Team (West Lancashire) regarding my attempts to refer AR to Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub ("MASH").
  
9. There were around three weeks between the incident where AR had been found researching school shootings and making the Prevent referral. I would not necessarily have automatically referred AR on the basis of a potentially one-off incident. I made the Prevent referral having considered the recent incidents and escalation in behaviour collectively. I also wanted to ensure we had a robust evidence base to rely upon for a referral which included having internal discussions and gathering information. I recall speaking with Jane Eccleston about making the referral at the time and she fully supported this.
  
10. Following this, I can recall trying to contact MASH as a MASH referral was required to refer AR to CAMHS. Referrals to MASH made by CAMHS seemed to be dealt with better than referrals made directly by the school. Initially, on 3 December 2019, I telephoned the Children and Family Wellbeing Service ("CFW") regarding the concerns in relation to AR's behaviour, and I was advised to contact MASH. I attempted to contact Matt Chipchase at MASH who was off sick. I then emailed LCC Children and Young People to ask for advice. Jenny Ashton, MASH Education Officer, responded via email on 6 December 2019 advising that the concerns regarding AR's internet searches could be managed with level 2 support such as via Police Community Safety Officer and Emotional Wellbeing Services and Child Action Northwest ("CANW") [Exhibit JL2/LCC001346, pg.70].

11. The police called me within a couple of hours of making the Prevent referral, but I cannot remember much about this conversation other than that they were reassuring and asked me for further information. Two police officers also came to Acorns for a meeting and advised they would go to see AR at home. I remember we discussed AR's behaviour, but I cannot remember in detail what we discussed. My recollection is that they did say that if AR was not suitable for referral to Channel, he would be referred to Early Help. I cannot specifically recall the police asking for a copy of AR's internet search history, but they may have. I would not have had any involvement in this. I cannot recall the police giving us any advice after making the referral other than that we should not hesitate to make another referral if we felt we needed to. They did not disclose to us what they had spoken to AR about. At some point I became aware that this referral was closed off by Prevent without further action, but I cannot remember how or when I became aware of this.
12. On 11 December 2019, AR went to the Range High School and attacked a pupil. That morning, AR had not arrived at Acorns. I asked my colleague Pam, a receptionist, to call AR's parents to find out why he had not attended. I recall that she could not get through initially. When she later spoke to AR's father, he said that AR had got a taxi to school that morning. Pam confirmed that he had not.
13. A staff member at Acorns was made aware of the incident either by the Range High School or the police but I cannot recall who. The call did not come to me directly, but I was informed by someone that AR had travelled to the Range and assaulted a pupil with a hockey stick. I was told that he had been arrested and found with a knife in his bag. I can recall being alarmed by the pre-meditation of this incident.
14. Following this incident, AR was not allowed to come back to school whilst the relevant authorities made decisions about the next steps for AR's future at Acorns. My recollection was that Acorns were encouraged by other agencies to keep him on the roll. Acorns were concerned about the level of risk AR presented and we felt that it was unsafe to bring him back into school without a full risk assessment being conducted by the agencies involved. During this time, work was sent home to AR to complete so that he could maintain some education whilst he was absent from school although I recall this was not particularly successful. On a couple of occasions, I attended AR's home address with a colleague with a bundle of work for AR to complete and to conduct safeguarding checks. We did not enter the house but met with AR's father at the door. We requested to see AR and he also came to the door.

15. There was a multi-agency meeting on 17 December 2019, but I do not think I attended this. I think it was attended by Joanne Hodson and Jane Eccleston.
16. I did attend a multi-agency meeting on 6 January 2020 [Exhibit JL2/LCC001346, pg.11-12]. I cannot recall anything about this meeting beyond what is recorded on CPOMs.
17. In June 2020, the Covid-19 lockdown was lifted, and AR was offered tuition on a two-to-one basis. A High Support Tuition Teacher, Maggie Allred, taught AR and I would sit in the room during the class. My recollection is that he was banned from using a computer unless he was supervised and he would complain about this. I can recall that he would discuss world events and would try to draw me or Maggie into talking about them. At some point, when it was felt the risk was reducing, AR went down to one-to-one tuition with Maggie.
18. On 1 February 2021, I made a second referral to Prevent after Acorns were notified by the DSL at the Range, David Cregeen, that AR had posted on Instagram about Colonel Gaddafi [Exhibit JL4/ LCC000455]. I set out the information provided by Mr Cregeen on the same date via email, including the screenshot of AR's Instagram post, and that AR had been previously referred to Prevent "*after the Range High School shared concerns with Acorns School regarding possible radicalisation and what he was looking at online and discussing just before he was permanently excluded.*" I had sought advice from CT/Prevent Pam Smith over the phone before making the referral.
19. On 9 February 2021, I received an email from PC Carmen Thompson from Counter Terrorism Policing North West ("CTPNW") in response to the second Prevent referral. Her email said: "*I just wanted to check that there were no further concerns other than the information from the previous school in relation to the Instagram posts?*".
20. I replied the same day copying in Joanne Hodson and Maggie Allred stating: "*In relation to AR, we have no further concerns at this time. I have cc'd Maggie Allred AR's high support tutor into this email. Maggie has informed myself and Jo Hodson our Acting Head Teacher that in relation to the Instagram post from AR there is a possibility he could have written the actual post as it appears to be in his style of writing in relation to his ASD*".
21. Maggie separately replied to me and Joanne: "*I assumed that there was a concern? I am concerned as I think he may not be active, but he could easily be radicalised and would be a huge risk if this happened – the risk would be very real of harm to others*". I replied: "*Don't worry Carmen from PREVENT will be looking into it. She was worked with AR before and knows his background – she has more than likely done a lot of the legwork already*".

*and just wants to know if we have any further immediate concerns and at the moment there don't appear to be any".*

22. A few minutes later I sent a further reply which read: "*Maggie-first rule of safeguarding. Don't assume there is an issue until there is one! We can only refer on what we see and not what we fear or assume!*". [Exhibit JL5/LCC001526]
23. It is very important in safeguarding to deal with the facts and the information available to you. I was conscious of relying too much on opinion and assumption and wanted to reassure Maggie that we had provided a factual representation of what had been observed in relation to AR to Prevent. I was reassured by the fact that Carmen Thompson had dealt with AR previously and knew the background to the first referral. I would have spoken to Maggie about this and the importance of referring on the basis of what we had seen and not what we assumed.
24. To my knowledge, I do not think Maggie's concerns were passed on to Prevent at this time. In the referral, we had provided a full overview of the concerns shared by the Range regarding possible radicalisation and the fact that a previous referral had been made. In hindsight, perhaps we should have relayed Maggie's concerns to Prevent at this stage although I do not think this would have changed the position in terms of the referral being closed. We did not receive any feedback in terms of any work Prevent did with AR at this stage and again I do not think we would have been provided with any further feedback had the concerns raised in Maggie's email been passed on. We may have been asked to make another referral which we did in any event around two months later.
25. On 21 April 2021, I made a third referral to Prevent [Exhibit JL6/ LCC001399]. This referral related to a number of issues which had been raised during AR's sessions with Maggie, including researching the London Bridge bombings and discussing Israel and Palestine, the IRA and the "occupation" of Northern Ireland in the 1600s by the British. I completed the form, but the information predominantly came from Maggie's entries on CPOMs [Exhibit JL2/LCC001346, pg.41-42].
26. Jane Eccleston and I met with AR and his father to advise we were making a referral to Prevent due to our concerns. My recollection is that AR's father felt that AR was being bullied and subjected to racist abuse by the school. He was dismissive of the concerns being raised. Following this referral, AR started to ask for more information about this process including asking to see a copy of the referral. He said he wanted to see the information and had a right to see it. I took legal advice, the outcome of which was that AR

could see any information but not if there was a risk to himself or others. I felt there was a high risk of harm in him seeing this information, so it was not shared.

### **Internet Usage**

27. My recollection is that after the incident in December 2019, AR was not allowed to use a computer at school unless he was being closely supervised by a teacher. I think his access was taken away completely for a period of time and when he was allowed to access the internet again, he was monitored closely. I do not think Acorns could have done anything differently in terms of monitoring and supervising AR's internet usage. The supervision system in place worked effectively in that any concerns were picked up and logged on CPOMs. AR did make attempts to override the security settings and access the internet but again this was picked up by teachers and he was unsuccessful in doing so.

28. I believe attempts were made to extract AR's internet history, but this was not done by me.

29. I understand the Inquiry has received the records concerning AR's internet usage on 15 November 2019 and that it appears AR was attempting to access webpages concerning other weapons and injuries [Exhibit JL7/LCC001401]. I cannot recall seeing this document as I think the School Business Manager dealt with obtaining this however, I do believe it was uploaded to CPOMs and provided to Prevent as part of the first referral in December 2019.

### **Prevent Referrals**

30. I do not think Acorns could have done any more to follow up on the referrals to Prevent. Given that a total of three referrals were made to Prevent, I am surprised that they did not refer AR to Channel. In making three referrals, I felt that we were enriching the intelligence picture for the police and that appropriate action would be taken, including a referral to Channel. There was overall a lack of feedback following each referral and Acorns were left in the dark in terms of what work was being done by Prevent with AR and his family following each referral. However, Carmen Thompson was approachable and did generally keep in touch with the school via email. Whilst I was surprised at the lack of feedback, I trusted that the appropriate action had been taken by the body responsible for dealing with the referrals. I ultimately trusted the process and assumed that the necessary work was being done with AR.

31. At the time, I did not consider making any further Prevent referrals in relation to AR. On reflection, we could have lodged an earlier Prevent referral immediately following the incident on 15 November 2019 when AR was found to be searching for school shootings. However, following this incident the school did make efforts to share concerns regarding AR's behaviour with other agencies. He was new to the school at this stage, and we were keeping a very close eye on his behaviour. Any concerns were logged promptly on CPOMs and shared with other agencies. The incidents logged on CPOMs on 15 November, 29 November, 3 December and 4 December 2019 were all included in the first referral.

### **Risk Assessments**

32. I was not involved in the preparation of AR's risk assessment [Exhibit JL8/LCC000707], although I would have reviewed this to understand any concerns and the level of risk he presented. Risk assessments were completed by class teachers and key workers who had direct access and knowledge of pupils. They are to assess the level of risk to the pupil themselves (for example if a pupil self-harms), the level of risk to staff and the level of risk to other pupils. They do not assess the risk presented by a pupil outside of school and in the community. Risk assessments should be updated on a regular basis, whenever an incident occurs or a new risk emerges. They are intended to provide a true reflection of behaviour.

33. I cannot recall receiving any training on how to complete risk assessments. There is a template, and I learnt from seeing examples prepared by other staff.

34. Overall, I think we considered the risk AR posed to staff and other pupils well and put appropriate safeguards in place, when necessary, such as two-to-one and one-to-one tuition.

### **Steps taken to re-engage AR**

35. There were various times when AR would not engage, particularly when he was not permitted to attend school and was receiving work at home. To encourage engagement, we implemented a reduced timetable and worked with AR's parents to encourage him to come to school. We tried to engage AR for an hour daily and gradually build this up. It was not possible to have him in school full time with other students as he was considered to be too high risk. We were very limited in terms of what we could do when he was not at school, and we were reliant on his parents to encourage him to do schoolwork.

36. Where a pupil stops attending school, there are various options available to re-engage them. In the first instance, this could be an emergency review meeting with the pupil and their parents to try to agree a way forward. Contact is made with the pupil's home and a visit arranged to discuss any issues and how support can be put in place. Any agencies involved with the pupil will also be notified if they are not attending.
37. It can be difficult to re-engage pupils who attend PRUs. The approach to re-engaging a pupil should be tailored to them and can involve agreeing a bespoke timetable and focussing in on the subjects that they enjoy to encourage them to come into school. Where attendance is an issue, this is monitored and reviewed regularly. Being in regular contact with the family and conducting home visits can assist with re-engagement.
38. In AR's case, his attendance was inconsistent at times, particularly following the third Prevent referral in April 2021. AR's father had shared the Prevent referral with him and I think he was angry about the things that had been said about him. The relationship of trust we had built with AR and his parents started to break down. Maggie was key in building this relationship of trust and provided a lot of support and guidance to AR. She kept in regular contact with AR's parents and communicated with the other agencies involved regarding his non-attendance and how this could be addressed. From early 2022, when it was confirmed that AR was to move to Presfield High School, it was very difficult to re-engage him as it was clear that he just wanted to leave Acorns. I thought that AR's move to Presfield High School was positive as they were a specialist provision and could provide him with the appropriate support and stretch him academically. The curriculum would have been more accessible and appropriate to meet his needs.
39. On reflection, I do not think there is any more Acorns could have done to re-engage AR with his education or encourage him to attend school.

#### **Referrals/Interactions with other agencies**

40. I was not involved in AR's referrals to CAMHS and for Social-Emotional Wellbeing ("SEW") assessment. This was dealt with by Joanne Hodson as the SENDCO. I was aware that AR was receiving input from Early Help.
41. Acorns received an Encompass referral from the police about an incident on 17 March 2022 where AR was reported missing from home and later found on a bus with a knife

[Exhibit JL9/LCC001398]. This was received on 18 March 2022. I did not have any involvement with this and Maggie took the lead on having discussions with CAMHs and AR's parents regarding the incident.

42. Acorns felt it important to share the details of the incident with Presfield High School given that the level of risk presented by AR had increased. It was important for Presfield to appreciate the whole picture in order to make a proper assessment of risk to keep their staff and pupils safe. It was agreed that I would share the full CPOMs report with Cheryl Smith who was the Designated Safeguarding Lead at Presfield. AR had stopped attending Acorns at this point, so he was not managed any differently in school. The key action at this stage was information sharing with Presfield to ensure that they understood the details of the incident on 17 March 2022 and the heightened level of risk that AR presented.

### **Handover from the Range School and to Presfield High School**

43. I was not involved in AR's handover from the Range High School however my recollection is that he came to Acorns with limited records and little was known about his background, save for the fact his family were from Rwanda, and the reasons for his exclusion from the Range.
44. My recollection is that when AR was transferred to Presfield High School we provided the full CPOMs record, AR's Pupil Risk Assessment and his Education, Health and Care Plan ("EHCP"). This is standard practice. I recall that this was before he was accepted on to their roll. Acorns did not have any input into what school he was transferred to, and I do not know how the arrangement was made, but I knew it was a specialist school, so it was a more appropriate placement than Acorns. I believe Presfield would have also received details of educational assessments that were undertaken to determine AR's academic ability and copies of his latest progress reports to enable them to pitch his work at the correct level for his ability. They would have also received his latest attendance record.

### **Reflections and Improvements**

45. I would like to extend my sincere and heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families, the victims of the attack and all of those affected by the horrific events of 29 July 2024.
46. I left Acorns in August 2023, so I am unable to confirm whether any improvements have been made.

47. In terms of my reflections more generally, CPOMs is an extremely useful tool and one which I would encourage every school to have. It is an invaluable resource in terms of comprehensively recording any safeguarding concerns, and actions taken as a result. I think it would be helpful if CPOMs were a mandatory resource factored into the budget for each school to encourage a consistent approach in terms of the logging and sharing of safeguarding concerns. Schools should be encouraged to rely on this resource and to share it with other agencies involved with a pupil and to pass it on to any other schools a pupil may go to.
48. To improve multi-agency working, and the joint sharing of information, it would be useful for DSLs to have access to the case note systems used by Early Help and Children's Social Services. This could be done in conjunction with the sharing of CPOMs from schools with other agencies to ensure any safeguarding information about a pupil is shared so that the educational and social agencies involved have the full picture.
49. In AR's case, I often felt that agencies did not intervene as much as they could have done. Acorns consistently raised concerns and yet it felt as though these were not taken as seriously as they could have been by other agencies. I felt that Acorns were looked down on and there was a lack of respect in terms of our professional knowledge and expertise. Having a more joined up approach in terms of information sharing, and having access to the systems logging concerns, could improve how agencies communicate about and assess the risks associated with pupils both in school and in the wider community.
50. In terms of online safety in schools, Acorns did a lot of work around safety on the internet. Given the accessibility of the internet and social media platforms to pupils, it is crucial that there is a focus in schools on online safety, with guidance and support also being provided to parents. The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command ("CEOP") is an extremely helpful resource which is rolled out nationally but not necessarily utilised to its full potential. It would be helpful if DSLs received CEOP training. Consideration could be given to introducing an Online Safety Champion role in schools to continue to drive the importance of online safety and the resources available to support with this.
51. I would not hesitate to make Prevent referrals in future where necessary and appropriate. I think that staff in schools are often hesitant or scared to make referrals to Prevent given the association with terrorism and extremism, and there may also be concern from a reputational perspective for a school. This could be tackled by demystifying the way in which the process works once a referral has been made and the important role that schools

play in making referrals where there are concerns in relation to a pupil. Delivering effective training on Prevent referrals is crucial and I think there needs to be better emphasis on how to fill out the referral form and what information should be included to ensure that referrals are as robust as possible. In my view, this would provide reassurance to DSLs and those filling out referral forms that all relevant information has been included. At the time, I did not receive training on what makes a good referral and think this could have been very helpful.

52. At the time that I completed Prevent awareness training as DSL at Acorns, I do not think that there was a requirement to complete refresher training on a regular basis. I think it is important for DSLs and any professionals making Prevent referrals to be required to attend regular Prevent awareness training, perhaps on an annual basis, with all training material being made available to professionals to access at any time. In addition, consideration could be given to improving the statutory guidance to schools and colleges around Prevent as part of 'Keeping children safe in education'. In addition, the feedback provided by Prevent to schools could be improved. This would assist in providing reassurance to schools and other agencies making referrals that they have been properly considered and appropriate action taken.

53. I do not think that Acorns could have done more or done things differently in relation to AR. We made every effort to engage and support him and to build a relationship of trust with him and his family. Maggie Allred was invaluable in building this relationship and worked closely with AR and his family. Where concerns in relation to AR were raised, these were recorded comprehensively on CPOMs, expressed to other agencies and led to various referrals, in particular the three referrals made to Prevent. The risk presented by AR was assessed dynamically and communicated appropriately to other agencies. I think there was a gap in multi-agency working in that Acorns' concerns were not taken as seriously as they should have been and we were left to manage AR as best as we could without the wrap around support of other agencies. Despite the difficult circumstances, we did everything we could to engage and support AR, voice our concerns, seek the support and guidance of other agencies including Prevent, and keep our pupils and staff safe.

## **Disclosure**

54. I confirm that I am not in possession of any further documents relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

## Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

Signed:

**Signature**

Printed: JANET LEWIS

Dated: 5 September 2025

### Appendix 1: Index to the Witness Statement of Janet Lewis

<b>Exhibit No.</b>	<b>Inquiry reference no.</b>	<b>Document Description</b>
JL1	MERP000772	Police statement dated 28 August 2024
JL2	LCC001346	AR's CPOMs records
JL3	<b>LCC000383</b>	Prevent Referral dated 5 December 2019
JL4	<b>LCC000455</b>	Prevent Referral dated 1 February 2021
JL5	LCC001526	Email chain dated 9 February 2021
JL6	<b>LCC001399</b>	Prevent Referral dated 22 April 2021
JL7	LCC001401	AR internet search history
JL8	LCC000707	AR's Risk Assessment Profile
JL9	LCC001398	Police MASH notification
JL10	LCC001345	Chronology prepared by Joanne Hodson
JL11	LCC001580	Chronology prepared by Joanne Hodson