

**Witness name:** Michael McGarry

**Exhibits:** MM/01-MM/05

**Dated:** 19 AUGUST 2025

## THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

---

### FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF MICHAEL McGARRY

---

#### I, MICHAEL McGARRY WILL SAY AS FOLLOWS:

##### INTRODUCTION

1. I am the Head Teacher at Range High School, Formby, Liverpool. Range High School is one of eight schools forming part of the Southport Learning Trust (the Trust).
2. I would like to express my sincere condolences to the families and friends of Elsie Dot Stancombe, Alice da Silva Aguiar and Bebe King. I would also like to take this opportunity to express those condolences to those who were injured and have to live with the memories of this tragic attack.
3. This witness statement is made to assist the Southport Inquiry ("the Inquiry") with the matters set out in the Inquiry's Rule 9 Request dated 22 July 2025. Axel Rudakubana ("AR") was a pupil at Range High School ("the school") from September 2017 to October 2019. This statement aims to respond comprehensively to the Rule 9 request in relation to my involvement with AR.
4. This is my first statement to the Inquiry. I understand the Trust has recently provided the Inquiry with relevant documents and information, some of which will be referred to in this statement.

## **Personal Details and Background**

5. I was appointed Head Teacher of Range High School in September 2019 and remain in this post at the time of making this statement. I have overall responsibility for the standards of teaching and learning provided by the school and its sixth form. I am responsible for the day-to-day running of the school and ensure the implementation of the Trust's policies to ensure that our pupils are safe and have access to a good standard of education.
6. I am supported by two Deputy Head Teachers and three Assistant Head Teachers. The school accommodates around 1100 pupils aged 11-19.
7. Prior to this appointment, I was the Associate Principal at the Belvedere Academy in Liverpool for eleven years and the Deputy Head Teacher at Fred Longworth in Wigan for five years.
8. I completed my undergraduate degree at the University of Liverpool and undertook my postgraduate degree at Liverpool Hope University. I hold a Masters in Educational Leadership. I also hold a National Professional Qualification for Executive Leadership.

## **Key Staff Members During AR's Time**

9. During AR's time at the school, the key staff members involved, and whom I will refer to in this statement, included:
  - a) David Cregeen: Assistant Head Teacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead ("DSL") at the time (from September 2019), Mr Cregeen is no longer employed at the school
  - b) Thomas Dolly: Deputy Head Teacher
  - c) Vicky Ashworth: Assistant Head Teacher

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

10. AR enrolled as a Year 7 pupil at the school on 4 September 2017. I was not a member of staff at the time he enrolled, having started my post in September 2019. AR remained a pupil at the school until his exclusion in October 2019 when he was in Year 9.

11. As I was not a staff member when AR started at the school, I have reviewed his history from the records that the school holds for him, and from speaking with senior colleagues.

### **AR's Academic Performance and Behaviour (2017-2019)**

12. AR was not known at the school for having any major behavioural concerns. In Years 7 and 8, AR's behaviour was not out of the ordinary and his attendance remained excellent for the entire duration he was a pupil. His behaviour was not such that it triggered any suspensions or exclusions, until a very serious incident in school led to his permanent exclusion in October 2019.

13. As a pupil, AR performed well and he was a capable student. He could be easily distracted and there were instances where his general behaviour caused him to receive detentions (not listening to teachers, becoming distracted etc). This is not unusual or out of the ordinary for pupils his age and therefore not regarded as so serious as to flag to the school that there were any significant underlying issues with his behaviour or his outlook. I have been asked to comment on an incident which took place in class in June 2019, the academic year before I started at the school. I have no personal knowledge of this, but it has been covered in paragraph 16 below.

14. I have reviewed the House log for AR which records any incidents or concerns. It contains a record of a meeting held with AR's father in July 2019 where school had started to raise concerns with his family over social media content and some poor behaviour in class. A general report for this meeting was compiled but staff, at this time, felt that his behaviour was not related to ADHD but rather lack of focus. The school requested that his father engage more with the home/school communication system to better monitor his behaviour on a daily basis. This would be normal practice then and now if school had early concerns about deteriorating behaviour.

### **Rapid Escalation in October 2019**

15. I will detail below some incidents which took place in September 2019, at the start of AR's time in Year 9. However, it was in October 2019 that there was a marked and rapid escalation in AR's behaviour which led to his exclusion from the school. On 5 October 2019, AR attacked another pupil during a lesson. He said that the pupil he attacked was bullying him. I first became aware of AR's adverse behaviour after this incident.

16. I did not speak to AR on the day of this incident. My involvement in relation to the incident was to ensure a thorough investigation of what had happened and determine the appropriate course of action. Due to information received from the police shortly after this incident, which I detail further below, ultimately AR was permanently excluded from the school on 9 October 2019.

## **SPECIFIC INCIDENTS AND CONCERNS**

### **Concerns - 18 June 2019**

17. I have been asked about concerns raised by the Head of Religious Education on 18 June 2019, regarding AR's comments about Jihad and the Manchester Arena bombing. The concerns were raised with the DSL.

18. I was not employed at the school at the time of this incident, and it would have been dealt with by the teacher and the then DSL (retired August 2019).

19. AR had a good behavioural record at the time of that incident. I don't know the details of what was said on that day but I would say that this appeared at the time to be an isolated incident. It is not uncommon for teenage pupils to make controversial remarks, often to gain attention in class and credibility with their friends. Remarks of this type for effect are not limited to racism and can extend to homophobic remarks or be gender based but this does not necessarily make the pupil racist or homophobic. It is possible for it to be attributable to the inquisitive, or curious mind of a young person and it is for the education professional to determine the appropriate action to be taken consequently. This can include the school itself taking relevant action by monitoring locally or seeking early help.

20. Typically, with isolated incidents such as this one, and where there are no other factors causing concern, the appropriate response is to have an educational discussion with the student. Where the issue persists or is raised several times then the school will consider preventative measures and/or further action. I am satisfied that it was brought to the attention of the then DSL and she would have determined the most appropriate course of action.

### **Incident on or around 20 September 2019**

21. I have been asked about an incident involving AR hitting a student on 20 September 2019 during an English class. From the House log record of the incident I can say that AR hit another pupil. AR stated that this was in retaliation as the pupil had been saying things to him and hitting him on the head. The other pupil was spoken to and he said that AR had been calling him fat and teasing him, so he had started tapping him on the forehead.

22. Both AR and the other pupil involved were spoken to and the issue was dealt with during tutor time to resolve the issues between them.

23. I have no other knowledge or detail of this incident.

### **"That's why teachers get murdered" Comment around 30 September 2019**

24. I have been asked about a comment AR made that "that's why teacher's get murdered" during week commencing 30 September 2019. I have no personal recollection of this incident but from the log it seems to stem from the fact that he felt that he shouldn't have been given a detention but was made to do it as per the school's behaviour policy.

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

25. I recall that on Monday 7 October 2019 there was another incident in an English lesson involving AR and another pupil. A fight broke out and as a result AR was placed in isolation. I was out of school that day attending a conference and I recall receiving a telephone call to inform me of the fight. I requested that both boys should be sent home to give us an opportunity to gather witness statements and investigate what had happened. I am aware that this incident is not recorded on AR's House log. I do not know why that is the case.

26. By this time, I was aware of both AR and the other pupil due to their behaviour in school. I was concerned that the other pupil could have been bullying AR and I wanted to investigate the behaviour and actions of both boys.

27. On the evening of 7 October 2019, the school received an email from Lancashire Police notifying us that they had visited AR following a knife crime concern reported to them by Childline. Childline informed them that AR called them and confessed to

bringing a knife into school in his bag because he was being bullied and he had been carrying the knife for ten days.

28. This email was received by David Cregeen, the DSL, late in the evening of 7 October 2019. This was clearly a serious incident, putting both staff and pupils at risk of harm.

29. Mr Cregeen called me about this the same evening. As he was already temporarily excluded, we arranged for AR and his parents to attend school the next day to investigate the police report.

#### **Investigation Meeting - 8 October 2019**

30. Mr Cregeen and Vicky Ashworth, Assistant Head Teacher, met with both AR and AR's father the next day.

31. I did not attend this meeting and was updated by Mr Cregeen the same day. At this meeting AR openly admitted to keeping a knife in his bag. He informed them that he had done this several times before.

#### **Decision to Permanently Exclude**

32. Due to the severity of AR bringing a knife into school, and the frequency of occasions that AR admitted to bringing a knife into school, and the clear and immediate danger this presented to pupils and staff, I was required to consider whether to permanently exclude AR. I made the decision to do so. He was excluded permanently with effect from 9 October 2019. He was sent home with schoolwork from Range High School for the first five school days, with Lancashire County Council taking responsibility for providing suitable full time education from the sixth day (16 October 2019).

33. I initiated the formal process for a permanent exclusion which required approval from the school governors and local authority. In doing so, I ensured that any exclusion was properly considered and effected following the procedures for exclusions as set out in the school's Behaviour and Discipline Policy of November 2019. This is the policy that was in effect at the time of AR's exclusion.

34. On 5 November 2019, my decision to permanently exclude AR was upheld by the school trustees on the following basis:

“The panel was particularly mindful of the over-riding duty to keep safe all members of the school community. Clearly, a situation in which a pupil brings a knife into school and states that he is prepared to use it, compromises his safety and that of the rest of the school community.”

35. AR's parents were formally notified of his exclusion by way of a letter sent on 6 November 2019.
36. Permanent exclusions are used only as the last resort and only for very serious cases, or where all other measures fail. In considering a permanent exclusion, the school must consider whether allowing the pupil to remain in school would be detrimental to the education and/or welfare of pupils, or others in school. It was clear that AR remaining as a pupil at the school caused an immediate danger to all others at the school.

## **POST-EXCLUSION INCIDENTS**

### **AR trespassing at the school - 11 December 2019**

37. The Inquiry has asked me about an incident that took place on the school site, involving AR after he was excluded from the school. AR returned to the site of Range High School during a Year 9 assembly on 11 December 2019. He was identified by one of the Teaching Assistants who brought AR to the back of the hall.
38. I was delivering the assembly in the school hall which had just finished. I approached AR, asking him what he was doing here when he was supposed to be in his new school. He attempted to flee and I had to chase him. Whilst he was running away he was blocked by a group of pupils who were in the corridor on their way to their next lessons. He then produced a hockey stick from underneath his coat and began to swing it at them, striking a Year 9 student.
39. I stopped AR and physically restrained him. Mr Dolly arrived and both of us escorted him to my office whilst another member of staff called the police. AR was physically agitated and breathing heavily. He didn't say anything whilst he was in my office, but he did mention that he blamed a pupil (who he was involved in an incident with on 7 October 2019) for getting expelled. He acknowledged that he had hit someone with a hockey stick, but he was in fact looking for the other student.

40. When the police arrived, they checked AR's backpack, upon which it was discovered he had also brought a knife into the school with him.
41. The police arrested AR before his father arrived at the school. The police explained to AR's father why they were arresting him. I vividly recall AR's father's particular concern over the location of the police station he was being taken to, as opposed to the seriousness of the incident and why AR was being arrested to begin with.
42. I provided a written account the same day which sets out my contemporaneous account of events and which I exhibit as **MM/01 – RAN000038**. This was written prior to the formal statement that was taken by the police later the same day. I had no further contact with AR after this incident. AR's brother remained a student at the school until the completion of his A -levels in 2023.
43. I cannot provide any further details beyond what is contained in these two statements. I did provide CCTV footage of the incident to the police which I exhibit as **MM/02 – MERP008145**

#### **Instagram Post and Contact with Acorns School - 1 February 2021**

44. On 1 February 2021, I was copied into an email from Mr Cregeen to the Deputy Head Teacher at AR's new school, Acorns School. Some of the pupils at Range High School still had contact with AR and brought one of AR's Instagram posts to our attention. The posts made reference to Colonel Gaddafi and demonstrated concerns which needed to be shared with his current school.
45. Mr Cregeen's email to the Acorns sought to determine whether the new school was still involved with AR and if not, to provide the details of his current school and support worker if applicable so the information about the Instagram post could be shared.
46. The Deputy Headteacher responded to confirm that AR remained enrolled at that school and that they would deal with this accordingly.
47. By this point, AR was no longer registered with Range High School with it being over a year since he was excluded. He was well known to the local authority given the referrals made by the school prior to his exclusion. Given the assurances from the Deputy Head Teacher at Acorns school, Range High School therefore had no further input in relation to this incident.

## INTERNET USAGE AND MONITORING

48. The Inquiry has asked whether AR's use of the internet was monitored at the time he was a pupil at Range High School. The school has an acceptable use policy in place which I exhibit as **MM/03 – RAN000038** and an e-safety policy which I exhibit as **MM/04 – RAN000038**. The acceptable use of computers and general e-safety are combined into an ICT lesson when the students join the school so they are aware of what is expected of them when using computers and the internet at school. When a student logs onto a computer, they are asked to accept a cut-down version of the Acceptable Use Policy before they can proceed.

49. At the time the school used a classroom management / safeguarding suite called Impero. I have consulted with our IT Manager to better understand this software and its use. It allowed the teacher in the room to monitor and control the student devices. It allowed them to control the devices with functions such as blocking the internet, blocking certain programs, and locking their computers. The package gave even more functionality to the IT team, who would have been able to monitor and control all devices from a console, not in the same room as the student devices.

50. The software was purpose-built for education and had built-in education-specific libraries and policies. The student devices were monitored in real-time for words and phrases typed. When a violation was detected, the student's device showed in the console as red, and you could click on the device to investigate the violation in detail. The software also takes a screen capture to help determine the context of the violation. The software flags alerts to the teacher in the room and the IT team, even if the software is not open or the teacher was working on something else, in the form of a desktop notification. These notifications can be clicked and later reviewed in the console.

51. At the time the software monitored for violations of the following categories:

- Adult Content
- Bullying and Trolling
- Radicalisation
- Drugs and Substance Misuse
- Eating disorders
- Grooming
- Illegal Content
- LGBT Derogatory Language

Race and Religious Hatred  
Self-Harm  
Sexting  
Suicide  
Weapons and Violence

52. As is the procedure now, when a violation is flagged, the IT team checks the screenshot and other data inputs to rule out obvious false positives, which are very common, and then raises it to the appropriate head of house (Head of Year now) and the safeguarding lead. We have since swapped over from Impero to an alternative solution called Senso. That software works in much the same way, but is cloud-based, and the screenshots are evaluated by AI to help determine the severity of the alert.

53. In addition to Impero, we had (and still have) Smoothwall Web Filter with Safeguarding alerts and reports. This system just monitors and controls web-based content, not all keystrokes like Impero. Similar to Impero, it is designed for education, so it has built-in categories and blocklists that are education-oriented. The system has a module specifically for safeguarding.

54. These built-in categories that are monitored for safeguarding are:

Abuse  
Adult Content  
Bullying  
Criminal Activity  
Radicalisation  
Substance Abuse  
Suicide

55. As with Impero, these general categories are kept up to date by the company as part of the licensing fee.

56. Violations are instantly sent to the IT Team to check and forward on. There is also a combined report scheduled that lists all the violations together. One of the most useful features on this system is search term monitoring. It will flag what a student has actually typed into a search engine when it violates one of the above categories. This type of alert is usually a good indication of the student's intent at the time, so we get fewer false positives.

57. I did not receive any reports flagging AR's use specifically, nor were any concerns reported to me about his use of the internet and whether such terms were being used whilst he was using the internet at school.

### **MASH, CAMHS AND PREVENT REFERRALS**

58. The school's safeguarding policy governs safeguarding referrals to external agencies. Staff have 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.

59. AR's behaviour, particularly bringing weapons to school, necessitated his exclusion and triggered safeguarding referrals.

60. Several referrals were made to relevant agencies by Mr Cregeen, the DSL at the time, including to the police, the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

61. Following the events from 7 October 2019 onwards, Mr Cregeen made referrals to CAMHS and MASH in accordance with policy and with police support. AR's parents were made aware of these referrals and provided their consent for them to be made.

62. The referrals were made at the same time as AR was excluded. Upon AR's exclusion, the statutory educational responsibility transferred to Lancashire County Council. The school provided all of the relevant documentation to the local authority, which assumed responsibility for liaison with the external agencies pending the governors' decision on AR's educational future following his exclusion.

63. Had AR not been excluded the school would have retained this responsibility, however under the circumstances it was not appropriate for them to do so.

### **Prevent Training and Referral Considerations**

64. The Inquiry has asked me about my training in relation to Prevent referrals. The school provide yearly training on commencement of the academic year. Prevent referrals form part of the school's safeguarding training which all staff receive. Senior leaders receive enhanced safeguarding training and the school has eight safeguarding leads with one senior DSL.

65. I regularly undertake training and refresher training in relation to safeguarding and the Prevent duty. I have undertaken Designated Safeguarding Lead training, Headteacher's Safeguarding Briefings and Prevent Awareness courses. I am familiar with the Prevent duty guidance issued by HM Government, Working together to safeguard children and Keeping children safe in education.
66. The Inquiry has asked me why a Prevent referral was not made at any stage by Range High School, and whether hindsight changes my views on whether one ought to have been made.
67. Prevent has a narrow remit, focusing on the identification of those at risk of radicalisation and terrorism. Prevent deals with all kinds of terrorist threats, and the statutory guidance (that was applicable from 2015 to 2023), defined extremism as: "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces". The guidance described Islamist extremists as those who "regard Western intervention in Muslim-majority countries as a 'war with Islam', creating a narrative of 'them' and 'us'. Their ideology includes the uncompromising belief that people cannot be both Muslim and British, and that Muslims living here should not participate in our democracy". The guidance noted that "The white supremacist ideology of extreme right-wing groups has also provided both the inspiration and justification for people who have committed extreme right-wing terrorist acts".
68. I do not think that a Prevent referral was appropriate at the time concerns were raised about AR – mainly October 2019. During his time at the school, whilst I had concerns that AR may have been subject to bullying, AR's issues albeit significant, were broader in nature and brought to the forefront violence in connection with potential bullying. Save for the isolated remark in the RE class in June 2019, AR prior to his time in Year 9 showed no signs of sympathetic interest in extremism, nor did he demonstrate any extremist ideology. His internet use flagged no extremist terminology.
69. At the time when AR was in school it is my opinion that he did not demonstrate behaviour that would have given rise to a Prevent referral, according to the training I received and understood. There was no link to his behaviour and the potential warning signs that would require a Prevent referral. He did not display extremist views or radicalised behaviour. Even taking his behaviour together in 2019, I did not form the

view that it amounted to warning signs that he was being radicalised, becoming involved in terrorism or engaging in extreme ideologies.

70. I have made referrals to Prevent in the past and I am an experienced senior leader; in my mind my interactions with AR did not cause me to think that a Prevent referral was the appropriate course of action. He was of course referred to MASH, CAMHS and was being educated at a specialist school following his permanent exclusion.

71. His apparent ideology was not brought to my attention until February 2021, when his then Range High School friends brought AR's Instagram posts to Mr Cregeen's attention. By this point, AR was already registered with Acorns School who were providing him with Early Start help and special education and TA support. The information provided by the pupils was shared with Acorns and we received assurance that this would be followed up by them.

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

72. I was approached by Lancashire Police to provide a witness statement in August 2024 following the tragic events that happened at the children's dance club in Southport on 29 July 2024. The statement dated 14 August 2024 sets out AR's time at Range High School and provides detail on the series of events leading up to his permanent exclusion. I exhibit a copy of this statement as **MM/05 – RAN000038**.

73. The Inquiry has asked about any errors in my police statement and any other relevant matters. I do need to correct a date in the statement. I refer to the fight in the English class as having taken place on 6 October 2019 when in fact this was on 7 October 2019.

74. I do not have anything to add to this statement and can confirm that it is an accurate reflection of my knowledge.

#### **BULLYING**

75. Having looked at the House log I can see that there was one instance when AR complained of being verbally bullied in April 2019. This appears to have been an isolated incident that was not escalated beyond speaking to those involved. No concerns over bullying were raised with the school, either from AR, his parents, or other members of the school community prior to the incidents in September and October 2019. AR did not exhibit any other violent behaviour, or demonstrate any

violent tendencies, or any behaviour that indicated that he was being bullied. The incidents from September 2019 and AR's acute behaviour and actions came as a shock to the school.

76. For the majority of time that AR was a student there were no concerns with his behaviour, with the exception of his behaviour in the weeks immediately prior to the exclusion.

77. Allegations of bullying towards AR in September and October 2019 were brought to the school's attention and issues with a particular pupil were investigated by the school and the pupil was subsequently excluded.

### **INFORMATION SHARING**

78. After he left Range High School, AR then enrolled as a pupil at the Acorns school. Post exclusion information was shared by the school with the establishments responsible for his education if and when this was requested. Range High School would not have known where AR was going to be placed after his exclusion, until such time he was placed, and as such it ensured that it shared the information required with the local authority who would have been the intermediary between the Range High School and AR's new school.

79. The Acorns did get in touch with the school who reported serious safeguarding concerns with AR and requested further information on the details behind AR's exclusion from Range High School. The Acorns reported that they had not received the Head Teachers report or other supporting documentation to assist them.

80. I do know that Mr Cregeen liaised with the Head Teacher at Acorns following receipt of this email. Mr Cregeen also contacted the Head Teacher to inform her of the incident that took place at the Year 9 assembly on 11 December 2019. The Head Teacher informed Mr Cregeen that the school had made a Prevent referral based on advice from Lancashire police who were providing Early Help in conjunction with things that AR was reported to have said to staff at the Acorns school.

### **REFLECTION AND IMPROVEMENTS**

81. The Inquiry has asked me to reflect on my involvement, and any relevant improvements made by the school, and whether with the benefit of hindsight anything could or should have been done differently at the time AR was a pupil at the school.

This is difficult for me to say to some extent given that AR was excluded very shortly after my appointment as Head Teacher.

82. Changes have been made to the school's systems and processes since AR's exclusion. These modifications have emerged as part of the school's ongoing commitment to continuous improvement, influenced by a change in senior leadership and the school's integration into the Trust.
83. The enhancements include the adoption of more efficient, automated systems for recording and monitoring behaviour, the establishment of a bigger safeguarding team, and the introduction of a new senior leadership team at the commencement of the 2019 academic year. New policies were ratified upon the school's affiliation with the Trust in 2024.
84. In January 2020 a new electronic system, named Class Charts, was procured and implemented to record safeguarding measures, with the appropriate training provided to all staff members. Class Charts is streamlined and compatible with the school's existing electronic recording platforms, ensuring accessibility for all staff members.
85. Implementing a new digital platform is in no way intended to infer that the previous system was inadequate. It is my opinion that the systems in place at the time AR was a pupil, although older, were adequate and enabled staff to appropriately manage the issues concerning AR.
86. After the incident, the school has closely collaborated with external agencies, including the Police Matrix System, in partnership with the local authority, to conduct comprehensive workshops aimed at educating young people about knife crime and violent crime.
87. The school remains dedicated to ongoing efforts to provide a safe and nurturing environment for both pupils and staff. I have carefully considered the measures taken by the school during the period when AR was a pupil. It is important to note that any changes made post-exclusion were not a direct consequence of AR's behaviour. Instead, these changes were part of an effort to streamline, improve, automate, and future-proof the school's documentation systems concerning the learning environment, including safeguarding aspects.

88. The absence of these changes would not have changed the manner in which the school dealt with AR.

89. Ofsted reports from 2018 stated safeguarding was effective and noted the school demonstrated its commitment to enhancing the safeguarding of its pupils by taking effective steps to improve safety measures.

90. Ofsted reports from 2022 stated safeguarding was effective and noted that staff at the school were vigilant and well trained, receiving regular updates on safeguarding protocols and knowing the proper channels for reporting concerns. It also noted effective collaboration with families and external agencies to provide necessary support to pupils.

**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:** 19 August 2025