

HAYLEY PATRICIA DAWSON

Exhibits: HPD1 to HPD6

Dated: 18<sup>th</sup> August 2025

## THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

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### FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF HAYLEY PATRICIA DAWSON

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I, HAYLEY PATRICIA DAWSON, will say as follows: -

**Introductory matters**

1. This witness statement is made to assist the Southport Inquiry (the "Inquiry") with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request dated 29th July 2025.
2. I have been provided with assistance by solicitors who have been instructed to represent Presfield High School during this investigation.
3. I would like to express my profound condolences to the families of Elsie, Alice and Bebe and to all those who were injured or affected by the events of that day
4. I became a school teacher in 2007 after gaining a B Ed in Sport Studies and completing my PGSE in Secondary Education. I transferred to Presfield in September 2014 and apart from two periods of maternity leave have been employed by the school since. I became head of sixth form in summer of 2020 and am now assistant head teacher.

## **Factual Narrative of Involvement**

5. I was informed in January 2022 that a placement request had been made for AR. That request would be accompanied by an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP). The request was for AR to join the school at sixth form entry. I was the head of sixth form and was provided with a copy of the plan.
  6. It was apparent from the plan that AR had a diagnosis of autism and on the face of the document, we may be able to provide for the need of AR. Accordingly a visit to Acorns School was arranged for me to meet with staff at the school and to meet AR in his current surroundings.
  7. I arranged to meet with a representative of Acorns School (Maggie Aldred) and AR on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022. There were no concerns voiced to me at this meeting regarding AR's previous behaviours or incidents. I was also able to observe AR in a surrounding that he was familiar with. It was thereafter deemed that following a meeting with the headteacher and the deputy head teacher that Presfield could meet the Autism Spectrum needs of AR and on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2022 an offer of a place in Presfield was submitted to Lancashire County Council.
  8. When I have been involved with children transferring into Presfield from schools within the Sefton area, it is often a transfer from a school that we have worked with previously. When this happens, we often have established a working relationship which allows for frank exchanges. "What do we need to know" would often be the discussion at such meetings
  9. When I had any interactions with AR I would attempt to gain an insight into how he would engage. I learned from my dealings with AR that he found things difficult in large groups and preferred to work on a 1 to 1 basis. Other adaptations were also necessary for example, allowing him to work with his back to the classroom to ensure that other pupils in the corridors could not see him.

10. Risk assessments would be completed by form tutors who had a more detailed working knowledge of the pupil. The risk assessments are living documents and are updated as and when new information comes to light. The assessments are reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team on an annual basis. The risk assessment for AR was not substantially updated due to the lack of attendance at school and his lack of engagement.

11. I had no involvement in the escalation of concerns regarding safeguarding to any external agencies. This would have been undertaken by our Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

12. I had no involvement in the decision making process regarding the removal of AR from the school roll. This decision would have been taken by the senior leadership team. At the time of that decision, I was not a member of that team.

### **Placement request for AR at Presfield High School**

13. I have been asked to consider my email dated 24<sup>th</sup> January 2022 to Lancashire County Council HPD1 -PRE000025. As a specialist school a decision was made to offer AR a placement at Presfield based upon my meeting with the Acorns School where no concerns were raised, a reading of the EHCP and my interaction with AR. We were also able to offer a place as we had capacity at that time to accept a new student into sixth form. AR had a positive diagnosis of autism which was considered to be his primary need and AR met the criteria for attendance at our school.

14. The EHCP did not contain any detail of the incident occurring at The Range School or any subsequent incidents. At the time the decision was made to offer AR a place at Presfield I was unaware of any of the incidents referred to. My knowledge was limited to the contents of the EHCP.

15. Had I been aware of the information that existed regarding AR at the time a decision was taken to offer AR a place at Presfield, I have no doubt that my recommendation would have been not to offer AR a placement. Autism was clearly not the primary need of AR.

16. Had the EHCP been an accurate reflection of the needs for AR, I have no doubt that Presfield would have been able to meet the educational needs of AR. Unfortunately the EHCP was not an accurate reflection and consequently at no stage was Presfield an appropriate setting.

### **Encompass Notification – May 2022**

17. On 17<sup>th</sup> May 2022, I was copied into an email from Jan Lewis at the Acorns School. HPD2 –PRE 001247. This email contained an Encompass Report regarding AR. It is important to emphasise that safeguarding information is not shared with all members of staff as the content is often sensitive information. This email involved safeguarding issues and accordingly I forwarded the email to our DSL on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2022. A protocol exists regarding the sharing of sensitive safeguarding material. I had been copied into this email in breach of that protocol. I forwarded the email to our DSL to deal with. Upon reviewing the document as requested, it is not clear to me if AR was the victim of an incident witnessed by the police or the perpetrator of that incident. The report does suggest that the incident involved a vulnerable child, accordingly I assume that AR was the victim in this incident. I am unaware if there was any further update from MASH following receipt of the report. The MASH team would have known the correct person to contact at our school. Had any further information been provided, our school DSL would have advised me of that information if I had needed to know it.

### **Steps taken to engage AR**

18. I have been asked to consider if the steps taken by Presfield High School to engage with AR regarding his education and to encourage him to attend were adequate. I can state categorically that in my view the school went above and beyond what was expected in this regard. Examples of this include knowing that AR did not like his father's cooking. Accordingly, AR was encouraged to attend with the promise of his favourite pizza for lunch. His curriculum was altered to enable him to attend on a 1 to 1 basis. A personal tutor was preured to teach him his favourite subjects. He was encouraged to attend school to play his favourite sport of basketball. He was given his own room to study. He was allowed to sit with his back toward the classroom door so as to not see other pupils in the corridor. Regular home visits were undertaken by many staff to encourage him to attend. During the school sixth form residential programme, the sixth

form was completely empty. AR was encouraged to attend as he would be the only pupil present. None of these steps appeared to have any effect upon his engagement or attendance.

19. On 24<sup>th</sup> June 2022 an email was sent to our DSL HPD3 – [PRE000053] raising concerns that AR had stopped taking his medication; stopped engaging with CAMHS his mental health was struggling; and that his mental health had to be his main priority at that time. This issue was escalated to the headteacher Tony Fay who I understand subsequently made a decision to remove AR from our roll.

20. On 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> October 2022 further emails were submitted HPD4 and HPD5 – PRE000087 and PRE000088. As no response had been received again this matter was escalated to the headteacher Tony Fay. I understand that the school was informed that the recipient of the emails was either leaving Lancashire County Council or had left the Council. We were not informed who was taking over her role.

21. On 8<sup>th</sup> June 2023, I wrote to the then deputy headteacher HPD6 – PRE000899 indicating that I thought the provision of service from Lancashire County Council was poor. This was because we appeared never to receive a response from them or when we did receive a response, it was an explanation as to why they could not assist. There was a problem with the authority retaining staff in role and we were never notified who had taken over that role. The service could have been better if we had more collaboration with the authority and kept informed as to who our points of contact were. The issue needed bringing to a head as we did not have contact with AR, we were not allowed to remove AR from our roll and the matter was escalated to the Headteacher Mr Fay.

22. I have been asked to comment on whether I or any other member of staff considered making a referral to PREVENT regarding AR. From my perspective, I had not considered a referral as I had not seen any behaviours that would warrant such a referral and had not been made aware of any such behaviours. The same position would have been adopted by all other members of staff. I would however clarify that had the contents of the email dated 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2022 addressed to our DSL been known, a different position would most likely have been taken.

23. With the benefit of hindsight, it is my view that a referral to PREVENT should have been made.

24. As head of sixth form, my work involved me interacting with local authority staff and other professionals. When meetings were convened with Lancashire County Council, it was not unusual for Lancs staff not to attend. When meeting staff from feeder schools within Sefton, we often have established relationships and can engage in open and frank discussions. This does not tend to happen with school representatives from outside the Sefton area. This did not happen when I met with Acorns School staff.

25. With the information now available I would agree that Presfield School could and perhaps should have done things differently. Risk assessments would have been different and staff almost certainly would not have been allowed to conduct home visits on their own. As indicated above a referral to PREVENT might have been made by the senior leadership team. Ultimately, had the information now known by me regarding AR at the time of receipt of his EHCP, I would doubt if an offer of a placement would ever have been made. It is clear that autism was not AR's primary need and consequently he should not have been offered a place at our school.

With the information that was known by me about AR at the time, I do not believe that any action taken would be different. The school believed that autism was AR's primary need and put in place strategies to assist AR with his transition to Presfield and to encourage him to re-engage with education. When it became apparent that mental health was his primary need, steps were taken to address that need.

26. I consider that the training, guidance and resources available to me were sufficient for me to deal with the perceived need of AR. With the information now available, that would still be the case as AR would not have been offered a place at our school.

27. I am aware of improvements that have been made since the events under investigation. There is now a wider Safeguarding team with access to a central email address. All members of the team have access to that email address and emails are less likely to be missed. I have now received safeguarding training. Some schools do not have access to a CPOMS system and still maintain paper records. Now when a child is

transferred to our school with a paper safeguarding (CPOMS) file. The transferring school is provided with a receipt for that paper file which is immediately uploaded onto our CPOMS system.

Dated this 18<sup>th</sup> day of August 2025

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court 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**

Hayley Patricia Dawson

Dated 18/07/2025

# HAYLEY PATRICIA DAWSON Final

Final Audit Report

2025-08-18

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