

Witness Name: CHERYL LYN SMITH

Exhibits: CLS1 to CLS19

Dated: 29th August 2025

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF CHERYL LYN SMITH

I, CHERYL LYN SMITH, will say as follows: -

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 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.

Introductory matters

4. I have been a teacher at Presfield High School (Presfield) since September 2000. In 2014 I became the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and became an Assistant Head Teacher in September 2023. I am currently a Deputy Head Teacher having been promoted in January 2024.
5. I Have a B Ed degree
6. My role as a teacher and DSL has fluctuated over time. Initially I would dedicate 2 days to teaching and 3 days to safeguarding along with other responsibilities. My teaching time was increased by the deputy head at the time from 2 days to 3 days from September 2020.

Factual Narrative of Involvement

7. I was aware of AR when I came back from being unwell on 18th April 2022 - he had already started visiting the school and had been given a placement at Presfield. I was involved until he was removed from roll in June 2024. There was a period of time however where I believed that AR was OFF rolled. This was due to an email that I had received from the head teacher.

8. I was sent an email via egress on 22nd March 2022 from Jan Lewis at Lancashire County Council - I did not open it until September 2024 when the head took a phone call from Tracey McKeating who said that Acorns had told her they had sent it. I was off sick at the time the email arrived for 5 weeks (going over the Easter holiday) and when I returned to work I failed to spot it.
9. I failed to request information to be sent to the Presfield CPOMS system from Acorns school. CPOMS is a data management system which is used by many schools to hold sensitive information about students. Not all schools have the system and some schools still use paper records.
10. On 4th May 2022 Hayley Dawson the Presfield Head of Sixth Form gave me a paper copy of a risk assessment from Acorns School which I uploaded to CPOMS . The risk assessment stated that work had been completed with AR and the risk posed by AR was now identified as low.
11. I have been asked how AR presented when I interacted with him. In my view, AR was quiet, subdued, passive, on one occasion when I walked through 6th form I saw him sitting at the very back of the classroom. When I saw AR at home he did not engage in conversation. His Dad used the words anxious and anxiety. I gained the impression that AR was fragile in terms of mental health and in terms of being unable to mobilise himself out of the house - for example he could not cope with leaving the house to attend school.
12. When I saw AR at home he was on the sofa. There were birthday banners on the wall and I asked Dad had someone had a birthday? He did not reply and I noticed the next time I visited they were still up. On at least one occasion AR had empty pizza boxes around him where he had been eating take-away pizza. There were dirty plates on another occasion where he had been eating on the sofa.
13. I never went upstairs at the family home, I only ever stood in the living room and porch. I never felt he posed a risk to me or others - I did not feel unsafe - PC Steve Baker or a colleague attended with me when I went to the house due to issues with getting into the home to see AR.
14. My concern was for AR's welfare as he was not attending school, not that of others. I was unsure of the parenting styles of parents and did not manage to gain a relationship with Mum or Dad in order to explore this.
15. I was involved in conversations in school regarding AR's non- attendance but most of the engagement plans/timetabling were made by the head of sixth form at the time and AR's form tutor. I was involved in attempting to get support from both Lancashire and Sefton. I am also aware that Presfield's parent support advisor Karen Gray

completed an early help assessment with a view to improving school attendance as a target. This was submitted to Lancashire County Council.

16. I was not involved in or responsible for the process of writing AR's risk assessments at Presfield school nor for the quality assurance of them. On 4 May 2022 Hayley Dawson gave me a paper copy of a risk assessment which had been sent to her from Acorns School which I uploaded to CPOMS . The risk assessment stated that work had been completed with AR and the risk was now identified as low.

17. I have been asked if I escalated any concerns to external agencies, I had asked for support from Sefton's first day response team. As a consequence of this request an Educational welfare officer, Angela McGuire attended the home on one occasion as Joe Farrell from the service had asked her to. AR's Mum did not respond positively to this attendance.

18. I also asked Lancashire Council first day response team to visit the home but this service was not in place in Lancashire and consequently, Matthew Hall a children's champion said he would not be making the 90 minute journey to the home.

19. Lancashire police officer collar number 11097 said police would not be going out when I requested a welfare home visit.

20. Lancashire's children missing education team would not visit AR or support us with his non attendance as they said he 'was not missing he was at home.'

21. I referred into MASH due to AR's non-attendance and due to him being unseen. My concern was for the welfare of AR as he was at home, socially isolated and not attending school .

22. We were not always able to gain access to see him in the home. There was a stage where I felt that Lancashire Council were finding reasons to not support us or AR. I also felt Lancashire were saying 'you have to seek support from Sefton as you are a Sefton school' while Sefton were saying 'you have to seek support from Lancashire as he is a Lancashire child.' It felt that no-one wanted to help.

23. I was not involved in the decision making process to remove AR from the roll at Presfield, but I did express an opinion to colleagues in school - to paraphrase - I felt that there was a place provided but AR was a non-attender, I felt this was a waste of resource when another student who would like a place at Presfield could have benefitted from the place to gain education and qualifications - something we were not able to provide for AR.

Handover from the Acorns School and Risk Assessments

24. I was not involved in the handover process as this task was undertaken by the head of sixth form. I was not aware of any risk assessments being delivered to Presfield at the

time of handover. I was provided by Hayley Dawson with a paper copy of a risk assessment from Acorns on 4th May which concluded that the risk posed by AR was low.

25. I have been asked if I was aware of the following incidents:-

- i. The fact that AR admitted, in October 2019, that he had brought a knife into the Range High School on 10 occasions to “stab someone.
- ii. That he had made a comment at the Range High School that “that’s why teachers get murdered” in September/October 2019;
- iii. An incident at the Acorns School on 15/11/2019 whereby AR was found to have been searching for school shootings in America during an ICT lesson;
- iv. An incident at Acorns School on 03/12/2019 whereby AR said, during an art lesson, “why can we have these with guns but can’t look at guns on the internet” and “can we have a picture of a severed head then”;
- v. An incident at the Range High School on 11/12/2019 whereby AR attacked a student with a hockey stick whilst in possession of a knife in his backpack;
- vi. An incident whereby AR was sharing social media posts relating to Colonel Gaddafi in early 2021;
- vii. An incident in April 2021 whereby AR was observed during a lesson to be conducting searches in relation to the London Bridge terror attack and he then spoke in detail about the Israel and Palestine conflict and the IRA.
- viii. That AR had been referred to Prevent on three occasions: 05/12/2019, 01/02/2021, and 26/04/21;
- ix. An incident on 17 March 2022 where AR went missing from home and was found on a bus in possession of a knife and AR stated that he wanted to stab someone and that he had tried to make his own poison.

26. I can confirm that at the time of handover (on my return to work from sickness), I was not knowingly aware of any of the above incidents. As indicated earlier in this statement an email containing this information had been submitted to me, however it had not been opened or accessed during the handover process due to my absence.

27. I am aware from a CPOMS entry dated 21st March that a telephone discussion is recorded as taking place with me, however, I have no recollection of ever previously speaking with Maggie Aldred.

28. I became partially aware of the incident at “ix” above. The school was provided with an Operation Encompass report and the details were that a vulnerable child AR had been involved in an incident. The limited details did not indicate if AR was the victim of

this incident or the perpetrator. The operation encompass report referred to AR as a 'vulnerable child.' It did not imply that he posed a risk to others.

29. I had unknowingly been made aware of all of the above incidents save "ix" by 2nd May 2022. This was the date of my return to work. Unfortunately, I did not open the email containing that information as it had been missed by me. I became aware of "ix" upon receipt of the Operation Encompass report.

30. If I had been aware of the above information, I would have ensured that risk assessments were updated and amended to reflect the risks both to AR and those posed by AR. I would also have considered making a referral to PREVENT. I note in this regard, that all incidents save for "ix" had been considered by Prevent and deemed not to meet the required threshold for action. A call would have been made to PREVENT to ascertain if "ix" would have made a difference to their analysis.

31. Had incident "ix" been an isolated incident, I would have requested the head to purchase a security wand device and I would have asked him to consider that AR should be wanded every time he entered the school premises.

32. I have reviewed an email dated 23rd March 2022 from Maggie Aldred at the Acorns School regarding the risk posed by AR and the incident which took place on 17th March 2022. [CLS1-PRE001621] cannot recall receiving this email nor any information regarding the incident at the time in question. I had been in work during the morning of 21st March but was unable to remain in work due to feeling suddenly unwell. I believed at the time that I was suffering from Covid as I had many of the known symptoms. I was regularly testing for Covid but all of the lateral flow tests taken by me were negative for the virus.

33. I was aware that the school was significantly short staffed at this time due to Covid and other illnesses and consequently, I briefly returned to work on the 29th March 2022 but was still unwell and had to return home shortly after 11.00am that morning. I was eventually admitted to Southport Hospital [I&S] and was an inpatient for several days. I was discharged [DPA] and I was signed unfit to return to work until Monday 2nd May 2022.

34. Despite being absent from work due to illness, I did continue to actively engage with matters when they arose and recall attending meetings remotely where possible. I was involved with ensuring that steps were taken regarding other students during my absence.

35. The Inquiry may wish to note that during the period of its investigation, my late husband Colin was diagnosed with an aggressive form of prostate cancer in July 2021 and undertook several courses of chemotherapy. Despite this treatment my husband passed away after a long battle with this disease.

36. I am unable to say that the information supplied by Maggie Aldred was fed into the approach of Presfield High School to AR's education or any of the risk assessments in relation to AR.

37. I would be greatly assisted to receive any documents from the Inquiry which may assist me in my recollection of this email and any information which may have been supplied

38. Presfield has disclosed to the Inquiry CLS2 and CLS3 – PRE001741 and PRE001742 two risk assessments completed with regard to AR. I am not aware of any other risk assessments being completed due to his lack of engagement and lack of attendance.

39. Risk assessments relating to students are updated as and when new information comes to light which affects risk. They are reviewed on an annual basis by form tutors and they were quality assured by the assistant head responsible for behaviour and not by me.

40. The Risk Assessments for AR were reviewed but without information, they were not updated.

41. On reflection with the information which should have been known regarding AR, the Risk Assessments were not adequate and did not take into account his historic behaviours.

Encompass Notification – May 2022

42. I have reviewed the email from Hayley Dawson dated 27th May 2022 CLS4 – PRE001247. My interpretation without further information was that something had happened to AR. The nature of the incident appears to be involving a vulnerable child. I did not assume that AR was the perpetrator of the incident.

43. The report indicated that MASH would contact us if any further information was to be supplied, no further information was received by me. The MASH team member was Roxanna Patel from Social Care. A meeting did take place with AR's father at his request to discuss his disappearance. This meeting took place on 23rd March while I was away from school due to illness.

Steps taken to engage/re-engage AR

44. In my view, Presfield went above and beyond its duty in its attempts to engage with AR and to assist in him re-engaging with education.

Issues regarding AR being on the Presfield High School roll

45. In an email sent by me to Tony Fay dated 24th June 2022 CLS5 -PRE000052 the phrase “placed in 6th form but actually...only year 11”? appears. This was due to an extended transition period for AR being agreed in an attempt to engage AR with

Presfield. AR had been out of education and while he was still a year 11 student he was placed on the roll of Presfield within the school sixth form. The transition was intended to take several months and be complete in time for the commencement of the September term.

46. In an email chain ending in my email to Tony Fay 10th October 2022 CLS 6 - PRE000085. There appears to be confusion as to AR's status within the school. I was aware that parents had been told that AR had been removed from the roll whereas the Local Authority had refused our request to remove AR. I was not aware of the local authority's position at the time of my email response. I requested that my colleague Hayley Dawson call Lancashire County Council to resolve the issue CLS7 - PRE000086

47. On 18th October 2022 an email was forwarded to Lancashire County Council CLS8 PRE000088. In my view it was urgent that we had clarity on the plan for AR as AR was apparently on our roll at that time and had not been seen since the last academic term. With any young adult, it is essential to be able to confirm that a student is safe and well. If AR was still indeed our student, we owed him a duty of care and needed to ensure that he was safe and well.

48. I was concerned for his safety as he had not been attending school and had not been seen by any of our staff. We were unaware of the parenting skill of his parents. Each time that a planned visit was arranged, staff would arrive and the blinds would be drawn at the house. Parents were not letting us in to check on the welfare of AR.

49. Presfield continued to be concerned about the safety of AR and consequently requests were made to various elements of Lancashire County Council. We were not informed when people had left their posts and had not been advised who was going to take over rolls. As a consequence, Presfield continued to make home visits.

50. I have reviewed the email from Mark Rigby to Lancashire County Council dated 16/05/2022 which was copied to me CLS 9 - PRE001580. Mark was the Deputy DSL at Presfield. he noted that Lancashire Social Care had closed AR's plan and raised a concern that AR had begun refusing to come into school and his father had reported difficulties at home (including AR pouring milk into his bed to prevent him from sleeping, tipping his father's dinner over his head, and pouring water over his father's laptop).

51. These concerns were raised with Lancashire Council with a view to them reopening their case files and provide AR with the Mental Health provision that he appeared to need. As far as I recall, Mark did not receive a response.

52. I reviewed my email to Hayley Dawson, Tony Fay, Lucy McLoughlin and James Berry dated 27/06/2022 at CLS10 -PRE000059 and my email to Hayley Dawson and Tony Fay dated 06/07/2022 at CLS11 -PRE000064.

53. Emma Lambert provided me with the names of two Lancashire Council staff that may be able to assist me with my concerns. However, it transpired that the Matt Hall who I understand was a children's champion was not prepared to travel to see AR. He did however confirm that he would return to me with a response from Gayle Lavelle a Special Educational Needs advisor. There was at the time insufficient information to make a referral to MASH

54. As Lancashire did not seem to be prepared to assist, I enlisted the assistance of my colleague Karen Gray to complete an early help referral which was submitted on 6th July 2022.

55. I was disappointed by the inaction of Lancashire Council as AR was a child for whom they had responsibility.

56. In an email to Lancashire County Council sent on 21/12/2022 CLS12 -PRE000101. I identified the service that would be available to us for a child who resided within the borough of Sefton. All of the services mentioned include the ability for staff to attend upon a students home in order to conduct a welfare visit and ascertain the reason for non-attendance. This service was not available for children residing in Lancashire. Had that service been available welfare checks could have been conducted by their staff.

57. I am asked to review the email from Joseph Farrell at Sefton Council dated 20/03/2023 CLS13 - PRE000210 and the email chain at CLS14 - PRE000216. Mr Farrell had arranged for a member of his team to attend the home address of AR. The response from the family was to complain about the attendance and refused to allow the staff member to see AR. In this regard it was considered appropriate for a welfare check from Lancashire Police. We were being denied an opportunity to satisfy ourselves of the health and welfare of AR and all other options had been exhausted at that stage.

58. When Lancashire Police refused to attend CLS15 – PRE000219, I arranged for Steve Baker of Merseyside police to attend. The request was unorthodox as a Merseyside Officer was conducting a welfare visit within the area of another force, it was agreed that this was an appropriate course of action.

59. I wrote an email dated 21/03/2023 to Lucy McLoughlin and after no response also to Tony Fay on 23/03/2023 CLS 16 -PRE000223. Within the email on 21/03/2023 I wrote:-

“the red tape is frightening – not under the remit of children missing education team although not seen by the school since 25 May 2022

Doesn't meet threshold for police welfare check as we can't say we think a crime is committed/emergency risk to him

Sefton Welfare team tell us to do the above

Lancashire SEN tell us to ring police (who won't go) and Lancashire social care MIGHT say he doesn't meet their remit.

Short of breaking in I don't know how to see this kid. The only option not exhausted is Steve Baker who MIGHT go out to help us because he's attached to us".

60. Our concern was that AR was not being seen and we were being prevented from seeing him. I was concerned about his welfare.

61. The views taken by Lancashire Council appeared to be that AR was an issue for Sefton Council and Sefton were of the view that the issue was for Lancashire. There were no cross border cooperation or policies.

62. Any of the Lancashire agencies could and should have provided assistance and arranged to check on the welfare of a vulnerable child. It appeared that the agencies were looking for reasons why they couldn't provide assistance.

63. Nothing was done by the agencies referred to and we remained unable to access AR.

64. Steve Baker as indicated above is a Merseyside Police Officer who at the time was attached to our school. Steve agreed to attend upon the home and was able to conduct a welfare check on AR.

65. A MASH referral was subsequently made by me, however I no longer have access to the request or the outcome.

66. I have reviewed the email I received on 22/03/2023 from Lancashire County Council and my earlier email from 21/03/2023 CLS17 - PRE000226. I had been advised that:- "The case will close, we cannot override consent at this time"?. From this I understood that the parents had refused consent for the sharing of information and as a consequence the MASH referral was closed.

67. I thought that the response was disappointing but as there was no consent, the local authority had little option but to close the referral.

68. I commented that "no one is picking this unseen child up". Fortunately, AR arrived in school for an unplanned visit several days later. As a result we were able to satisfy ourselves of the pressing matter of his welfare.

69. I am not aware of any response to my email dated 24/03/2023 CLS18 -PRE000235

70. I have reviewed my email dated 30/04/2024 to Hayley Dawson CLS19 -PRE000436. I was prompted to send this email as AR was still technically on our school roll and again, I wanted to satisfy myself of his welfare. His EHCP had been withdrawn at this stage.

71. I do not believe that any further home visits were made.

72. In my dealings with other agencies, I found that response from Lancashire Council was very poor, there was no cooperation and no constructive responses. This may have been due to our school coming under the Sefton umbrella.

73. At no stage did I or any member of staff at Presfield consider a referral to PREVENT. In my view all of the incidents involving AR had been reported to PREVENT save for "ix". This incident on its own did not merit a referral.

74. I am asked if a further PREVENT referral should have been made with the benefit of hindsight. This is a difficult question for me to answer as the information should have been known without the need for hindsight. However, I would repeat my answer in paragraph 68. I did not believe that the circumstances of the incident dated 17th March 2022 were of themselves sufficient to reach the threshold for a referral.

Reflection on events

75. Reflecting upon my involvement with the events under examination by the Inquiry, I would have sought training on CPOMS and the technical training that was required to utilise the system. I would also have opened the Egress email dated 22nd March from Jan Lewis upon my return from a sickness absence. Had this been opened, I would have spoken with the SLT about not allowing single staff visits to the home of AR and would have viewed him through a different lens. I had always viewed AR as a vulnerable student who was at risk rather than AR being a possible risk. I would also have advised on the amendment of the risk assessments held by the school.

76. When CPOMS was introduced into Presfield, this was an opportunity to review the whole of the safeguarding processes utilised at Presfield. This was not done and was a missed opportunity.

77. I consider that the guidance, training and resources available to me were adequate save for the CPOMS training which I should have sought support with from the SLT as we were bringing in a new IT system.

Improvements

78. I am aware that a safeguarding group email now exists. This ensures that when I am away from school, any emails regarding safeguarding issues are attended to. CPOMS is also now used to log behaviour issues whereas these were previously logged in a different system known as ARBOR.

I am aware that during my absence the headteacher now reviews my incoming emails.

I am willing to provide any further information to the Inquiry that the Chair may require.

Dated this 29th 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.

Signature

Signed [Cheryl Smith \(Aug 29, 2025 18:44:33 GMT+1\)](#)

Cheryl Lyn Smith






Cheryl Lyn Smith

Final Audit Report

2025-08-29

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