

**Witness name:** David Cregeen

**Exhibits:** DC/01

**Dated:** 20 August 2025

## THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

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### FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF DAVID CREGEEN

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#### I, DAVID CREGEEN WILL SAY AS FOLLOWS:

##### INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

1. I am currently employed as an Assistant Head Teacher at Ballakermeen High School in the Isle of Man.
2. I would like to express my sincere condolences to the family and friends of Elsie Dot Stancombe, Alice da Silva Aguiar and Bebe King, I would also like to take this opportunity to express my condolences to those who were injured on 29 July 2024.
3. This witness statement is made to assist the Southport Inquiry (“the Inquiry”) with the matters which have been set out in the Inquiry’s Rule 9 Request dated 22 July 2025. Axel Rudakubana (“AR”) was a student at Range High School (“the school”) from September 2017 to October 2019. This statement will respond to the Rule 9 request in relation to any involvement I may have had with AR during his time at the school.
4. This is my first statement to the Inquiry. I understand the Southport Learning Trust have provided the Inquiry with relevant documents and information, some of which may be referred to in this statement along with any additional documents which assist the Inquiry.
5. I no longer work at Range High School, therefore in drafting this statement, I have relied on documents which have been provided by the Recognised Legal Representative for the Southport Learning Trust and documents provided by the Inquiry.

6. One of the documents I have relied on is the House log. The House log was specific to Weld House and used to record key pastoral information in relation to student behaviours and/or safeguarding in Weld House. Both the Assistant Head of the House and me as the Head of House had access to the log.

## **PERSONAL DETAILS AND BACKGROUND**

7. I started working at Range High School in 2002 as a teacher and learning mentor, progressing through various leadership roles before leaving as Assistant Head Teacher in September 2022. Throughout my employment, I held both teaching and pastoral responsibilities.
8. My career progression at the school included several key positions: I served as Head of House at Weld House (overseeing pastoral care for up to 300 students from Years 7-13) until July 2019, when I became an Associate Leader in the Senior Leadership Team. In September 2019, I took on the role of Designated Safeguarding Lead ("DSL"), and in July 2020, I was promoted to Assistant Head Teacher whilst retaining my DSL responsibilities until my departure in September 2022.
9. During my tenure as DSL, I expanded the safeguarding framework by creating a larger safeguarding team and introducing assistant DSLs throughout the school. This included appointing Heads of Year and other department leads to ensure comprehensive DSL coverage across all academic years, including an assistant DSL who also worked with SEND students.
10. When AR was enrolled at Range High School, I held the pastoral lead role at Weld House, which is one of the four houses that students are allocated to upon starting school. AR was a member of Weld House and therefore fell under my pastoral care during this period.

## **PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE**

11. I completed my undergraduate degree at Liverpool Hope University, and undertook a postgraduate Master's degree in Education at Edge Hill University. I hold a Cert.Ed. (Post 16) from Liverpool John Moores University and have Qualified Teacher Status, with the Merseyside and Cheshire Graduate Teaching Consortium.
12. I hold a National Qualification for Senior Leadership. During my employment at Range, I held Level 3 training in safeguarding from Sefton Borough Council and delivered annual safeguarding training to all staff at Range High School during my employment there.

## **KEY STAFF MEMBERS**

13. The key staff members involved during AR's time at the school included:

- i. Michael McGarry, Head Teacher
- ii. Thomas Dolly: Deputy Head Teacher
- iii. Vicky Ashworth: Assistant Head Teacher

## **AR'S DURATION AS A STUDENT AT RANGE HIGH SCHOOL**

14. AR enrolled as a Year 7 student at the school on 4 September 2017. At that time I was the Pastoral Lead as the Head of Weld House.

15. AR's attendance remained excellent for the duration he was a student. His attendance in Year 7 was 98.15% and his end of year reports showed his performance to be on, or slightly below target for the academic year. There were no reports that AR exhibited any major behavioural concerns.

16. In Year 8, AR's attendance was slightly lower, at 94.97%. Similar to Year 7, his performance indicated no major issues, however, his end of year assessments mentioned concerns over AR distracting other students or being distracted by other students, albeit this was not reported across all of his subject areas.

17. In April 2019, AR reported that during a science lesson, a student had told him that another student had used a derogatory and racist term, whilst referring to AR. I asked the respective Heads of House (Sefton and Blundell) to investigate this and report back to me. The matter was investigated but the claim was not substantiated. I am unable to ascertain their responses on the House log but it would not have been out of the ordinary for the follow up and outcome to have been a conversation. If any further action was taken I would have recorded this on the House log.

18. Overall, AR was a good student. He was capable of being easily distracted and there were instances where his general behaviour caused him to receive detentions (not listening to the teachers, not submitting homework on time, etc). this however is not unusual for students his age and therefore his behaviour was not regarded as so serious as to flag to the school that there were any significant underlying issues of concern.

19. In July 2019, AR was assessed for the possibility of having ADHD. The results of this survey indicated poor behaviour traits, rather than ADHD traits. These were reported to AR's father on 9 July 2019. He did not agree with the outcome of the assessment.

### **SUMMARY OF ESCALATION IN BEHAVIOUR FROM YEAR 9**

20. AR's behaviour began to markedly deteriorate at the start of Year 9. Whilst specific events have been considered in detail later in this statement I have set out a brief summary below.

21. I recall AR being frustrated as he was of the view that a student was bullying him, however when we suggested mediation or the opportunity to resolve this in order get to the root of his concerns, AR refused to engage. There was little that the school could do without AR's co-operation and willingness to provide any further information.

22. On 4 October 2019 AR's father contacted me by email to express concerns over a student who he said had threatened AR. The school investigated and both students were spoken to. The other student informed his Head of House that AR said they were going to have a fight but they were only "messaging". The two boys concerned were in several classes together and so the outcome of the investigation was to ensure that seating plans were rearranged for the classes that both students attended and for staff to remain vigilant.

23. On 7 October 2019 AR was involved in a fight with another student. This led to a temporary, fixed term exclusion.

24. The same evening Lancashire police contacted the school informing us that AR had been bringing a knife into school and admitted he had done this on several occasions.

25. The police report and its subsequent investigation ultimately led to AR's exclusion on 9 October 2019.

26. AR's parents were formally notified of his exclusion by letter dated 6 November 2019.

### **SPECIFIC INCIDENTS AND CONCERNS AND MY INVOLVEMENT WITH AR**

27. I will now address my involvement in some of the specific incidents which have been referred to by the Inquiry team.

#### **Jihad comments made 18 June 2019 in RE lesson**

28. I have been asked by the Inquiry about whether there is any further detail I can provide in relation to any concerns that the Head of Religious Education ("RE") made to my

predecessor, in relation to comments AR made about Jihad and the Manchester Arena bombing.

29. I do not have any personal knowledge of this comment and was first made aware of these concerns in December 2019. I would not have taken any steps in June 2019 as I was not the DSL and this incident was not brought to my attention at the time. However, once it was (in December 2019), AR had already been excluded, and I took the step of informing AR's new school. This is discussed in further detail in paragraph 52 of this statement.

### **Incident on 20 September 2019**

30. On 20 September 2019, in an English lesson, AR hit a fellow classmate on the head. He said this was a response to the classmate tapping him on the head. AR was given a detention for this incident. Both students were offered mediation and encouraged by staff to speak to one another to remedy this. AR expressed no wish to engage with either the teacher or the other student after the incident. Mediation is a voluntary process and there is no mandatory requirement to make them do so.

### **Comment – "that's why teachers get murdered"**

31. I have been asked about whether I can provide any further detail in relation to AR's comment "that's why teachers get murdered" which appears to have been made in the w/c 30/09/2019.

32. AR was given a detention on 4 October 2019. I did not give him this detention so cannot recall personally why this was given, it will have been a subject teacher or another member of staff that ordered the detention. The detention is not contained on the House log, however not every single event with every student is input onto the House log as this is not the aim of the document, so this is not unusual.

33. AR's father had emailed me that day informing me that another student who he says had previously threatened AR, had done it again. I replied to AR's father responding to his concerns after speaking to the Head of Sefton House (the House of the other student). The Head of House informed me that the other student refuted the claims made by AR and it was in fact AR that initiated nasty comments towards him. There was insufficient evidence from either student as to what happened, or to take further action.

34. I was informed that during the detention AR made a comment about teachers being murdered. AR dismissed the severity of the comment when he was questioned on why he made it, saying he was simply referring to a comment made by another student, in reference

to a teacher who had been murdered the previous year. I informed AR's father about this comment at the same time as responding to him about the concerns he had about AR being bullied by this other student. I cannot recall what his response was.

#### **Police Contact Regarding Knife - 7 October 2019**

35. I have been made aware that AR was temporarily excluded on a fixed term basis on 7 October 2019 following a fight in English class. I have been informed by the Recognised Legal Representative that a fight broke out and as a result AR was placed into isolation with both boys subsequently being sent home. I have no recollection of this fixed term exclusion, and it does not appear on AR's House log. I cannot say why.
36. On 7 October 2019 at 22.13pm, PC 4658 Alex McNamee of Lancashire Constabulary emailed the school, explaining that police had been contacted by Childline. AR contacted Childline to say that over the last ten days he had been carrying a knife to school as he was being bullied by another student. The PC said we were likely to receive a call from a police officer the next day and informed me that they had put referral interventions in place.
37. This was a grave concern, and I informed the Head Teacher, Mr McGarry of the report the same night. On 8 October 2019 I met with AR along with the Assistant Head Teacher Vicky Ashworth. A search of his bag was undertaken, and no knife was found, but AR admitted to bringing a knife in previously, as he says he was tired of being pushed around. He admitted that he would have used the knife to stab someone but that he would not bring one in again.
38. I asked AR about whether he understood the significance of his actions to which he responded that he did. An investigation commenced into the report by the police, and I briefed Mr McGarry immediately after the meeting.
39. Given the seriousness of the incident and the danger posed to the rest of the school, it was determined by Mr McGarry, and I agreed, that the most appropriate form of action, and to ensure the safety of the school was to permanently exclude AR. He was sent home with his father the same day, with a permanent exclusion taking effect from 9 October 2019. His exclusion was referred to the school trustees and local authority as part of the permanent exclusion process and his parents were informed accordingly.
40. On 10 October 2019 I made a referral to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services ("CAMHS") via the Alder Hey Single Point of Access, Merseyside. They informed me on 12 October 2019 that their recommendations, following a Multi-Disciplinary Team meeting to

discuss AR, were for him to be referred to the Targeted Youth Prevention Service and that the matter would be closed to this service. I emailed the outcome of the referral from the Single Point of Access Duty team to Lancashire County Council.

41. I also made a referral to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub ("MASH") and I will discuss both referrals in more detail later in my statement.

42. AR's exclusion hearing took place on 5 November 2019. The school's decision to permanently exclude was ultimately upheld by the panel and his parents were informed by letter dated 6 November 2019.

### **ANY OTHER RELEVANT DETAIL OR INCIDENTS**

43. I have been asked whether there are any other relevant matters that I wish to draw to the Chair's attention. The following are events which took place after AR was excluded from the school.

### **Contact from Acorns November 2019**

44. The local authority placed AR in the Acorns school after his exclusion from the school.

45. On 21 November 2019 I received an email from the Deputy Head Teacher of Acorns. She informed me that she had safeguarding concerns over AR who had been fixating on another student in class, who he says was bullying him and bossing him around. She had been contacted by AR's father to say that AR was being targeted again, however staff had seen no evidence of this behaviour by the other student.

46. She also informed me that AR had been searching for school shootings in America in his ICT lessons and asked if Range High School had any further information relating to the events leading up to his exclusion, as she had received no such documents and it appears that the local authority had not sent these to them.

47. I emailed Mr McGarry and Vicky Ashworth and we agreed to send the relevant documents to the Acorns. I sent them by email the same day.

### **Hockey Stick Incident at Range High School - 11 December 2019**

48. I was alerted on 11 December 2019 that AR gained access into the school, this was odd since AR was no longer a student at the school and had been excluded since 9 October 2019.

49. I was told Mr McGarry wanted to speak to me so I made my way into his office which is when I found out what had happened. In the office, AR admitted to coming into the school to kill a student he had previous issues with, and in his bag was a hockey stick and a knife.
50. The police were called, and AR when questioned, told them that he brought the hockey stick to kill the student he accused of bullying him, and if that didn't work then he would have used the knife.
51. I understand that prior to being apprehended, AR had assaulted a bystander in the school hallway by hitting him with the hockey stick. By AR's own admission, this was not the same student he intended to harm and his explanation for assaulting him with the hockey stick was that he could not find the boy he was looking for.
52. AR was arrested by the police for bringing a knife onto school premises and assaulting a student with the hockey stick. His demeanour with the police and on arrest was cold. He was calm and matter of fact. His response when speaking to us was not emotive and this bothered me since it was a stark contrast to his previous demeanour earlier in the year. For instance, during Year 8, when he was involved in altercations with another student, he displayed frustration and emotional responses.
53. On 11 December 2019, AR elicited no such response. Despite admitting he brought in a knife to school, assaulted someone and admitted his intent.
54. I contacted the Head Teacher of Acorns to inform her of the incident and AR's arrest. The Head Teacher advised me that Acorns referred AR to Prevent, based on his explicit and concerning behaviour and with advice from Lancashire Police. She said AR was in receipt of Early Help.
55. On 13 December 2019 I emailed the Deputy Head Teacher of Acorns to apprise her of a discussion I had with the Head of RE the previous day. The Head of RE raised a concern to my predecessor, the previous DSL, Claire Quinn, in June 2019, following an incident which took place in an RE lesson, whilst AR was a Year 8 student.
56. I was told that the RE teacher taught a lesson on Jihad (holy war), looking at the rules of Jihad and asking the students whether the Manchester Arena bombing was Jihad. Other students responded no, which was the expected response. AR's response was that "it was a good battle though". She spoke to him at the end of the lesson and asked him what he meant by his response. AR stated that his response was from the viewpoint of the suicide bomber, and those views were not his own.

57. I shared this information with Acorns as I considered it relevant for Acorns as AR's school provider and for the Prevent referral the Deputy Head had referred to in our phone call a couple of days before.

58. On 17 December 2019, I attended a strategy meeting attended by AR's social worker and his parents following his recent arrest. Early Action and the police were in attendance. AR's mother agreed to meet with AR's social worker on 19 December 2019 and the police informed the attendees that AR was not permitted to be within 400m of Range High School and forbidden from contacting any of the prosecution witnesses.

59. I attended a follow up strategy meeting on 6 January 2020. I had no further involvement after this meeting since AR was no longer on the register for Range and his dual registration had expired.

#### **Instagram post and contact with Acorns school - 1 February 2021**

60. I have been asked about whether there are any further details I can provide in relation to information passed to the Acorns on 1 February 2021 concerning a social media post made by AR.

61. I contacted the Deputy Head of Acorns on 1 February 2021 to inform them that AR had been in contact with some students from Range High school via Instagram – they brought those posts to my attention.

62. AR's Instagram stories mentioned Colonel Gadaffi. I considered it pertinent to share this with the Acorns school, in light of the information they had previously provided regarding the referrals, including Prevent, that had been made to various authorities in respect of AR.

#### **PREVIOUS STATEMENTS AND CORRECTIONS**

63. I was approached by Merseyside police to provide a witness statement following the very tragic events that happened at the dance club in Southport on 29 July 2024. My statement is dated 17 September 2024, DC/01 – **RAN000035**

64. I have been asked whether there are errors or omissions in my police statement which require correction.

65. In paragraph 35, I have referred to AR gaining access to Range High School on 12 November 2019. This date should read 11 December 2019.

## **INTERNET USAGE**

66. I have been asked about whether I can provide details of how, if at all, AR's use of the internet at Range High School was monitored and/or supervised during his time there.
67. The school's IT systems were equipped with internet security measures managed by two designated IT professionals. These professionals were responsible for monitoring student activities on the school's IT system and reporting any concerns to the senior leadership team. Alerts were triggered by specific keywords or search terms used by the students. Although I am not aware of the precise terms included, the firewall was configured to detect and flag content related to racism, homophobia, pornography, terrorism, and other inappropriate materials. This list is not exhaustive.
68. For instance, a student at Range High School once searched for the ingredients of a "pornstar martini," which was promptly flagged to the senior leadership team due to the nature of the search.
69. Similarly, an incident where a student searched for "how to make a bomb" was immediately flagged and addressed by the senior leadership team. This comment resulted in a Prevent referral being made. The referral was ultimately closed after investigation with no further action being taken, following consultation with the local area Prevent officer, children's social services and the police.
70. There were no concerns brought to my attention in respect of AR's internet usage during his time as a student at the school.

## **MASH and CAMHS Referrals**

71. I was concerned about AR's mental state, following the contact by Lancashire police on 7 October 2019 and after speaking to him on 8 October 2019. It appeared to be deteriorating at pace, given his extremely disproportionate response to incidents which are relatively commonplace with teenagers in a secondary school, i.e. students not getting on with one another.
72. AR appeared agitated when he was in Mr McGarry's office. He reported having full awareness of the consequences of his actions yet showed a complete lack of remorse for his actions that day. I was of the view that in addition to keeping the school community safe from AR's dangerous actions, that he was also in need of a significant amount of support very quickly.

73. The school's safeguarding policy governs safeguarding referrals to external agencies. Staff have the autonomy and discretion to make referrals where safeguarding concerns arise, regardless of the number, or severity of incidents. I.e. a referral can be made following concerns as a result of a series of minor events or one major incident causing concern. This was clearly such an incident.
74. AR's behaviour, particularly bringing weapons to school along with his knowledge of the harm it would cause and his apparent lack of empathy following the harm caused necessitated his exclusion and triggered those safeguarding referrals. I therefore made the decision to refer AR to CAMHS and MASH.
75. I initially made the MASH referral to Sefton, however AR's home address did not fall within the Sefton locality and so I was advised to forward this on to Lancashire County Council. I contacted Lancashire County Council who informed me that they were in receipt of a referral from Lancashire police and therefore the school's referral was not required.
76. I raised a concern with MASH as I was of the view that this met the threshold for Level 4 Child Protection. I was informed that Lancashire County Council had graded this incident as a Level 2 (known as Early Help), albeit an Early Help worker had yet to be allocated, and I was advised to forward my concerns back to the police. I did so, referring my concerns the same day to PC McNamee who informed me that his initial concern was in fact reported as a high risk.
77. I followed this up with Lancashire MASH over the telephone on 14 October 2019, providing them with details of the school's and the police's concerns and the series of events leading up to AR's exclusion.
78. Based on my concerns over the state of AR's mental health, I also reported the events of the previous days to CAMHS, via the Single Point of Access at Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust. I was informed by them on 12 October 2019 that they had closed this service to AR as it was not relevant to them, instead they recommended the concern be forwarded to the Sefton Targeted Youth Prevention Team.

## **PREVENT REFERRALS**

79. I have been asked about the details of training at the time of my involvement with AR in relation to Prevent referrals and my consideration of whether a Prevent referral ought to have been made given comments by the Head of RE, the comment about murdering teachers and AR bringing a knife into school.

80. Prevent was a significant part the Level 3 DSL training that I undertook with Sefton every two years and I was, and am, familiar with its remit, what to report and when. I have addressed above a Prevent referral having been made in relation to another student.
81. Prevent is a module covered within the DSL training which I undertook in June 2019 and June 2021. The school was aware of the Prevent referral process and this is referred to in Range High School's Safeguarding policy at the time AR was a student and Sefton local authority's Child Protection policy referred to in the training it provides to safeguarding leaders at schools within Sefton.
82. I remember having the Prevent duty printed off and placed in the wall of my office.
83. My views are that AR's actions at the time did not cause me to consider a Prevent referral. Following a tumultuous start to the academic year, including fights with his classmate, and the knife incident, which very much came out of the blue, the main concerns above and beyond school safety, were for AR's wellbeing and mental health and getting to the bottom of what was causing him to act so disproportionately to how he might have been feeling at the time.
84. At the time there was no worrying use of the internet flagged, he had no other safeguarding concerns, nor was there any demonstration of extremist ideology. Whilst AR had made comments about jihad in an RE lesson, this was an isolated incident taken in the context of his behaviour and presentation at the time.
85. The priority for me was to get AR the support he needed and immediately, hence the referrals to CAMHS and MASH.
86. By reference to the murder comment, this was a comment which AR explained was something he repeated from another student. At the time, AR showed no violent tendencies or elicited any behaviour demonstrating a propensity for violence, or radicalisation.
87. AR's comment made in the June 2019 RE class discussion about Jihad, was not something I would have considered for a referral to Prevent. The comment was made in the context of a lesson specifically about Jihad, again with no accompanying concerns over religious ideology or violent tendencies by AR himself. AR said the comments were not his own views. Had the lesson been about another subject matter and AR demonstrated ideology relating to Jihad then this would have been considered for a Prevent referral.
88. Under the circumstances I do not think it was inappropriate or wrong not to have made a Prevent referral at the time AR was a student at the school. As I previously mentioned the

cause for concern was the sudden deterioration in AR's behaviour and mental state. The information about the Jihad comment was shared with Acorns as soon as it came to my knowledge (December 2019) who had made a Prevent referral by then, as I understand AR's ideals and behaviour had become apparent and obvious following his exclusion from Range High School.

## **Improvements**

89. Subsequent to AR's exclusion, modifications were implemented to certain systems and policies at Range High School. These changes were not a consequence of AR's exclusion, rather an ongoing process of continuous improvement and primarily involved enhancements to existing systems rather than the introduction of new ones.
90. The school engaged an independent auditor to undertake a safeguarding audit. Following the recommendations, the school implemented a system to ensure that background checks were undertaken on any visitors to the school site. The measures were a part of ongoing learning for schools, undertaking safety measures to protect students and staff from external visitors. This was learning implemented from the Shamima Begum case. Whilst that case does relate to extremism, the measures were not a consequence of AR's actions or exclusion.
91. The school procured an additional package that could be bolted on to its existing system, Class Charts to specifically record student behaviours and safeguarding issues. While previous measures were in place to record such concerns and these methods worked, the updated system provided quicker and more accessible means for all staff members, in addition to being easier to audit and share information and this implementation in no way infers that the previous systems were ineffective.
92. The school's record keeping at the time, has assisted me significantly with recollecting the events of October 2019 for the purposes of both statements to the police and this public inquiry. Having been a pastoral leader for over twenty years I have had many interactions with students and both the logs and documents which have been shown to me have assisted greatly. They reinforce my belief that Mr McGarry's decision to permanently exclude was the correct one and I continue to support this and the local authority's decision.
93. The school also modified its automated door closing system as a physical safety measure. This adjustment was not a direct response to AR's behaviour but was introduced to enhance

the safety of both students and staff. It enabled automated doors to close more rapidly than previously, effectively preventing tailgaters from entering the school premises.

94. My general observations of AR were that he was a quiet boy. Despite the fact that he was a Weld House student I didn't have many interactions with him. Those that I did were very positive. As an example, my first interaction with him was in relation to his contribution to Children in Need.
95. Concerns regarding AR's behaviour emerged towards the end of Year 8, particularly with one classmate with whom he had disagreements. Despite these concerns, discussions with both students and their parents did not yield any further action which necessitated activation of the school's anti-bullying policies.
96. The contact from the police from 7 October 2019 was unexpected and troubling, particularly the news that AR had been involved with knives in this way, endangering the safety of the school's students.
97. I would like to repeat my deepest sympathies for the families and friends of those who passed away and those who were injured by the horrific events of 29 July 2024.

#### **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**

**Dated:** 20.08.25