Monday, 26 October 2026

(10.00 am)

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Can you remain standing for a moment just to take the oath.

MS KATE DIXON (affirmed)

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you very much, please have a seat.

A. Thank you.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Yes, Mr Moss.

Questions by MR MOSS

MR MOSS: Thank you, sir. Just start by giving us your full name if you would, please.

A. It is Kate Dixon.

Q. Thank you, Ms Dixon. You have given evidence before but could we just have on screen please your Phase 2 witness statement, that's DFE000297, please. That's the first page and if we just go to page 21 DFE000297_0021, we see that's a statement that you signed. Obviously we have redacted your signature, but on 28 July of this year, is that right?

A. Yes, that's right.

Q. Can you just confirm that the contents of the statement are true to the best of your knowledge and belief?

A. They are.

Q. Because it was a statement you provided helpfully quite

early in our evidence gathering for this phase, I know there are a couple of matters we will need to update as we go through matters. Just so that we have it, could we also have on screen, please, just to remind ourselves, DFE000256. That was your Phase 1 witness statement, which was dated 5 September 2025 and you previously gave evidence to the Chair in Phase 1 on 27 October of last year?

A. That's right, thank you.

Q. Thank you. I want to start with your background and I'm going to do this, Ms Dixon, as you will understand, because not everybody will have been involved in your Phase 1 evidence. We have different Core Participants for Phase 2.

So if we could have your second statement back on screen please, we just go to page 2 DFE000297_0002, paragraph 3. We see that:

"Since July 2016 [you] have been employed by the department as a director."

Importantly for us:

"... since 2017 [you] have had responsibility for national policy on safeguarding in education settings including countering extremism."

Is that right?

A. Yes, that's right.

Q. Now, obviously your statement details a lot of issues, some within your immediate area, I suspect, of responsibility, but I suspect, like others, it is a corporate statement, you have had appropriate input from your colleagues, is that right?

A. Yes, correct.

Q. Thank you. We see you have been a civil servant since 2002. You gave some information about this last time. Can I try to summarise it in this way. I think in previous roles, prior to your director of national policy on safeguarding and education, you have had experience in mental health areas, although you are no longer directly responsible for that. Is that correct?

A. That's right, yes.

Q. For bullying policy, although again, you are no longer directly responsible for that area?

A. Yes, that is right.

Q. Information technology, risk assessment for pupils and security measures for classes, as well as Prevent and radicalisation. So I think you have a good broad experience prior to your current role?

A. Yes, that's right.

Q. Thank you. Turning to the role of the DfE. You set out a useful, pithy summary in paragraph 4, which we have on screen. So, relevant to the Inquiry's Phase 2, we

remind ourselves that the Department for Education has:

"... overall responsibility for setting the policy [and] accountability and regulatory framework for children's services, including children's social care ..."

So pausing there, that's one big area that we are interested in. But also "for safeguarding in relation to children in education and training".

So those two pillars of responsibility the DfE holds, yes?

A. Yes, that's right.

Q. Thank you. I want to just look, in brief terms -- some of this is, again, refreshing evidence that you gave previously, but if we could just go back to your first witness statement, just to set the framework of how that works in practice. It is page 3 DFE000256_0003, paragraph 7.

Three lines dine we see that the work:

"... includes developing legislation, statutory and non-statutory guidance, setting national standards, shaping the structure and oversight of service delivery, and determining how funding is allocated to support [those] objectives."

Is that right?

A. Yes, that's right.

Q. Thank you. Then, page 2 DFE000256_0002, paragraph 4. We remind ourselves in the social care context that, for that system, DfE, as will be readily understood, is not the direct deliverer of those services. Is that right?
A. Yes, that's right.
Q. Explain then how it works in terms of who does deliver those services and what the DfE role is?
A. So, I think as you have referred to in previous paragraphs, the DfE role is to set the legislation, to set the policy. We support that with guidance. Children's social care is delivered through local authorities. We work with local authorities as a representative body but we don't get involved in individual cases unless there's some reason for national importance that they come up to our safeguarding panel, where we are looking at lessons learnt.

So in the main, we are not involved in individual cases and we are not involved in the operational side but we set the framework within which local authorities do their work.
Q. Thank you. As we will go on to explore, it must follow that if there is a degree of ambiguity about the extent to which duties in social care extend to the sphere of when children pose a risk to others, that is a direct area for which DfE is responsible for curing that

ambiguity, if ambiguity there is?
A. Yes, and I think I will probably talk later in my evidence about the ways in which we are moving towards recognising that in our policy guidance and you will probably ask me some questions about legislation as well.
Q. Just establishing that as a theme early on, but I think you will accept that, given the operational and policy divide that you are talking about, if there is a problem in the guidance, an understanding in that area, that falls square within DfE's responsibilities?
A. Yes, to set the policy. Yes.
Q. Then still in this first witness statement, we just remind ourselves of the helpful summary, page 3 DFE000256_0003, paragraph 9, I think it is the bottom of the page. Main areas of policy responsibility, you gave a little bit more detail here. So if we can just go over the page DFE000256_0004, 9.2:

"CSC in England, including systems for children in need ..."

So children's social care:

"... child protection, and looked after children. This includes fostering, kinship care, adoption, alternatives to care, and residential care."

Yes? So that's a bit more detail about what falls

within that. Then 9.3:

"The standards, operation and funding of the system for children and young people in the primary and secondary school sectors in England, including interventions where concerns are identified."

Again, we are going to come onto interventions later on:

"This includes local authority maintained schools and academies, and provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities ('SEND'). DfE also regulates the independent school sector and has policy responsibility for home education."

Yes?
A. Yes, that's right.
Q. Thank you. If we can just look at page 5 DFE000256_0005 paragraph 12 of this statement, just to round off DfE's roles and areas of responsibility. You set out in your first statement that the Department:

"... works closely with other government departments ... to ensure a coordinated approach to policy affecting children and young people ..."

Then, if we scan down to later in the paragraph, you say that:

"... includes work in relation to the Prevent duty,

on which the Home Office ... is the lead government department.

Yes?
A. Yes, that's right. Probably, since I gave evidence last year, the work that I have done has been even more cross-government working. I know you have other witnesses coming after me; working with other departments, on cross-government work.
Q. Thank you. I want to turn, please, to the guidance issued by the Department, first of all, at a general level. So, if we can stick with this statement for the moment. If we look, in your first statement, at page 13 DFE000256_0013, paragraph 48. You explain that the Department:

"... produces a wide range of statutory and non-statutory guidance for schools, LAs and the wider education sector."

Then 48.1:

"Statutory guidance is issued by the [Secretary of State for Education] pursuant to specific powers contained in [various] Acts ... And sets out what organisations, such as schools and [local authorities], must do to comply with the law, and should do in the exercise of their statutory functions or duties."

It will be familiar to many but can you just explain

the distinction between "must do" and "should do" in the statutory guidance?
A. So, where we use "must" it is to comply with the law. Where we use "should" then that's exercising statutory duties and functions. There is -- within statutory guidance, there is a provision that if you have looked at the guidance and the law and decided to do something different, it is possible to do that but you must then be able to -- agencies must be able to justify that.
Q. Thank you. So that "should do" is where the clear expectation of the normal policy, I think, is set out but it allows for a reasoned departure if individual circumstances truly exceptionally require it?
A. Yes.
Q. Thank you. Then still in this first statement, page 14 DFE000256_0014, paragraph 52. It may be obvious but:
"Those responsible for managing schools are expected to refer to statutory guidance regularly to ensure compliance with legal duties and to remain informed of policy developments."
We will come to it but you refer there to a particular example, "Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance" and so on. So the expectation is that the individual schools will keep on top of the guidance. I think, as we will come onto,

there is an expectation that for some parts of some guidance, teachers and other frontline education workers are meant to read certain sections individually of certain guidance?
A. Yes, you are probably referring to Keeping Children Safe in Education in particular.
Q. And part 1, yes. Thank you. Can you just, without necessarily turning up the references, just summarise for us the DfE's responsibility in terms of the provision of training?
A. Yes, I don't think we have got responsibility to provide training against our guidance but in many areas we do and we tend to do that where we think it is a particularly important or new issue or where we are getting questions about the understanding of it. I am sure we will come onto -- I can talk now -- various aspects of where we have decided to provide training ourselves, where we have asked somebody to do that on our behalf or whether we provided materials to be used in -- so, for example, in Keeping Children Safe in Education, often the first September inset day in schools is used by schools to go through the changes to that guidance and sometimes we will provide materials, if there's a particularly new issue there and -- I am sure, subject of this Inquiry, might suggest that there

might be areas that we would do that in the future.
Q. Thank you. So, on the whole, would this be right, education settings themselves, but perhaps to a certain extent the local authority, would have a responsibility for a lot of the training, but there will be some exceptions where central training is at least offered, particularly in new or important areas where it is assessed that central training might be helpful?
A. Yes, or on issues that perhaps might not come up as often in individual settings.
Q. Thank you. Turning very briefly to the role of Ofsted. Obviously, we will hear from our next witness in more detail. But if we can go back to your Phase 2 statement, please, so your second statement. It is page 6 DFE000297_0006, paragraph 21. You explain there that:
"Ofsted inspection is the primary mechanism for monitoring compliance in state-funded schools. ... inspections [involve] inspectors [assessing] pupils' behaviour and attitudes, the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and how well schools identify and manage risks, including those relating to violence and serious harm."
You go on to say for independent schools, there's a different regime:

"... half are inspected by Ofsted and half by the Independent Schools Inspectorate."
What determines the difference?
A. So, independent schools have a choice of whether they join the independent schools council and schools that do that are inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate. They are both inspectorates, they both inspect against the same set of standards which DfE set and the regulation from both of those inspectorates come into the Department and we deal with those. So anyone who is not inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate because they are not a member of that council, will be inspected by Ofsted.
Q. Thank you. Whoever is doing the inspecting, should we understand -- and I think you touched on it in your answer -- that there is a role for DfE in setting out the standards against which inspections take place? So you can require that a new aspect of policy, for example, should become subject to inspection?
A. Yes. So, the standards are in legislation, but that's DfE legislation and in addition, if the standard is broad, we can also provide guidance underneath that standard about what that includes and then the inspectorates will both inspect against that standard set by the DfE.

Q. So we will come onto it perhaps but in the area of filtering and monitoring, I think that's an area where it is envisaged that additional work by Ofsted might be brought in, I think from 2027?

A. There is some work consulting on those, that standard, if that's what you are referring to.

Q. Yes. We might come onto the detail of that. Thank you. I want to come on next, please, to looking at the currently existing relevant guidance in just a little bit more detail, to see, first of all, what it does provide for. Then we will come back to look at potentially some gaps.

So can we start, please, with some general aspects on this. So, Keeping Children Safe in Education, is our first area of guidance. If we look at your second statement, page 5 DFE000297_0005, paragraph 19, please.

You say that Keeping Children Safe in Education:

"... is the principal statutory safeguarding guidance that schools and colleges rely on every day to protect children and young people."

Is that right?

A. Yes, that's right.

Q. It includes, I think, already some updates in relation to the Inquiry's Phase 1 work, is that right?

A. Yes, it does. So, we talked, when I gave evidence last

time, about information sharing between schools. So we have updated in response to -- fully, in response to the recommendations you gave in Phase 1. KCSIE is on an annual cycle and you will probably see when we talk about Keeping Children Safe in Education and Working Together, which are sister documents, we published the new version of Keeping Children Safe in Education already, so that's in force now for September. Working Together is being consulted on and we are about to publish an update and I hope what you will see is we are including more and more references to the work covered by this Inquiry. I think by the time we publish Working Together, I know you will ask me questions -- there will be more in Working Together and then we will need Keeping Children Safe in Education to catch up again.

Q. Of course. So Keeping Children Safe in Education update for -- in terms of Southport related matters, the update has come earlier in the cycle?

A. Yes.

Q. Working Together to Safeguard Children will come next in the cycle?

A. Correct.

Q. But then, when you come back to Keeping Children Safe in Education, next time round, there will still be more to be done. So you are not saying "job done" on Keeping

Children Safe in Education?

A. Yes, I think there will be more to add, yes.

Q. Thank you, and we may come to some of those areas. If we go over the page DFE000297_0006. We touched on it already, but paragraph 20, that's where you set out the expectation on all staff to at least read part 1 of Keeping Children Safe in Education, I think?

A. Yes, that's right. We ask all staff to read part 1.

Q. Thank you. As I say, at this stage, I just want to establish the key documents. So if we can just bring it up on screen, DFE000263. Again, just to introduce this really at this stage.

Then if we can have page 5 DFE000263_0005. The status of the guidance at the top of the page, so it sets out the statutory basis of it; the duty, I think it is five lines down:

"Schools and colleges in England [in bold] must have regard to it when carrying out their duties ..."

Then "About this guidance", we see, don't we, that distinction between the use of "must" and "should", again familiar to many in terms of statutory guidance but it bears that distinction that we spoke about earlier on?

A. Yes, and it does it clearer than I said too.

Q. Not at all. Thank you. Then next, just in terms of

establishing the absolutely central documents. We have mentioned it already, but Working Together to Safeguard Children. If we could have DFE000262. We remind ourselves that the date of this is March 2026 and so that was before the publication of the Inquiry's Phase 1 report, first of all, would you agree?

A. Yes.

Q. Thank you. I think also in terms of the Children's Wellbeing Act 2026, it was before that came into force?

A. That is right.

Q. Which I think was about two weeks after the Inquiry published its Phase 1 report?

A. Yes.

Q. So neither of those two developments could have been taken into account in Working Together to Safeguard Children?

A. That is right.

Q. Thank you, and can you just confirm that, although you are giving evidence today, that you will be continuing to keep the Inquiry updated as to how the 2027 version of this policy develops?

A. The Working Together document?

Q. Yes.

A. Yes, I can say a little bit about it. There is quite a lot of references in the consultation to the work of

this Inquiry, I can go into those, and we are aiming to publish the final version before the end of the year. So, yes, we will absolutely share it with you.

Q. Thank you. That will obviously be an important document in its final form.

If we look back in your statement please, at page 5 DFE000297_0005, paragraph 18. What you tell us about that is that you are aiming to understand, it is about halfway down the paragraph:

"... we are aiming to understand how the statutory guidance can better support practice in identifying where children may pose a risk to others, including responding to potential extreme violence by children."

So however it is defined, the VFI cohort, I think you are telling us, is an important part of the changes that are going to be made to this guidance?

A. Yes, and we ran the consultation between June and September and it includes a number of different references. I can give you some of the paragraph numbers or read some of them out, if you like. We don't use the term "VFI", we don't use the term "NIEV" but we talk about, for example, all children including those who may be causing harm to others should receive a safeguarding response; practitioners should work with children to understand their experiences; and what will

reduce the likelihood of harm to themselves and others. Paragraph 250:

"Be responsive to the needs of children who have harmed as well as been harmed." (As read)

Referring to other agencies where there is a risk of continued harm to others, and obviously we haven't published the final version but I would expect those references, or something very similar to be in it.

Q. That's a helpful indication of things that are in the latish working draft, is that a fair summary?

A. Yes.

Q. Presumably -- we don't need to bring it up on screen -- but, that is intended to be responsive to the learned Chair's Phase 1 recommendation number 39, which said that:

"The Department for Education should update Working Together to Safeguard Children and the Children's Social Care National Framework and that those documents should highlight that safeguarding and child protection assessments, when considering what support to put in place, and planned multi-agency working must consider the risks posed by children to others." (As read)

A. Yes, that is right.

Q. Is work also being done on the Children's Social Care National Framework?

A. Yes, that is right. I think also when Ann Graham gave her evidence she very much talked about -- reflecting that understanding and already practice about looking at the vulnerabilities of children who harm. So tying those two bits together.

Q. Yes, and obviously there is a big connection between the two?

A. Yes, absolutely.

Q. Thank you. Then, still on existing relevant guidance, I want to just turn to guidance in relation to Prevent. I want to start just by revising some evidence that the Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel give us last week. Can we have back on screen CCE000001, page 28 CCE000001_0028, please.

It is the top of the page. It is just that first paragraph of conclusion:

"... large numbers of children are being referred to Prevent every year, and many of those children are being referred several times. The majority of referred children do not progress to receive an intervention and are often referred back to the organisation that referred them, most often an education setting. This speaks of a system holding a great deal of worry about a group of children, seeking somewhere for them to get help, or someone to hold responsibility for them, and

not finding it."

What is your view on Dame Rachel's conclusion there? She agreed that that was the absolute central conclusion of this report?

A. Yes, and I heard her evidence and your summary of her report in general. I mean, obviously, that is -- you have been asking a number of witnesses about what they think the right answer -- or a possible answer would be, to stop that going round in circles. I have got a view and I can talk you through that. There are a number of different ways that that could work but it is not working for education settings and it is not working for children.

I think there's been, you know, some progress but that's not necessarily been helped by the frameworks. It's often been local practitioners working within the existing frameworks and I think what you are seeking to help Government and practitioners do is work out if there is a better framework in the future.

Q. Thank you. Could we just look please back in your own statement at page 6 DFE000297_0006 and paragraphs 22 and 23. This is on training. You explain there -- and this goes back, doesn't it -- to certain areas where central training is offered?

A. Yes.

Q. You say that you don't have training specifically focused on VFIs. But:

"... the department has developed ... a suite of Prevent training for frontline professionals across the education sector known as the 'universal offer' ..."

You explain that it is:

"... designed to support understanding and implementation of the Prevent duty and related safeguarding issues within education settings."

You say:

"While the training may cover behaviours, vulnerabilities and risks that are relevant to VFIs, its primary focus is on preventing radicalisation, and supporting practitioners to identify and respond appropriately to concerns linked to radicalisation ..."

You then say:

"DfE considers that further and/or different training is required on this issue."

Just tell us why you have reached that conclusion?

A. So, I think this comes onto, you know, is Prevent big enough or should there be something different? I think what we are finding, from those working in Prevent, our Prevent coordinators, they are telling us that they are often using the Prevent framework and stretching it to be able to refer an individual that is displaying

VFIs/NIEV, whatever, kinds of behaviours. Sometimes that's successful but sometimes it is not. So, I think in terms of different training, once we work out the best, or the best at the moment, set of risks or behaviours that we are asking local partners to look for, then we will obviously want to help them be able to do that, which will require some guidance. Obviously Jonathan Emmett from the Home Office talked about the NIEV guidance but also training to help them talk to each other and talk to us about what they are seeing and finding.

But also to think about the potential interventions and I am sure you will ask me later about online. So some of the work that our training coordinators do from the Department is better learning about Com networks and being able to share some of that through the training that they do, so the world doesn't stand still and we try to go with it and help practitioners in the areas that they are less confident in.

That doesn't just extend to Prevent. There is a lot of overlapping things here. So I also have responsibility in the violence against women and girls and misogyny and I think we are finding that actually practitioners want to understand more about misogyny and so we are developing resources and materials that can

help a better understanding of that. I'm not saying we have got it completely right but we might as well be sharing what we have got with other people if they would like to listen.

Q. Thank you. So part of this -- and I won't read it out but we see the second sentence of paragraph 23 -- some of that, I think, in terms of what needs to change and develop on this is forward-looking. So, insofar as there is a new pathway that's established for the VFI cohort, that this training would need to adapt to make allowance for that. You are also indicating, I think, that the general increase in online harms and their complexity and the way that they are interrelated -- you give misogyny as the example -- means that you understand that there's further work needed there because teachers and DSLs are seeking more guidance in that area. Is that a fair summary?

A. Yes, that's right.

Q. Thank you. Looking at the current guidance, if we look particularly at the Prevent duty practical guidance. So if we have ILT000372 on screen, please. We see that this is a gov.uk, DfE-badged publication and we also note how recent it is, so 2 October 2026.

I'm not, if you will forgive me, going to go through this in detail, but just to get a feel for it and I want

to go to some particular aspects. So could we go to page 6 ILT000372_0006, please and I wonder if, in fact, we might just have the full screen just this once for page 6.

What I'm going to do, that I have done on previous occasions, to give you and the learned Chair an opportunity just to glance down the screen and not necessarily read every word but just to get a fair flavour of the content.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Yes.

A. Thank you.

MR MOSS: So page 7 ILT000372_0007, please. You see entirely appropriate references, in particular to understanding the context and in putting these up on screen, I don't want to be seen to be cherry-picking particular points unfairly. So much of this guidance, no doubt helpful and perfectly appropriate. Over to page 8 ILT000372_0008 please. So a list of warning signs to look out for, which is important, but I won't read into the record because it is on screen.

And page 9 ILT000372_0009, please. So we see that continues and then there is the section on "online influences".

There is an important section on page 13 ILT000372_0013, which I didn't want, as I say, to take

out of context, which is on when Prevent may not be the appropriate route. If we can just have that section highlighted, so the bottom two-thirds of the page, please:

"Not all concerning, harmful or violent behaviour falls within Prevent's remit.

"Concerns that do not relate to radicalisation, susceptibility to radicalisation or involvement in terrorism should be managed through the most appropriate safeguarding, welfare, behavioural, criminal justice or multi-agency pathways.

"Examples may include:

"Violence that is not linked to extremist ideologies or terrorism.

"General criminality or anti-social behaviour.

"Mental health concerns requiring specialist support.

"Other forms of exploitation, abuse or neglect."

Can I suggest that that first bullet point is wrong?

A. So, I guess it is if you read it alongside "susceptible to radicalisation". So the Prevent guidance is focusing on Prevent. I think what I said before, local practitioners are trying to stretch the offer in the absence of an alternative offer and they are using susceptibility to radicalisation as part of that, which

may well be driven by a risk or behaviour in that first bullet point.

Q. But the test, as we have heard often, is "vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism" but the Prevent approach to that, the Counter Terrorism Police approach to that, as you will be well familiar, is to include a "fascination with extreme violence or mass casualty attacks", FEVMCA, as one of the Prevent categories, and because it is upstream, you don't have to have an extremist ideology or a terrorist ideology to have an appropriate Prevent referral, as you know very well from your professional expertise.

A. Yes.

Q. So when it is saying:

"Not all concerning, harmful or violent behaviour falls within Prevent's remit.

"Concerns that do not relate to radicalisation, susceptibility to radicalisation, or involvement in terrorism should be managed ..."

Elsewhere, and examples include "violence that is not linked to extremist ideologies or terrorism", if not wrong, that's confusing for practitioners, isn't it, if you take the FEVMCA example? So if it is not linked to ideology at all but they seem to be fascinated with mass casualty, school shootings for example, a safeguarding

lead could read this and I think: that's not Prevent territory?

A. Well, it says "may" doesn't it and I think linked to the above paragraph saying that it might be more appropriate through an alternative route but I don't disagree that people are stretching the guidance for want of something else.

Q. But here, it is not stretching the guidance to include it, it is putting in guidance that will exclude appropriate cases.

A. Might. It may, yes.

Q. In the context, what I would suggest is that this may be an example of how the compromise, which is one way of putting it, the fudge is a more pejorative way of putting it, around the definition of what Prevent is suitable for, makes this sort of DfE guidance very difficult. Would you agree?

A. Repeat your question?

Q. Yes. There is a compromise going on as this Inquiry has been exploring, whereby ultimately, Prevent is about vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism --

A. Yes.

Q. -- and by definition, that must include -- that must be ideological. Because the definition of "terrorism", as you know, requires a cause, so an ideology. But the

compromise is to say that people who don't seem to have an ideology, but are fascinated with extreme violence and mass casualty attacks, can be an appropriate Prevent referral if the concern is that they are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism, even if they have no apparent ideology at the moment. So that's something of a compromise and it may be thought a difficult and complex one.

But here, this part of the DfE guidance, the part of the guidance that's saying: don't send everything to Prevent, my paraphrase; but in giving guidance on what not to send to Prevent -- and you are quite right in saying it may not be appropriate, so it is not hard set as that -- an example is violence that is not linked to extremist ideologies or terrorism, and that's quite hard-edged as potentially exclusionary, and doesn't seem to cater for: unless they are fascinated with violence and you are worried that they might be vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. Do you see what I'm driving at?

A. Yes, I think I do and I imagine it is partly to do with what's in the legislation. I suspect it is partly to do with the issue, which is Prevent, as a system, can deal a certain number of referrals and managing a gateway. But, I think we collectively are exploring, knowing that

that's not working, what the best next option is and I think Rachel talked in her evidence, didn't she, about young people's views being fluid. That's also very relevant. I think when the Prevent duty and guidance were written, it was much more clear cut and that helps the operationalisation of a system, but I think isn't responding to the world now. So that's why we are looking for a new way.

Q. Thank you.

A. But I will take your point. Thank you. While I'm writing my notes, can you remind me what page that is?

Q. Yes, it is page 13.

A. Page 13, thank you.

Q. What we see under the bullet points:

"Where there is uncertainty, you should seek advice ..."

So it may be that will assist:

"If, following assessment, there is no concern that an individual is susceptible to radicalisation or at risk of becoming involved in, supporting or facilitating terrorism, Prevent support is unlikely to be appropriate."

But then the guidance is:

"Where concerns remain, you should consider referral or support through relevant safeguarding, public

protection, violence reduction, criminal justice or other local multi-agency pathways."

Now, so far, perhaps in a sense, so obvious. But should the Inquiry understand that the need to be so generic, consider referral "through relevant safeguarding, public protection, violence reduction, criminal justice or other local multi-agency pathways", reflects the lack of any individual, clear, national pathway for violence-fixated individuals?

A. Yes, and whether that is okay or not okay is what we are all thinking through. So, should it be multi-agency and should you be referring to the individual things that exist, or should there be a coordinated national system.

Q. Thank you. In fairness, obviously this guidance is having to deal not just with potential VFIs but other areas. So we see may include concerns relating to "gang involvement" and "exploitation". So there is a number of types of cases that may be non-Prevent and would need a pathway?

A. Yes, and sometimes I think, on the previous pages, the behaviours could be leading in one of many directions and the question is: should we catch them all in one thing or not?

Q. Thank you. Could we just turn to page 14 ILT000372_0014 of this. So there is a section here on what happens

when you make a Prevent referral and it sets out, in bullet point form, what may happen including going on for Channel support but also no Prevent further action and give some guidance in relation to that. Should the Inquiry understand that that is, in part, a response to the Phase 1 recommendation 63, about a lack of feedback to referrers but also in relation to those who refer not having a good understanding of what the Prevent options are?

A. Yes, and I think further down the page, the fourth paragraph:

"Making a referral does not end the referrer's safeguarding responsibilities."

This is seeking to respond to that point as well. It obviously doesn't fully respond to Rachel's evidence of: well, what do you do? But it is leaning into, you know, still being interested and still being part of that responsible system.

Q. Thank you. We see helping DSLs, perhaps in particular, to understand what the referral results may be:

"No further Prevent action.

"Signposting ...

"Ongoing monitoring and information-sharing ..."

And so on, at the bottom of the page.

One of the questions that the victim and survivors

teams have asked is: should a referring school have a right to be told the outcome and the reasons for a Prevent referral? I think, in context, if it is not taken on by Prevent.

A. In principle, you know, that would help them understand what's happened to that child, but also help them learn whether that was the right thing to have done, whether there was an alternative. I suspect there may be cases in which some of that information might be sensitive or not able to be in the public domain but in terms of the principle of understanding that that child has been picked up and there is an intervention, and helping the school know whether they did the right thing or not, then that's very relevant and it also speaks to Rachel's evidence of -- I can't exactly remember her word -- but, you know, a system who are worried and want to do something and calibrating both that instinct and worry but also helping them know whether they did the right thing or whether there was something more appropriate to do.

Q. Thank you. Then page 25 ILT000372_0025 of this guidance, again, if only so it is not suggested that I have overlooked it, case study 1:

"TJ, 16.

"Fascination with weapons, extreme violence and mass

casualty [attacks]."

Again, I won't read out the totality of it but perhaps just give you and the learned Chair an opportunity to glance your eyes down the case study, as set out.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Yes.

A. Thank you.

MR MOSS: So, this does give an example, albeit one in which there is a hint about right-wing extremism because the reference to speaking about Hitler, of someone whose primary acts of concern were in relation to extreme violence and explosives, knives and firearms, without established ideology perhaps, Columbine shooting, which, in this case study, did lead onto a Prevent referral and indeed being taken on by Prevent and Channel, yes?

A. Yes. I was reading this yesterday and was thinking that this is exactly the case study, way of seeing Prevent being used and stretched but obviously as the volumes go up, it becomes more difficult.

Q. Thank you. Then page 28 ILT000372_0028, and I put to you in plain, I hope, straightforward terms earlier on that something was wrong. I'm not suggesting in relation to case study that this is necessarily wrong. But it is an interesting case study. So, a 15-year-old:

"Threats of serious violence towards family members.

" ... known to social care ..."

Problems with lack of empathy:

"Police became involved following an incident in which JH attempted to harm animals in public using a knife. A knife was later discovered hidden in their bedroom."

Now, just pausing there. A number of experts to the Inquiry have flagged that an interest in harming animals -- and we remind ourselves that AR had a fascination with animal and other de-gloving injuries -- to some, is a red flag but nevertheless, bottom of the page:

"Further concerns were raised [about] desire and intention to kill ... family members."

Then, over the page ILT000372_0029:

"Considerations.

"... presented significant safeguarding concerns and a risk of serious violence ... [But the] information suggested that the risk was directed towards specific individuals rather than being linked to an extremist ideology, terrorist cause or grievance.

"... no evidence that [he] was accessing extremist material, engaging with terrorist content or demonstrating indicators associated with being drawn into terrorism.

"Outcome.

"The concerns did not meet the Prevent threshold and were considered more appropriately addressed through existing safeguarding, social care, mental health and police processes."

So that's seeking to give a case study falling on the other side of the line --

A. It's the other side, indeed.

Q. Perhaps, as you say, just the other side. Presumably, again, the slightly generic, "more appropriately addressed through existing safeguarding, social care" processes and:

"A co-ordinated support plan was put in place, with regular reviews involving relevant agencies."

It doesn't say what pathway, specifically was used, or should be used in that case. Again, I think reflecting the difficulty that there will be regional variation --

A. And dependent on what the interventions are, indeed, in the local area.

Q. Thank you. Mr Baisley from the National Education Union says in his evidence that 35 per cent of teachers have been worried in the previous 12 months about a pupil because of an apparent interest in or preoccupation with violence, weapons, or attacks.

Does it surprise you that that number is so high?

A. It is sad that that number is so high. Does it surprise me? It probably wouldn't, if I didn't work in this area -- sorry, it probably would, if I did not work in this area. But I think I'm sadly not surprised and I think there's obviously positives that teachers are spotting this and picking up on it. I am sure that is also thanks to the work of this Inquiry, and I am sure we will come onto online as well. Sadly, you know, things just get faster with the online world.

Q. For those practitioners dealing with those cases and Mr Baisley's striking 35 per cent in the last 12 months, would you accept that, at the moment, looking at this very recent guidance, that it remains difficult for safeguarding leads in schools to determine whether it is a Prevent referral type case or not?

A. I agree. I mean, you have pulled out two case studies which fall either side of the line and they are both dealing with individuals who are displaying interest and risk and behaviour around serious violence. Prevent was set up as a system to look at ideology and the interventions that happen, if a Prevent referral is taken on, focus on those. But what we are seeing is a different set, or more fluid set, of behaviours that may fall into ideology, may dip in and out, but have

very worrying behavioural risks associated with them.
When we come onto talking about interventions, if we do, I actually think some of the education and social care interventions on offer are relevant to all across that spectrum, but there is not a clear system and if we want to define one, we should get better at that and if we don't, then we need to very clearly talk about the multi-agency responsibility and coming together where there is this blur or either side of the line. Because the local -- the professionals in schools and children's social care deal with huge numbers of children.
We are focusing on a very narrow set that cross the line but we need to be able to help them to see those in amongst all the bigger ones.
Q. Thank you. So we will come back to pathways but should we understand that the point you are emphasising is that, if the system ends up with two alternative pathways, Prevent, principally focused on ideological terrorism, and another pathway for those fascinated with violence but without apparent ideology, you would encourage a design of a system that recognises that, while you might have those two pathways, the interventions and the learning about what interventions work, are bound to have a commonality?
A. Yes, that's right and I think, as I suggested in my

witness statement -- you will probably come onto but I might as well say it because we are skirting around it now -- I would advocate for an expanded Prevent system. I think, for my sector, that would work the best because what they are seeing is a blurring of these boundaries and they are using that Prevent system to the best of their ability now to expand it. I'm not naive in that it would come with huge costs and the need to think about the legislation, et cetera, et cetera. But that's my view.
Q. Thank you.
A. An alternative could be made to work but that's, pragmatically, what I think.
Q. Now, you will appreciate that the danger of you dipping your toe into that subject is I have to ask you some follow-up questions.
A. Of course.
Q. You will appreciate that expanding Prevent in that way, if it is genuinely to make clear that it is to cater for non-ideological cases, would involve a change not necessarily to the definition of "terrorism", but at the least to the definition of -- the statutory definition of what Prevent is set up to deal with?
A. Yes. That is very hard and that's -- I guess, it may be easy for me to say because it is not my legislation to

deal with, but yes, I understand that would -- to make the system neat and proper, would be necessary. I will expand a little bit more. Obviously, Prevent was set up for a particular purpose, it has a particular brand, it has pros and cons to it in terms of how it is regarded in the system, from schools and children's social care.
It is seen as an expansion of a safeguarding system, okay, with a narrow pathway. I think it would -- if it were to be expanded, if that were the decision and the recommendation and accepted decision, then it would need some sort of re-brand, I think. Legislation takes time and is not always within the control of the Department suggesting it. So, I suppose there are steps that could be taken in the right direction if that were chosen before legislation was passed but you are right, to make it a sort of water-tight perfect system, if that was the decision that was taken, it would need underpinning changes to that duty.
Q. Thank you. The other two aspects, perhaps, that -- not that I would seek to challenge you on in relation to that view, but what some with contrary views have said about that option. So the first further point is this, that there is a significant concern about the stigmatising effect of a referral to Prevent, when it is known that Prevent is principally part of the

counter-terrorism national security structures and while it is the preventive upstream and it doesn't mean you are a terrorist, it has those connotations and there are those who have strong concerns that broadening out Prevent to deal with violence fixation case, short of ideological terrorism, risks stigmatising what will, in the majority of cases, be children?
A. I understand and have heard that, which is partly my point about re-brand. I think two points: there is the stigmatisation, there is the labelling; if this was to be done with some sort of re-brand, then obviously thought would need to be given to whether it was doing as much of that stigmatisation. I suppose there is also -- there is a question of volume, isn't there? You know, how big do you make it? I know the difference between the number of referrals into children's social care, 650,000, and the number into Prevent, 8,000, is massive. Where do you bring it, in the middle?
I think though -- again, we might come onto this in interventions -- and Ann Graham talked really brilliantly about addressing the vulnerabilities underneath any risk of harm to others. Sometimes, in intervention terms, an arrest or a harder shock can be helpful.
Q. Yes. We will come back to that perhaps in a different

context, but the second further point of challenge would be that Prevent is designed to be the upstream preventative arm of counter-terrorism and if you expand it, even if you give it greater resource, there is a risk of diluting its focus on those who are at risk of being drawn into terrorism, linked with the fact that, however appalling -- and Southport is the strongest possible case -- but however appalling non-ideological mass fatality attacks are, there are those who say there is something special about ideological terrorism in the sense that it is trying to undermine national values and that's why you have internationally-recognised specific powers and duties in relation to terrorism.

So, it is taking one part of the system and changing the rules in that area with a risk of dilution but also a risk of taking away from the terrorist focus.

You have a senior position in the Department for Education with responsibilities in the area of safeguarding, including in relation to radicalisation. What do you say about that second aspect?

A. I understand and I have heard it and I have sympathy for it. I think, however, the cohort of children and young people that my department is responsible for, what we are seeing in children and young people is so much of a blurring of the kinds of behaviours and risks and that

bit about being susceptible to radicalisation and I think with the input of online, where you can't see what's going on and it is going on so much faster in somebody's mind and brain and the vulnerability to being drawn into that through the online world, mean that the kinds of visibility of behaviours that schools and children's social care are seeing and the kinds of interventions that you might apply, if it were Prevent, an ideology or not, are very similar, from what we know. We will come onto there's not huge amounts of evidence about exactly what works really well.

But the fact that there's a similar set of behaviours in either of those spaces and a similar set of interventions lead me to a pragmatic conclusion, and evidenced by the sector kind of already doing that, where we haven't given them a different answer; that seems to me where I land, pragmatically.

Q. Thank you. So, similar, I think, to Ms Rance -- I don't know if you saw her evidence of the National Crime Agency -- but she, in effect, my paraphrase, said that the distinctions between ideology and non-ideological are less clear, more fluid and more blurred and it no longer really a suitable way of discriminating the current risk, and a major re-think about that, therefore, would be appropriate. I think I gather that

you are subscribing to that broad camp?

A. Yes, I didn't hear her evidence but yes, that sums it up very well.

Q. Thank you. Can we turn next to the definition of "VFIs" please. If we go back to your statement, just to understand where this has reached in your department. It is page 2 DFE000297_0002, paragraph 6, please.

You tell us, at the bottom of the page, that:

"... ('VFIs') is a term used to define a newly identified threat."

You are:

"... using the term amongst policy officials in the department, [but] there is not yet a clear definition or understanding that may identify this group. [So] current guidance, legislation and policy do not yet refer specifically to VFIs."

So we know, of course, that Government thinking, led by the NIEV Taskforce and the Home Office, has moved on and if we could have HOM001011 on screen. Several months after your witness statement, we know that very recently this interim guidance was published. You will be familiar with page 2 HOM001011_0002, paragraph 6. There are caveats which I do not need to give because they have been read into the record many times, but the current working definition:

"The use or threat of extreme violence, not driven by a clear ideological purpose, which is communicative in nature and intended to shock, intimidate or outrage the public or a section of the public."

A few questions about that. First of all, do you have any views, either as a director, or reflecting views of the Department, about that definition?

A. Yes. So, I think it is the best we have come up with so far. So we were involved in working with the Home Office on this definition and this guidance. I think you have asked other witnesses about -- I don't know how you say it -- NIVE?

Q. Yes.

A. I think I prefer this because it is looking at risks and behaviours rather than, I have heard other witnesses talking about: do you define it after it's happened or before it's happened? And what we are asking children's social care in schools to do is look for the risky behaviours. So I think giving them our best understanding of what to look for is the most helpful thing we can do. I think all the caveats around -- you know, already in the two years that -- since the attack, you know, we have changed what we were writing about this and how we were defining things and we probably still will. That sort of applies to the previous

conversation we have had about the expansion or otherwise of Prevent or what the system is. These things will change.

But I think this is the most useful we have come up with. So, I'm -- of all the things that -- the academic seminars, et cetera, I think I do find this is the most helpful for my workforces.

Q. Thank you. The critique of this as a definition would be that it includes an intention aspect, so as well as saying "communicative in nature", it is "intended to shock, intimidate or outrage the public or a section of the public" and the challenge to that, from Professor Cassam and from a number of others, has been that, you could have a VFI-type attack, which wasn't intended to shock, intimidate or outrage the public or a section of the public, but purely was just driven by nihilistic outlook, violence for its own sake, someone who is indifferent about what the public think about it.

Is that a problem with this definition?

A. In seeking to define something, we want to do our best to do it once or for as long as -- not to change it every day. So that's a fair challenge. I guess, I suppose -- and perhaps the second half of that sentence could be refined. I guess, maybe it is also sort of wanting to get across how this is not like

mainstream acceptable. You know, it might not be intended to shock and outrage the public but it would outrage the public.

Q. Yes, the objective effect?

A. Yes.

Q. Thank you. So you mentioned NIVE. So the alternative of "non-ideological violent extremist" is the suggestion and we have been exploring whether trying to describe the cohort of concern could be captured by those who are vulnerable to be drawn into non-ideological violent extremism.

What do you think about that?

A. I think I prefer looking at what the risks are rather than the defining cohort. You know, it is an alternative way of doing it. I think, some of the work we did, at least a year ago, was looking at whether we could put numbers on the cohort and whether we could define the cohort. We found that very difficult across Government to do. I mean, all of this is incredibly difficult. But I feel like we have moved towards looking at the kinds of input behaviours because of that and because of my point about actually what we are asking the workforces to do is look for the behaviours rather than necessarily for the cohort. So, I prefer this.

Q. Thank you. I want to turn now to go back to guidance but to look, not at what guidance there is, but at arguable gaps in the guidance, and if we can go back to page 2 DFE000297_0002 of your statement and paragraph 6.

We have seen this already but I just want to pick up the threads again. So, you say because there is not a clear definition:

"... current guidance, legislation and policy do not yet refer specifically to VFIs. This makes it difficult to respond to a number of the ..."

Questions that we posed to you for this statement. Should we take that literally though, that the absence of the definition of VFIs, has held back the work on issuing DfE badge guidance?

A. So I think in the first year following the Southport attack we spent quite a lot of time in Government trying to define the cohort and look at the numbers, to look at the behaviours. I think in a way, it is a bit surprising that VFIs sort of hadn't made it into any of our guidance because that was the term we were using at the time. I think in order to help the practitioners in my sector, we wanted to be able to give them something to look for. I think what I have talked about, in terms of the references we have got in Working Together and the consultation, we have moved some way towards the

language of acknowledging children who are posing a risk to others is important but we haven't put, in any of our guidance, the types of behaviours that we are asking our practitioners to look at beyond that.

I think the Home Office guidance now gives us that opportunity. That's the best we have done so far. So, in terms of sequencing things, unless, you know, you and, through the evidence sessions, it is shown that that's rubbish, then I think that is the best that we have got and we will use that in our policy guidance and training as we sequence the Department's documents going forwards. Yes.

Q. I hope none of my questions have suggested that it is rubbish. We are looking at the relative values. But you say it is a bit surprising. There's nothing to stop your department and others saying to practitioners: the definition has not yet been settled, but we are looking in this general area, VFIs/NIEV, still to be determined, but in this area of those generally so described, whatever the final definition would be, x, y, z. It seems a little bit surprising that it's held up practical guidance?

A. Well, I don't think -- so, two distinct points. In a way, I'm surprised "VFIs" as a term didn't make it into our guidance because it's sort of been the language

that we have been using. In a way, that's maybe fortuitous because actually, it might be that we have now moved that language and I remember when I was writing this witness statement thinking: "VFIs" is the term we have been using, I shall use that in my statement, but I know that we are thinking about whether we might change it to "NIEV" but no, it is right, when I wrote my statement that VFI was the term we were using. But pretty soon after I sent it to you, you know, "NIEV" was the new term we were using across Government. So that's what I meant by "surprising". It was a moment of time and it just so happened we were not confident enough in the time we were writing Keeping Children Safe in Education and Working Together, to have used it, nor were we confident enough in terms of the timing for NIEV.

In terms of your point about, we should be helping practitioners in the sector the best we can, at the moment in time, I think the language that is in Working Together is the language that we were most confident in over the summer when we were writing that document. We were not confident enough when we were writing Keeping Children Safe in Education.

But when we go round the cycle again and we revise Keeping Children Safe in Education, likely, we will be

more confident because of the conversations we have all been having. Hence, my reference to unless it comes through these witness sessions, that's the Home Office's guidance is completely wrong, that's the piece of Government guidance and that would be what we would then signpost my sectors to and be able to reflect that more strongly in our safeguarding guidance from the Department. Does that make sense?

Q. Thank you. It may be that the learned Chair, at the conclusion of your evidence, may wish to consider that with you.

A. Yes.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Let me do it now, Mr Moss, only in this way. I want to echo first what Mr Moss has said about how we are a long way from the view that the definition proposed by Mr Emmett is rubbish. It is certainly one of a number of options. But I would want to stress very strongly that one of the things I will be doing is looking at the respective merits of the various definitions that have been proposed and I will, undoubtedly, be making a recommendation and potentially a strong recommendation as to what I consider the best of the alternatives to be.

So, I would encourage, at the moment, to move away from an attitude that unless Mr Emmett's formula is

considered to be rubbish, then that is what is going to be utilised. I would encourage you instead to await the spring of next year, so that we can evaluate the competing options.

A. Thank you. That's really helpful, and can I ask a question? I'm not really supposed to ask questions, am I?

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Well, you can certainly ask the question, but whether it is answered is something else altogether.

A. So, obviously, we don't want to be not sharing the best that we can do with our practitioners at the moment and what we have tried to, therefore, do in Working Together is avoid pinning a term on it. Presumably, that is the most pragmatic approach and Mr Emmett was very clear that it was draft guidance and that it was subject -- and he absolutely was very clear that you have considered a lot of evidence from experts and he wanted to take your view into account.

We are sharing that document, Mr Emmett's document, with our workforces and that feels right because I think we have been working on this a long time and it feels wrong to have done that in a small group of people when there is a bigger group of people in the world trying to deal with these issues. We may as well share that. But

there is a risk of --

MR MOSS: Shall I just pick up in relation to that and see if we can help. So if we go back to page 2 HOM001011_0002, please, paragraph 6. We see, on any view, that there are the caveats, which I said I wasn't going to repeat and now I am going to repeat them. Paragraph 5: Interim guidance, not intended to prejudge the outcome of the learned Chair's Phase 2, and that the Inquiry's examining, amongst other things, "the adequacy of arrangements" in this area, and paragraph 6, "a working definition".

So, on any view, those caveats, it might be thought -- insofar as there is going to be any fresh guidance issued between now and the Phase 2 report, it might be thought, would you agree, it is important that those caveats are fully reflected, because that cannot be a completed definition adopted by Government formally, against the caveats that Mr Emmett himself, in this document, reflect?

Then I wanted to ask you about this in terms of its distribution. So if we can go back to the first page of this document HOM001011_0001. Mr Emmett suggested -- sorry it is page 2 HOM001011_0002, top of the page -- if we look at "Purpose and Scope." Mr Emmett said it would be circulated to frontline practitioners and I think he

indicated it had been circulated, perhaps, already to educational professionals already. Where has it reached in the system? I'm not suggesting it shouldn't go out, but where is it at currently?

A. Yes, no problem. So I asked this question in advance for my preparation. So it has gone to local authority chief executives. It has not yet gone to schools. The way we communicate with schools is not through a direct email address to every school. We put it in batched bulletins. So once this guidance is published on gov.uk, we will then put that link into the bulletin and send it out to schools.

I guess, that was a bit of my question really and I think you have answered it, in terms of, basically: caveat it. So I want this to be shared with schools. That is huge body of people. But also, I don't want it to be wrong, but I think it is the best that we have got so far. So I feel it is appropriate that we should share it and I think what you have said and it is a very pragmatic conclusion which is just say that it is the best that we have got so far, it might change, but better than sitting on it.

Q. Yes, thank you, and then paragraph 1, where it says that the interim guidance has been "developed collaboratively with frontline practitioners", I think you talked about

the fact that you were speaking to the Home Office. Were teachers included in the frontline practitioners, given how many Prevent referrals they make?

A. So I don't know if teachers were but certainly, ADCS were. We arranged some work between the Home Office and children's social care and local authorities, to hear what they had been doing and how they had been tackling things that fed into both this and other bits of work.

Q. Thank you. Then, if we go to page 3 HOM001011_0003 of this document. Aspects of why, perhaps, it would be good for it to be circulated, with all of those caveats, is that it does give guidance, so reference to the fact, paragraph 7, there is "no single profile or pathway", explaining how the drivers are complex. But starting to go into some of the factors, and I won't read them out but listed at the end of paragraph 7. Then, paragraph 8, if we can just have the second two-thirds of the page, please Amanda.

Professional judgement remaining important but a list of areas again to look out for. Then over on page 4 HOM001011_0004, we see these types of case study of -- my words -- good practice or helpful practice in individual areas.

So, again, no doubt, things that would be useful to be circulated. If we can look out on the section on

statutory responsibilities and have that expanded. Making the point that those remain unchanged. Would you agree that a fair reading of this, effectively, means if it is not going to be a Prevent referral, you have to use what is currently available, by way of local pathways that may be available in your particular area?

A. Yes.

Q. Thank you. On page 5 HOM001011_0005, we see:

"For children, when approaching any safeguarding considerations, practitioners should apply Working Together to Safeguard Children ... and the Children's Social Care Framework ..."

Shouldn't there also be reference there to Keeping Children Safe in Education?

A. Yes, I think so and the rest of the paragraph references "Children's Social Care", but -- and sorry, I don't know what paragraph 10 says. But yes, there should be a recognition of schools' role and Keeping Children Safe in Education, yes.

Q. Thank you. Mr Emmett said that consideration had been given to whether Working Together to Safeguard Children should refer to VFI risk and he deftly gave a pass to you and said that you would be best able to assist on that.

A. So I think that's probably picked up the previous

conversation we have had, which is the confidence in the terminology and the stage in the cycle. So, I think what we have said is: crack on with sharing this, it is the best we have got at the moment, make it clear that it is working definition, but the Chair intends to form a judgement on the basis of the various evidence and work that the Inquiry has done on a definition and if there is -- if you conclude that there is one best, one brilliant, thank you, that would be amazing and then we can reflect that in our documents and that would include Keeping Children Safe in Education, probably the next circle of Working Together to Safeguard Children.

Q. Looking at this guidance, the challenge remains, if you take the case of a designated safeguarding lead in a school or college, that there isn't specific guidance on a particular pathway or a particular multi-agency process that should be followed for a non-Prevent VFI. It is the: use what you have available to you, type guidance, yes?

A. Yes, and I think in one of the previous ones, it lists -- it starts to list some of the ones that might be available but there are lots of different ones.

Q. Yes, and it doesn't give specific advice on how they should be assessed, how risk assessment should be done?

A. Not from VFIs or NIEV. That input, no.

Q. Nor what interventions they should be seeking?
A. No.
Q. Working Together to Safeguard Children, DFE000262 please. If we could have page 15 DFE000262_0015. I appreciate you say this is to be updated and we will get the further version, but:

"Expectations for multi-agency working."

Paragraph 20. Again, I don't want to be thought to take this unfairly because in particular at paragraph 20, there is an emphasis on the importance of multi-agency working and how central it is and who may be involved in it and some of the teams. Then, if we can go to full screen, please Amanda. If we just go over the page to 16 DFE000262_0016. We see, just looking at some of the headlines, no need to expand it, but paragraph 26, the expectations for strategic leaders and multi-agency work for senior and middle managers in 27, and over the page DFE000262_0017, that continues. Then there is the sections on information sharing and we will pick up some of the detail of this.

Just over the page DFE000262_0018, again, I just want to give the flavour of what's in it. So dealing with DPA issues, paragraph 32. Over the page again DFE000262_0019, emphasising paragraph 33, "aim to be as transparent as possible". So the information sharing

guidance. Over the page again DFE000262_0020, please. Thank you. Just two more pages on to 21 DFE000262_0021. There's then common myths, so myth-busting sections and 22 DFE000262_0022. Then if we could have page 35 DFE000262_0035 as well please, paragraph 88. At the bottom of the page, dealing with information requests:

"Sharing of information between organisations within a multi-agency system is essential to improve outcomes for children and their families."

Then, full screen please, and over the page DFE000262_0036, that continues there. Again, further emphasis on the need to comply with requests, paragraph 90 and so on.

So, I wanted to give a fair impression of what's contained there but, again, subject to the updating work that's going on, there's nothing about pathways that should be adopted for VFIs, there's nothing about how to assess them and there's nothing about interventions that should be sought in VFI cases?

A. No, there's not.
Q. Keeping Children Safe in Education, which we have looked at already, but for this context, DFE000263, please. I will just finish off this section before we take our mid-morning break. So this is the one that has been updated. Page 19 DFE000263_0019. Could we have the

"Serious violence" section at the bottom of the page, please. So:

"Serious violence is a continuing safeguarding concern ... Physical assault, carrying, threatening with, or using weapons, often in the context of peer conflict or bullying, and it can be associated with criminal exploitation."

Emphasis on reporting concerns about a child carrying or using a weapon to the DSL. Then the DSL lead should assess the risk to the:

"... pupil and others in the school, considering wider information or concerns and take appropriate action. Depending on the risk, they should put in place a safety and support plan and where relevant, consider action to de-escalate peer conflict."

The victims teams have asked, in relation to that: if the assessment shows a risk to people outside the school, to whom should the safeguarding lead pass it?

A. I think then that would be passing information to the police.
Q. Is that set out anywhere, that expectation? Because some of the concerns might be generic in nature, rather than about attacking a specific person?
A. I still think that would be a risk to the public. So, that would be the relevant place.

Q. You would say the police are the appropriate body?
A. Yes.
Q. Thank you, and they also ask whether the sentiments at paragraph 49 should apply, not just where those carrying or using a weapon, but also where a pupil says that he want to kill or seriously hurt someone, without reference to weapons?
A. That sounds sensible, yes.
Q. Thank you. Then, Annex B within this document, page 182 DFE000263_182 please. Can we have just a bit further down the screen please. Perhaps go to the whole page. So under "Manage referrals", so the DSL is expected to refer cases:

"Of suspected abuse and neglect to the local authority ...

"To the Channel programme where there is a radicalisation concern ...

"Where a person is dismissed or left due to risk/harm to ... the Disclosure and Barring Service ..."

That is a different area of work, obviously:

"Where a crime may have been committed to the Police as required."

There is nothing there, even in this updated version, about the VFI type case, is there?

A. No, there's not.

Q. Because -- what, because it can't be updated in the absence of pathway because you wouldn't know who to send it to?
A. I think there's probably -- I guess, I'm not sure of the point but I think there are other places in the document where we talk about risk of harm to others. I mean, you could add lots of things onto this bullet point list. I'm not sure VFIs would be the first thing I would add to the list. So, for example, your previous question, where there is a risk that there might be a risk to the public or where there is a risk a crime may be about to be committed, then talking to the police. I don't think it is intended to be an exhaustive list. So I'm not sure I would add --
Q. But does it not reflect, at the very least, again, this ambiguity or the difficulty of the current position because one might have there a bullet point that says: in the case of somebody who is showing concerning signs of somebody being fascinated with violence, but it is not ideology, you must use appropriate multi-agency path processes. But it would have to be as generic as that. It is not as clear-cut as the current list: suspected abuse, and neglect local authority; Channel for radicalisation; and crime to the police. You are worried about teachers who have misbehaved, go to the

barring service?
A. I don't think I would object to putting another bullet point in. I still think that that's not supposed to be an exhaustive list of everything that safeguarding leads would do. I think, elsewhere in the documents, Working Together and Keeping Children Safe in Education, it is very clear that there is a partnership that exists between safeguarding leads, local authority, police and others, in appropriate circumstances. So, I think the principle of agencies working together and flagging when one risk might be more appropriate for another, is right.

Your broad question and the question that we are seeking to answer is: should there be a referral path way and what should it be and how can we make that clear to practitioners? Yes, if we conclude that that's the right thing, then we would absolutely write that into the various pieces of guidance. If we conclude it is multi-agency working, then we would strengthen that and make it clear that that was responding to violence-fixated individuals or NIEV, or whatever terminology we use. So yes, really happy to write that into the guidance. It is not the absence of waiting for the pathway that I think is meaning that bullet is not there.

Q. Right. So just finishing off on this document and then we will break. Page 155 DFE000263_0155. There is annex A, which again, I shouldn't overlook, there is a lot of material to cover, but:

"Annex A contains important additional information about specific forms of abuse and safeguarding issues. School and college leaders and those staff who work directly with children should reed this Annex."

Then just to flag that at page 169 DFE000263_0169, you get the further -- if you remember, I took you to the serious violence in the main body --
A. Yes.
Q. You will be very familiar with this. Page 169 then gives that serious violence -- if we could just have the top two-thirds of the page -- things to look out for:

"Increased absence from school ...

"A change in friendships ...

"A significant decline ...

"Signs of self-harm or a significant change in wellbeing ...

"Unexplained gifts ...

"The likelihood of involvement in serious violence may be increased by factors such as ..."

Then the list is there. Then also, over the page, at page 170 DFE000263_0170, there is reference -- and

again, I don't want to be thought to have overlooked it -- to, in the second paragraph, Violence Reduction Units, where they exist, being as a body to whom concerns can be raised and in the third paragraph, the serious violence duty.

So, as things stand at the moment, that -- and I don't denigrate it, but that is the best that can be done, is it, in terms of general guidance on where serious violence cases may go and what to look out for? Which has some resonance with VFI cases but is not specific?
A. I think two points to make. There is a cycle timing issue. So in terms of the cycle for Keeping Children Safe in Education, the content of the guidance is mostly defined before Christmas, in the autumn. Then we run a consultation in the first half of the year and then we publish our final version ahead of the summer holidays, so that school leaders then use it from the following September. So actually, the drafting of this, any new content would be happening now. So, for this version, a year ago, we were less confident and quite a lot of extra information has come and been published since then.

So, if and when we are confident about the definition and behaviours, that's when we would then put

it into the new Keeping Children Safe in Education. The second point is that we don't always do a very full update. In fact, we alternate usually. We will do a full update that we have done for this year's version then we will do a technical one next year and full. That is not set in stone --

Q. Can I ask this then, if this was a full change for this iteration, will you make next year's, by exception, a full change as well, given how much more on VFI work needs to be done?

A. So we would certainly consider that. The other point I wanted to make is, in the past, we have done standalone, bigger annexed documents. So, for example, on peer-on-peer abuse, we did a much fuller version that went alongside Keeping Children Safe in Education and stood there for two or three years because it was new to the sector, we wanted to put a lot more detail in there than we would normally put in the sections for Keeping Children Safe in Education. That is certainly an option available to us and might well be a very appropriate one and that could be done alongside either a technical update or a fuller update.

We then, in that instance, found -- there's always different opinions about how big or small to make Keeping Children Safe in Education. So we found that

was quite an effective way of putting a lot of emphasis on a particular issue and then, after the sector had got familiar with that issue, we then consolidated that down and put it into the main body of Keeping Children Safe in Education.

It feels like that approach would work very well for whatever we decide we are calling violence-fixated issues.

MR MOSS: Thank you. Sir, could we pause there and take our 10-minute break?

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Certainly. Just over. We will sit again at 11.50 am.

(11.38 am)

(A short break)

(11.50 am)

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Yes, Mr Moss.

MR MOSS: Thank you, sir. Ms Dixon, could I just ask that in relation to the decision on whether Keeping Children Safe in Education should have a fuller update for next year or a technical update but potentially with an annex that deals with VFI/NIEV/NIVE, when would that decision be made in principle as to the type of update?

A. The assumption is it will be a technical update. I don't know if that's already been taken. But it would be fairly soon that we would be writing to ministers

with our advice. So I can go back and ask.

Q. I think the request is this, if I may, with the Chair's permission, just ask you to keep the Inquiry very carefully and closely informed about what is proposed for next year's update to Keeping Children Safe in Education, whether it is going to be the usual technical and if so, whether it will have annex on VFI/NIEV/NIVE, or whether it may be a fuller update because it is recognised that on the "risk posed to others" including VFI, that there is much work still to be done. Could you just keep the Inquiry carefully updated, bearing in mind the Inquiry's Phase 2 publication timeline, if I may, sir?

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Yes, absolutely.

A. Yes.

MR MOSS: Thank you. Just finally on this -- we don't perhaps need to turn it up -- but just to reinforce that, Mr Owston of Ofsted, who will give evidence this afternoon, says in his statement that while he commends -- my words -- the way that Keeping Children Safe in Education, does have a section on risk to others and child-on-child abuse in particular, which he thinks it is good that it is in part 1, he says that the information given is focused on challenging abusive behaviour that's already occurred, not on spotting signs

that a child may come to pose a serious threat to others.

So he says Keeping Children Safe in Education could be stronger on how to identify children and young people who may be a risk to others. Do you agree with him?

A. So, we are always seeking to help the people who are responsible for safeguarding in education settings with their responsibilities. There is lots of views about how big or small the guidance should be. It seeks to reflect both longstanding issues as well as new ones. So -- and we always consult on it, so we ask people's opinions. I'm certainly not against putting more in. I think -- and the more I think about it, a fuller update would be the better way of doing it because you are only going to get a few extra words in the main body of Keeping Children Safe in Education and I think there probably will be quite a lot to say. You know, several pages worth to say.

Q. Yes.

A. It also means that it can be more easily updated and I think that we will find that we learn more about it and we will want to update it. It also links into signposting people to training. So actually, if there is a significant new bit, then we would want to do some more additional training on that bit.

Q. But being realistic, Ms Dixon, there is a bit of difference between practitioners having a debate about there should be more or less detail and a senior member of Ofsted saying that Keeping Children Safe in Education could be stronger on how to identify children and young people who may be a risk to others. That's an observation that calls out for action.

A. When we are clear what to write, yes, absolutely, in the main document. I still think that it is a long document and quite a lot of the criticism we get is that people don't want it to be such a long document. So I think there are different ways of putting in what I think people will want, which is a more fuller list of things to look for. That's not to take away from the point that he is making and several others, I am sure would make, which is the main body of the document could reference more as we have known more and it has become more of a pressing issue and I think I refer back to the cycle at which that document was written and what we knew at the time. But, absolutely, I don't disagree with, it is supposed to reflect the main things that we want people to be worrying about and this is one of them. So, yes.

Q. So, just pulling back there. We have looked at individual pieces of guidance and the gaps and I want to

just look at the whole piece now. So if we look at Ms Mulholland's witness statement. She gave evidence, as you know, last week. So that's ASCL000013, at page 9 ASCL000013_0009 please, and it is paragraph 40. She said that the overall picture is the:

"ASCL considers there to be significant gaps in the current national strategy, guidance, governance and accountability arrangements relating to behaviours associated with violence fixation. This is primarily because there is no dedicated statutory framework for education addressing ... (VFIs). Instead, schools are expected to apply existing safeguarding frameworks ..."

On reflection, do you agree that there is a great deal of force in what she says about that?

A. I agree there isn't a clear, defined set of strategy guidance and governance for a single pathway because there isn't a single pathway. So, yes, I agree with that, and the current situation is that schools are using, and expected to use, the safeguarding frameworks that are in place. So I think the guidance reflects the time and the system, what we are seeking to understand is whether that system is right and what could be better and then the guidance would absolutely reflect that new or existing decision of what's better to do. So, yes, I agree. I guess it would be wrong to have addressed

that gap without a clear answer to what the answer to that gap is.

Q. Perhaps to similar effect, the report on this Inquiry's survey of practitioners, the Crest report, can we have ILT000219. It is page 33 ILT000219_0033, please. So, reading from the second substantive paragraph on the page:

"Among [local authority] practitioners, 97% said they would feel confident raising a VFI case with senior managers when there is a risk of harm to others, and 80% agreed they know who the key partners are. However, when asked about training received specifically on VFI, 70% reported having received none at all. One respondent noted: 'I need to be clear that I have not been offered or attended any training on violence fixation.'"

Just if we can have the next paragraph fully on the screen. They refer to the fact that:

"... VFI-related training is not uniform across the country ..."

They refer to Home Office training in relation to Prevent. Then if we can go over the page ILT000219_0034, please. We see the figures there set out. So, high confidence in raising a case with senior managers, actually, high confidence in knowing who key

partners are, and then bottom of the page, adequacy of training. An overwhelming majority have received none, and others, "very inadequate" or "inadequate" with 14 per cent saying "good".

So, the good news from that appears to be practitioners actually feeling confident about raising these cases upwards and having a good understanding of those to whom it could be raised but a marked training deficit; would you agree?

A. So yes, if we are basing it on what a definition or a label or a term is. I suppose -- and yes, great news that there is confidence that they are confident in raising. I guess in terms of training, it comes back to partly the interventions point, partly what risky behaviours are manifesting as. People might not label them as VFIs and that's because they are coming from lots of different types of behaviours. So I mentioned misogyny before. In various documents you have pulled up, your risk of social isolation, online behaviours; so I think that there is training for those things. It might not be labelled as violence-fixated individuals, but I think we are trying to circulate and provide training on what might be other things -- vulnerabilities -- into the system, it's just not got the wrapper of violence fixation.

Q. If I can suggest, that is quite an optimistic spin on what this survey shows, that these practitioners who are answering these questionnaire have had relevant training, it just wasn't labelled "VFI". The more realistic interpretation is practitioners have Prevent training but they don't feel they have training that helps them deal with violence fixation cases. Isn't that the more natural interpretation of the Crest survey?

A. I don't know how we would be confident that we were providing violence-fixated individual training without having decided what violence-fixated individuals are. So I guess it is all a bit circular. I'm not saying that people are not asking for more or open to more; that's great. But I think training is not necessarily going to be labelled "violence fixated", until we have decided what violence fixated is and I think some of the things that I have mentioned in terms of risk factors, we are providing training on and training does exist.

I also had -- you might have had the same -- an update from Lancashire Council on the kinds of training they have been looking at since they have been involved in the Inquiry and -- I will go to my notes. The training that they think is important and they have put in place is around neurodivergence, autism, online,

and they don't call those violence-fixated individual training. So that's the point I'm trying to make.

Q. Yes, but just rounding off on this point, both in terms of guidance and in terms of training, the challenge to your department may be that we are more than two years since the attack and it might be suggested that there are some signs here of the DfE being in something of a holding pattern, whereby in the absence of a definition and clearer guidance, guidance going out to practitioners or training going out to practitioners, hasn't really moved on?

A. So, I guess that comes back to the conversation we were having about what goes first. So we have sought to improve our training, as we always would, in terms to respond to things that are happening in the world. We have not labelled it "violence-fixated individual training". But, we talked about Com network training; we are responding to what our practitioners want to hear about; and I guess part of the debate we were having was how far -- I don't want to be tardy, I don't want to be holding things back from practitioners but equally, I don't want to define it in a way that might then be superseded or a better definition of it because we are trying to be as clear as we are to our sector.

I think what we concluded was, we push ahead,

sharing what we can and relevant training, relevant guidance but with caveats that it might change and that's completely normal and natural because harms to children are always evolving.

So I was really picking up on the way the survey maybe was asked and the questions but I'm very open to providing extra training, developing extra training and indeed either labelling it or part labelling it in response to violence-fixated individuals.

Q. You say you are very open to it. Are there any plans to do it? You have talked about the times when DfE does get involved in the provision of training, as being new and more controversial areas where it might be thought that central training is helpful and you have referred to what one local authority is doing and it might be thought to be very concerning if Lancashire weren't doing anything, bearing in mind their involvement in the events but one has to look at the national picture. I mean, as you sit there now today, does DfE have a clear plan in mind for new training in this area to be provided centrally?

A. So the Prevent coordinators that I have in my team provide training -- free training on emerging issues and are doing that all of the time. I also have responsibility for the Educate Against Hate website,

which again, we provide regular updates on that and can do. So we are always providing extra --

Q. Does it deal with the VFI-type cohort risk?

A. So, yes, it does, but what I was trying to explain earlier is it doesn't necessarily label it "VFIs". It is looking at the underlying -- how you define what the other vulnerabilities are. So training in relation to online. Training in relation to misogyny. Training in relation to knives. So you also talked about violence against animals. Those -- we are providing conversations and training about those rather than calling it violence-fixated individuals.

Q. Leave aside the label. I'm not going to suggest, obviously, that misogyny is not relevant, but is there clear training going on now in relation to those who have a fascination with violence and gore, where the concern is that that may develop into mass casualty attacks, for non-ideological reasons? Is that something which is being focused upon in training?

A. Yes. My Prevent team do that training.

Q. Thank you. Turning to identification and risk assessment, please. If we could go back to your second statement, it is page 8 DFE000297_0008, paragraph 28.

You say:

"There is not currently a specific process or agreed

definition to support identification of a VFI, therefore education settings would not specifically risk assess this cohort. More broadly, where a pupil posed a risk of violence in an education setting, the setting would be expected to assess the risk to both the pupil and others in the setting but would not be responsible for assessing any risk to others outside of the setting."

One understands, of course, that schools would not be the only agency involved, but does that risk slightly understating the extent of the role of schools in risk assessment here, do you think?

A. I don't think so, no. I think it is clear on the one hand there is not a specific pathway, which we know. I think it is explaining and pressing that schools have -- education setting have a responsibility for the risks to their pupils but also the risks they pose to others and it is also saying that they are also responsible for working with other agencies, which is relevant on a whole range of factors.

Q. Could we have a look at Mr Baisley's statement, it is NEU000029 at page 10 NEU000029_0010, please. I want to pick this up at paragraph 36. Bottom half of the page please:

"There is no national tool for assessing the risk a pupil poses to others. Members use individual pupil

behaviour risk assessments, of which the union's pro forma ... is one model ... These tools were designed for behaviour management and staff safety, not to capture escalation towards extreme violence; they share no common language with the police, health or children's social services and their quality depends on the school."

Then he referred to the fact that the union's:

"... casework analysis ... suggests the tools are inconsistently used."

Then, if we could just look at paragraph 38, over the page NEU000029_0011:

"The union does not consider these tools adequate, on their own, to assess the risk posed by VFIs. Practice varies between teachers, roles and schools, and the union is not aware of national steps to secure consistency. On compatibility with other agencies' approaches the union holds no systematic evidence, beyond noting that school risk assessments and agency threat assessments use different frameworks and vocabularies."

So what he is speaking to there is that in terms of what you were assessing the teachers' or DSL's responsibility would be of gradating the risk in the school, teachers and DSLs don't have the right tools for

that for VFIs at the moment?

A. So they don't have a common risk assessment that is specific to VFIs, no, and I am sure one of the questions is whether they should, whether there should be a common risk assessment. So that's correct. They do have professional curiosity and judgement and work with other agencies. So, they are using that and the frameworks that exist to assess risk, both to the individual and more widely.

Q. But what the unions are saying is: insofar as frontline staff are using any risk assessment tool, it is one provided by us, the union, not by the Department or by local authorities. So if the starting position is, okay, teachers on not responsible for assessing the risk to the public as a whole, that would need involvement by agencies outside, but as practitioners who we all agree they may be the first to spot these cases, the first to spot concerns, it is why the education sector is so important, and what Mr Baisley is saying is, there isn't even a tool for the assessment of risk within the education setting. Because if there was such a tool then that would help if -- it was flagging up as higher risk, that would help to inform those other agencies needing to be involved. But there doesn't seem to be an agreed gradation of risk even within education

settings, or a tool to help teachers assess that risk. What do you say about that?

A. So it feels quite a circular discussion, doesn't it? If we wanted a specific VFI tool and risk assessment --

Q. Forgive me, I'm going to interrupt you. I don't think he is saying we need a VFI-specific tool. He is saying there isn't even a tool to assess risk of violence, let alone one that deals with VFIs. So I think he is raising the concern about the risk of serious violence in schools being without a national tool to help teachers do the assessment. That seems to be, on the face of it, a clear gap?

A. I mean you could have different tools for every different risk, couldn't you? But Keeping Children Safe seeks to add to professional curiosity and judgement of a designated safeguarding lead and all others in a setting, to give them information about what to look for, the risks they might pose and where to -- what to do with that information.

Q. So consider all the factors and use your professional best judgement, is that what it comes to?

A. So, yes, and I think that that is being done well. If we come up with greater specificity about serious violence and violence-fixated individuals and we decide that a common risk assessment is the right thing to do,

if, collectively -- this is the "we" -- and that there is a specific pathway, then those things would follow. But we don't have a specific risk assessment tool and a specific pathway for every risk to children.

Q. Forgive me, Ms Dixon, but you keep returning to that factor time and again and I think I have put it to you, plainly and clearly, that that which the union has been raising a concern is not: we need 15 risk assessment tools for each specific risk. We do not have one for the risk of violence of pupils to others in the education setting; there is no national tool for that. So before you get into: well, we could have a tool for everything, the generic tool in relation to the risk of pupils attacking staff and attacking other pupils in the school, including but not limited to because they are fascinated with violence, there is no such tool. At the moment, it seems to rely on staff judgement.

A. There is no tool and I am saying yes, it does rely on staff judgement. I'm not yet convinced that there needs to be one that is specifically on serious violence, a common risk assessment. I don't know if the union is saying that. They are saying there isn't one that exists. I don't know if they are particularly saying that they would like one. So, yes.

Q. Yes. Well, if we look at paragraph 36 again, the

previous page NEU000029_0010, I think, in respect to Mr Baisley, what he is saying is pretty obvious:

"There is no national tool for assessing the risk a pupil poses to others."

A member will use individual pupil behaviour risk assessments, with the union's pro forma for one. Then back over the page NEU000029_0011, 38:

"The union does not consider these tools adequate ..."

There is not much ambiguity about that.

A. Yes, perhaps you are right, that statement "the union does not consider these tools adequate". Again, this is about VFIs and you were talking before about serious violence and the wider question. But, yes, in terms of -- I thought a straight answer they were giving, there is to tool, and I agree with that, there is no tool. Should there be a tool? They are suggesting yes, on VFIs. Is that fair?

Q. Well, it is not for me to judge whether it is fair.

A. Sorry, a fair answer to your question.

Q. Does this exchange at least cause you to pause and think the lack of a tool to help assess that risk is something that requires further thought?

A. Yes, and in listening to other people's evidence, thinking about a common risk assessment and a common

tool, there's all very valid questions and I think the point you are making to me here is actually, there might be some choices around serious violence and violence-fixated individuals, to think through if we do provide a tool, kind of which broad or narrowness, it is for.

Q. Yes. But sticking with the broad, one of the advantages of any structured tool of that kind is, it doesn't just rely upon individual's skill and professional curiosity, because a good tool for a serious violence risk in schools would have a list of factors to raise and consider and the very point of having that sort of structured list of points to go through and think about is helpful, in terms of the accurate assessment of risk. Would you agree?

A. Yes. A set of questions can definitely be useful.

Q. Not necessarily a set of questions, but a list of areas to think about. So not necessarily structure points 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, but for example: you must explore the child's online environment, this may include ... and then several examples. Then thinking about the home environment and there would be many others, peer-on-peer issues and so on. But that sort of list of areas to raise and to take into account in assessing what the problems and the risks are, that is not novel learning,

the benefit of those sorts of lists; would you agree?

A. Yes. Sorry, if I'm making the same points. I guess the question is how, in a broad document of Keeping Children Safe in Education, and the broad set of risks that schools are looking at and children's social care are looking at, do you provide step-by-step instructions for every risk, or do you provide a framework in which experienced and committed professionals can use their judgement?

Q. We have seen that the figures for the number of exclusions and suspensions that have arisen through weapons and the figures for weapons being brought into school are both on the increase; do you agree?

A. Yes.

Q. In that context, before you get into your concern about it being over-specific, I will put it one more time, there is a clear case for consideration being given to an assessment tool to help DSLs assess the risk of serious violence?

A. There is -- yes, your words, there is a clear case to consider whether that is something that would be helpful and we would want to ask a number of different people, including the people that would be using it and the input to it and what you would do with it. So, yes.

Q. Thank you. A slightly different aspect that came out of

the expert cadre's evidence was Ms Swan raising concern from the case studies that significant decline in academic attainment, attendance, behaviour and functioning didn't, in the case studies, lead to further assessment, support or referral.

The cadre of experts, in their oral evidence, placed weight on the fact that sometimes it is also the children who go suddenly very quiet and are not necessarily problematic in their behaviour but become more withdrawn. On that aspect, do you think that that is something which needs greater emphasis as being a point of concern in the identification of potential VFIs?

A. Do you mean if a child -- their behaviour completely changes and they go quiet then that would raise an alarm bell?

Q. Yes, no doubt in the context of other factors?

A. Yes, I think in this and other factors, yes.

Q. Yes, thank you, and again, perhaps something that requires thought in terms of the emphasis given to that in future guidance?

A. Yes, I think -- I mean -- I think the current guidance is clear that noticing a significant change in behaviour in a child would be a cause for concern. I think it also talks about withdrawal and social isolation and

again, I think the link that we see with children, in fact anyone, going more and more into the online world, that's a significant flag of when that behaviour might be changing. So I think that is very relevant, yes.

Q. Thank you. Then a different aspect in relation to this was the evidence that emerged from the first phase about other practitioners, other agencies, listening to the concerns of teachers and DSLs and you will recall that the Inquiry's recommendation 57 dealt with that and we are told that in relation to that, ministers have been writing to local safeguarding partners, to emphasise the importance of that.

Has -- it may be too early, but has there been the beginnings of any sign of that having any impact?

A. Sorry --

Q. Forgive me I'm taking it too quickly. Could we look at CHAIR000002, and page 390 CHAIR000002_0390. Forgive me, it is my fault, Ms Dixon, for taking it too quickly.

A. That's all right.

Q. Recommendation 57.

A. Yes.

Q. So the recommendation for:

"... a nationwide reminder to all agencies considering the risk that children pose to others of the importance of respecting the insight offered by the

child's school if they raise concern about the severity of risk ..."

In the recommendation, the learned Chair emphasised that The Acorns School were aware of those and concerned about that and raised risk again. So:

"As was the case with AR at The Acorns School, teachers will often spend more time observing the child ... than is available to other professionals. Warnings from teachers and/or schools with particular expertise (including but not limited to Pupil Referral Units) should be given particular weight."

We are told that there has been -- my summary -- but a write-around arising from that. It may be too soon but I wanted to ask if you have begun to see any improvement in that, in the weight given to teachers' concerns by other agencies?

A. So, there's obviously greater awareness of these risks and -- we have seen Prevent referrals go up and we assume that the greater number of Prevent referrals significantly is capturing this cohort and that is also the intelligence I have got from my own Prevent network, that they are using that system to flag concerns. I think it's very true that teachers and those working in schools are going to be the frontline in seeing children and changes in behaviour and there certainly

is -- we will come onto it later -- wider concern about online behaviour, where you can't see what children are doing. So, I think, yes, it does feel like that is true and people are listening and respecting.

One caveat there, obviously some children are not in school. So, then that becomes -- obviously, the system is less effective. They may be children who have been in school and are now falling out of school, or they may be children who -- in other agencies, or other community individuals, parents would be the greater likelihood of seeing that change in behaviour, which, I guess, brings it back, again, to the safeguarding guidance of Keeping Children Safe in Education, is trying to impress that everybody has a responsibility and that is a similar principal point here, that changes in behaviour usually signal something, so being cognisant of it and doing something with it.

Q. Could we just look, in this regard, again, back at Mr Baisley's statement and you will understand that I'm using the union evidence here as giving a helpful different viewpoint on some of these aspects.

So NEU000029, thank you, and it is page 4 NEU000029_0004 and it is paragraphs 14 and 15. So:

"... safeguarding leads' central complaint was the response they receive from external agencies when they

raise safeguarding concerns."

So this is their survey:

"Seven in ten ... said external agencies take account of concerns raised by school staff not very well or not at all well ... Among leads who have actually taken a concern to an external agency, the negative share rises to 78 per cent. Only one in four ... said they are always or usually told the outcome ..."

Paragraph 15:

"The written comments in the ... survey [of DSLs] describe external agencies dismissing or downgrading concerns raise by schools, particularly where the pupil has special educational needs or disabilities ... social care thresholds set so high that referrals come back with no further action; schools expected to supply detail but rarely told what followed ..."

Just pausing there. Again, it is fairly early in terms of any impact of the response to the recommendations, but that paints a relatively bleak picture in terms of the weight being given to DSLs' concerns when they take those concerns to other agencies, would you agree?

A. Yes, and the point of feedback, which obviously Rachel made as well.

Q. What more can be done about this? Because it

instinctively feels -- if the learned Chair will forgive me for putting it this way -- so right and so obvious that teachers who spend time with children are critical in identifying concerns and, therefore, all the more worrying if those concerns are being dismissed.

What more can be done to ensure that they carry greater weight in the multi-agency assessment?

A. I think there is probably a few things. So, the changes to multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, bringing education expertise in and additionally valuing that expertise.

I think some of the points we have talked about already which is, you know, as we get better at defining this cohort, then, actually the feedback loops and the confidence in those referrals for the specific pathway or set of risks will get better.

I think there is undoubtedly a threshold and a workload point in all of this, isn't there? You know, if everybody had all of the time in the world, the feedback loops would keep going round and round and people would be all in the loop, but there is something certainly in here about respecting the role that education professionals have and can see, valuing that and bringing them into that intervention or onward pathway and mirroring the bit that we pulled out

earlier, about once you have made a referral, it not being the end of your responsibility. It is good to see here that schools want to know and particularly if the pupil's with them, they want to know what's going on as much as they can and be able to be put of that.

Q. All right. I'm interested in -- although, I appreciate you say about thresholds, but you say the changes to multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, bringing education expertise in and additionally valuing that expertise; no one could doubt that but in concrete terms, I mean, does something need to be done, for example, in relation to escalation routes. If a DSL feels that social care or police or Prevent are being too dismissive, where do they go to? Because social care sits with the local authority, so they may feel: well, there's an absence of an escalation route here. Does something need to be done about that?

A. I guess it is about weight of evidence and weight of concern, isn't it? So, it is a sad set of paragraphs to read but practically, if I was in a school and I was raising a concern, I would raise it again and in safeguarding, it is about triangulation and weight of evidence. So that's the pragmatic action I would take if I was in a school.

But, I see the point you are making, and you know

obviously, we want people's concerns to be valued and taken seriously. So I'm happy to take that away and see if there is more --

Q. In AR's case, first of all, within the school no one could doubt that it was taken at a senior level because the acting headteacher was personally and directly involved as well as the DSLs and no one could sensibly doubt that they raised it several times on a number of occasions and yet still nothing happened. Presumably, within a pathway dealing with the VFI cohort you would want an agency, who is unhappy that other agencies are being too dismissive of the risk, to have an escalation route to that pathway, either to say, "This case is not being taken on but we, the safeguarding people, in the school are unhappy about it", or, "This case has been taken on but the level of response is too low, we are worried, and we are the teachers with eyes on". Would you agree that thought needs to be given to that?

A. Yes, I mean the line is always going to be drawn somewhere, isn't it, and there may well be disagreement but I think, in terms of either knowing what's happened and why or having something active that can be done, if I was in a school and a case wasn't taken on, I would want to understand why but I would also want to understand whether there's something I could do, if it

was being referred back to me and look after that pupil in my school. So the more we can understand about what available interventions there are, what works, where those interventions are, is all the better.

Q. Thank you. I just want to turn next to a sub-issue on identification and risk assessment of VFIs, which is looking at special educational needs and disability cases but also those who are not in employment, education or training.

So, on the aspect of SEND. If we could look back in your statement please at page 8 DFE000297_0008, paragraph 31. Your second statement. You will recall, from the Phase 1 report, the sentiment that autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions should not be used to explain away behaviour and in your section on SEND, you say:

"Although not specifically designed for VFIs, Prevent resources for schools do include material on ... ('ASD') ..."

You say:

"This material makes clear that concerns relating to children with ASD/SEND should be acted on as they would be for any other child."

You say:

"... September 2026, the department is extending the

universal offer on Prevent to include training on SEND which will make clear that SEND does not excuse behaviour, as well as reiterating that concerns about children with ASD/SEND, should be acted upon."

Has that happened, do you know?

A. Yes. Yes, it has.

Q. Specifically, it provides that what?

A. So, it provides greater understanding of neurodivergence and special educational needs, seeking to help local practitioners understand that and I think the point that I also heard you discuss with other people, which is there is not a link and causation but actually, we have seen overlaps in these cohorts. So a better understanding of what autism and ADHD behaviours might show, some of the vulnerabilities that might go with that, and -- but making sure it is not a causal link. But the more people can understand that those different ways of thinking and how they might then be influenced online or otherwise, narrowing of thinking, or following a path more quickly, is all helpful, for this risk, but more generally too.

Q. Because this is relevant to cases that may, even under the current system, not end up with Prevent, does that need to be extended out of Prevent material and to find a home in either Keeping Children Safe in Education or

Working Together?

A. I am sure that there is very much useful information in that training that's diverted through our Prevent networks, that could be useful elsewhere.

Q. Specifically in that guidance because you are absolutely right and we have been trying to be very careful to emphasise the importance of avoiding stigmatising those with neurodevelopmental conditions and that the evidence positively does not suggest, for example, autism causing a serious violence risk. But, at the same time, we have seen the prevalence of those with neurodevelopmental conditions, in particularly the Prevent subset, and the current research assessment and medical literature in relation to that, saying that that is probably explained by the way that the neurodevelopmental conditions may contextualise the risk. So: more vulnerable to isolation; potentially more vulnerable to bullying; more vulnerable to grievance, in the sense of perceiving that they have been bullied; and more vulnerable to online exploitation than others. There may be issues relating to narrow focus of interests for those who are autistic.

So not directly causing but that contextualising?

A. Yes.

Q. Again, one appreciates that one can't have 15 pages on everything, but at the moment, it seems that where

that's found a home, according to your evidence, is in Prevent. Doesn't it need to be wider? Doesn't it need to be in, for example, Keeping Children Safe in Education? So that the central message: don't dismiss behaviour as being caused by a neurodevelopmental condition. If it is giving rise to a risk to others, you need to address the risk but being sensitive to the stigmatisation risk?

A. So, yes. I think it is not just about this particular risk, is it? So actually, sort of about the fixations part. The more we are learning about neurodivergence, the more that is a vulnerability. That's just not on the risk that they pose to others, that could well be on the risk to themselves. So I don't know if there is a section -- I'm pretty sure you have looked -- but the section on SEND and what we know about neurodivergence in Keeping Children Safe in Education, I can certainly go back and look at that and I suspect it will be applicable to the vulnerability to the individual and from the individual.

So if there is more that we can put in on that, then I shall certainly look at that.

Q. Thank you. Those are issues we will be picking up in other contexts, including with the Youth Justice Board on Wednesday.

A. Great.
Q. Secondly, in this area, you touched, earlier on in your own evidence, Ms Dixon, helpfully on the children who are not in school, so not in education, employment or training. If we could look at page 8 DFE000297_0008 paragraph 33 and we have it right at the bottom of the page:
"The majority of this statement has focused on children and young people within education settings, or ... known to [children's social care]. We are very aware, however, that some ..."
Over the page DFE000297_0009:
"... children and young people who may be at risk of becoming fixated with violence will not be attending mainstream education settings."
Then you explain:
"This could include children educated in alternative provision, home education, NEET ... or with poor attendance."
You say:
"The department is working across each of these areas to try to ensure appropriate oversight, but it remains challenging. Any future policies relating to VFIs should include consideration of children not attending mainstream education settings."

But the reasons why it remains challenging, in brief, are what?
A. If a child is in school then they are much easier to see what's happening. Obviously, they are not at school all the hours of the day, but a good proportion and a good indication of what's going on in their lives and their minds. That is obviously less visible when children are not in school --
Q. But what are the challenges of tackling it when they are not in regular school?
A. Well, the challenge is that you do not see them so much so you are looking for other individuals who are in contact --
Q. Forgive me, you are saying the Department is working across each of these areas but it remains challenging. What are the barriers? Where is it proving particularly difficult?
A. So for example, I talked in my last session about we have responsibility for out-of-school settings policy area. So actually, helping out-of-school settings with their safeguarding responsibilities, being able to provide more guidance to them about that sort of thing. That's an area that's obviously more difficult, more diverse but we are trying to find a framework, or some guidance that aims at that sector. That's broadly, not

just about violence fixation.
In home education, we are creating the Children Not in School register, so there will be more visibility of who those children are, where they are and where they are receiving their education. That will help have a wider reach into the number of practitioners or individuals that might be in contact with those children.
Less my area, but obviously The Milburn Review is looking at lots of different challenges around NEETs and again, that will be an area that Government is trying to reduce and a set of individuals who have also got greater eyes on. Then on the attendance, obviously getting children into school, again, I talked last time about some of the arrangements, strengthening of the school attendance. It is our view and preference that children are in school and that offers both education and safeguarding strengthening.
Q. Sure, but on that aspect, obviously, in AR's individual case, as you understand very well, Ms Dixon, there was the difficulty that the local authority, on any view, by their own admission, performed poorly in stepping in to try to provide a resolution to AR's poor attendance. Ms Swan, as part of our expert cadre, noted the absence of oversight by local authorities in this area in the

case studies that the expert cadre looked at. If we can have briefly on screen CHAIR000002 page 394 CHAIR000002_0394, there was the specific recommendation 65, if we could go to that.
Specifically asking the -- or recommending that the Department should consider remedial steps to tackle the problem of local education authorities, where they are failing to respond adequately. So it is really about challenging poor performance by local authorities in this area. Can you tell us what specifically is being done about that?
A. So quite a number of things across the Department. I have talked about school attendance. There is a big programme of work on special educational needs, and to make mainstream settings work better for children with special educational needs, so they are less likely to be falling out of mainstream. You know, I talked about CNIS, the Children Not in School register.
So I think it is more about making the school system work for individuals and making education work. Some of the -- we might come onto in the interventions, where local authorities are seeing children fall out of education, it being recognised that not only the attendance at school, offering a protective factor, but finding a way of giving them online, or work at home, to

give them that sense of pride and attainment and belonging and purpose is all important. So a lot of the thrust of what the Department is doing, rather than particular specifics on -- like, we are basically trying to change the big system rather than --

Q. One understands that and I don't, for a moment, wish to denigrate it. The importance of trying to help education settings, individual schools or colleges, helping them to have the resources and the training to try to ensure that pupils remain with them and remain engaged and the options open to them. But that is actually dealing with something different. It is dealing with the failure of local authorities when, in an individual setting, as was the case with AR, have done all that they could, or all they reasonably could with the resources, and the child is simply not attending and the case is put to the local authority, saying: they are not attending, and at the start, for AR, that was before he had turned 16 and the local authority was just, on the learned Chair's findings, very poor at responding to that and the local authority accepted in their evidence that they had not intervened sufficiently.

So specifically on that, what is the DfE doing to bring poor performing local authorities to book?

A. So, part of that is through the school attendance guidance and the changes I talked about last time in my evidence and part of that is also through the inspection of local authorities and holding them to account on their responsibilities.

Q. Thank you. I want to turn to a different topic now of information sharing between schools. Again, if we could just look within the volume 2 of the report. If we just look at page 391 CHAIR000002_0391, we have recommendation 58. So, the DfE:

"... in finalising the Keeping Children Safe in Education ... and in any necessary amendments to other policy and guidance, should ensure that:

"In cases where a child leaves a school because of permanent exclusion, there is absolute clarity concerning the relative responsibilities of the excluding school and the local authority over the transfer of (i) the Common Transfer File and (ii) safeguarding information to the next school."

Then:

"Better guidance is given of the circumstances in which safeguarding information is to be shared in advance of: (i) an offer of a placement; and (ii) the transfer of a pupil. This should include, in particular, where this would aid arrangements that may

be necessary for the safety of other pupils or staff because there is relevant information concerning the child's risk to others."

Now, in relation to that, if we could take that down please and if we could go to Keeping Children Safe in Education, DFE000263 and it is page 40 DFE000263_0040, please. I think we can see that this has been updated, I hope you will be able to confirm, to seek to deal with this.

So page 40, paragraph 148. It should be the bottom of the page:

"Where children leave the school or college, the [DSL] ... should ensure their child protection file is transferred to the new school or college as soon as possible, and within 5 days for an in-year transfer or within the first 5 days of the start of a new term to allow the new school or college to have support in place for when the child arrives. The ..."

Just over the page DFE000263_0041:

"[DSL] should ensure secure transit, and confirmation of receipt should be obtained ... This should be transferred separately from the main pupil file. Receiving schools and colleges should ensure key staff such as [DSLs] and special educational needs coordinators ... or the named persons with oversight

for ... (SEND) ... are aware as required. It will then be for the [DSL] to consider what other information should be shared with other relevant staff and when appropriate to do so."

Then, at 149:

"In addition to the child protection file, the [DSL] should consider if it would be appropriate to share any information with the new school or college in advance of a child leaving particularly where the information would support an assessment of risk to others in the school as well as the individual pupil."

If we can keep that on screen and where it is, 150 also says:

"Where information indicates a risk to others and/or the individual pupil, for example, where a pupil has previously carried, threatened with, or used a knife or weapon, it is incumbent on the receiving school to assess risk, and accordingly, put in place a safety and support plan for when the child arrives."

So that amended text takes matters forward. If we just look at the wording of 149, it says the DSL, safety lead "should also consider if it would be appropriate to share any information". Now, that language, we go back to the "should" and the "must". So that's the policy expectation. But notably, what it doesn't say is:

should share any information. It says "should consider if it would be appropriate to share". I just wonder whether, on reflection, that really does go far enough? Because in cases where the information is relevant to a risk to others, there might be thought to be a case that this guidance should be saying: you should share that information, not: you should consider sharing it?

A. So, I think it is right because I think safeguarding professionals are using their professional judgement. So I think it is right because there might be circumstances in which it wouldn't be appropriate to share. I think there is quite a lot of addition to the text that we have put in place here. We thought about the drafting, we consulted on the drafting, so ...

Q. Yes. Well, one can imagine in other circumstances, not involving a significant risk that the child poses to others, one can imagine circumstances in which it might not be appropriate for that to be shared. But if the risk is a significant risk of the child assaulting either a member of staff, or other children, or the public as a whole, it is difficult to envisage circumstances in which that shouldn't be shared in advance with the new school, isn't it?

A. I think what we are saying here is professional judgement and it may be the agencies are working

together on that and they will make the decision, based that professional judgement about the risk --

Q. But if you said "should be shared", there would still be -- it is not saying "must be shared", it is saying "should be" --

A. Yes, fair enough.

Q. -- and you have the opportunity to make a reasoned and presumably, recorded decision as to why not. But in cases of the child being a significant risk to others, they would have to be truly exceptional for not sharing that information in advance, wouldn't they?

A. I suppose it is about what risk to others and the significance of that risk. But, yes, I take your point, that in the -- the explanation I gave about "should" and you could reasonably depart from a "should" in guidance, then an alternative way to be to miss out also "consider if appropriate" because there would be that caveat if it wasn't appropriate to not do it. So I don't exactly know the background to the wording but I can see it can be written in a different way, yes.

Q. Yes, and you are, of course, entitled to accuse me of lawyer's pedantry, but this has a real-world implication and concern lying behind it because, in his oral evidence last week, as you may be aware, Mr Baisley, on behalf of the NEU, spoke of the perverse incentive,

whereby the more information a school shares in advance about a pupil's risk, the less likely the pupil is to get a new school and so you have this perverse incentive, for a school who is passing on a child, not to reveal more information in advance because they may know that will reduce the risk. But in terms of ensuring safety, whether for the receiving school staff, children or indeed the public, having that information in advance is surely the right thing to do?

A. Yes. I can see the point that he was making, and it shouldn't be the case, should it, and in a responsible and well-functioning system, that there needs to be a persuasive case to take a child from one school to another. But I can see the point that he's making and that you are making also, that those words could give some sort of wriggle room for thinking that they are not doing that because it might prejudice the taking of a child. One would hope that the people making these judgements, safeguarding would be their principal concern and that would be the overriding decision, but I can see the point you are making.

Q. Thank you. So might that be added to the list of --

A. Things to consider for next time, yes.

Q. Forgive me. It is a growing list.

A. Yes.

Q. Thank you. Then, moving to information sharing with other agencies. We don't need to turn it up, but you helpfully indicated in your first witness statement that poor information sharing has contributed to serious child safeguarding incidents over a prolonged period.

A. Yes.

Q. In your most recent statement, if we could look at page 3 DFE000297_0003, paragraph 10 of your second statement:

"I agree with the Inquiry that information sharing needs to be improved and the department has taken important steps on this issue that [you] will set out later. We will of course continue to work with the Inquiry to support any further improvements that may be necessary."

So if we go to Keeping Children Safe in Education, DFE000263, page 38 DFE000263_0038. We, in fact, saw this in my previous flick through, but I want to come back to it more fully now. So if we could have paragraph 138, the section at the bottom of the page:

"Information sharing is vital in identifying and tackling all forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and in promoting children's welfare, including in relation to their educational outcomes. Schools and colleges have clear powers to share, hold and use

information for these purposes."

Then:

"As part of meeting a child's needs, it is important for governing bodies ..."

Over the page DFE000263_0039:

"... and proprietors to recognise the importance of information sharing between practitioners and local agencies. This should include ensuring arrangements are in place and understood that set out clearly the processes and principles for sharing information within the school or college and with local authority children's social care, the safeguarding partners and organisations, agencies, and practitioners as required."

So no doubt, that is part of what you say, in terms of efforts having been made to make this clear in guidance, yes?

A. Yes.

Q. Thank you. Then, 140, we see the encouragement for:

"School and college staff [to] be proactive in sharing information as early as possible to help identify, assess and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children, whether this is when problems are first emerging, or where a child is already known to local authority children's social care."

Just in relation to this, the language there moulds

back into: be proactive when assessing and responding to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children. It doesn't say: and the risks that children may pose to others. Or it doesn't say: including the risk that children may pose to others.

Do you think that that is a shortcoming?

A. I think, in our greater understanding now and acceptance that safety and welfare of children is both the risks posed to them and to others, it is fine, but I also wouldn't be against, you know, an extra bit that said, "including the risks they pose to others". I guess, the more extra little references to that throughout the document, the more you embed in practitioners minds that they are looking at both of those things. So, yes, I wouldn't be against it.

Q. Thank you. So in relation to this aspect, Dame Rachel in her evidence last week, in general says that the guidance -- she was specifically referring to Working Together to Safeguard Children -- needed to be reviewed to make it clearer that risk of committing violence or harm to others should be a reason for a safeguarding referral to be made and for support to be offered.

So she was encouraging to make it absolutely explicit in guidance that risk to others, committing violence or harm to others, should be a reason for

making a safeguarding referral. Now, when challenged on that by me, in terms of you would have to have some element of significant risk or you would have a safeguarding referral for every case of violence, she agreed there would have to be a threshold.

But do you agree with that and the need for that to be given greater emphasis?

A. So I think it is given greater emphasis in the consultation version of Working Together. So I think in --

Q. We will see that in the next version coming through?

A. Yes.

Q. Thank you. Then, if we could go back into your statement please at page 7 DFE000297_0007, paragraph 26. You say that the Department:

"... is addressing long-standing information sharing challenges ... through a coordinated programme of work to stop children falling through the cracks ..."

You say that includes:

"A new statutory information sharing duty ..."

We will come onto that:

"A Single Unique Identifier ..."

We will come onto that:

"Information standards and a code of practice to improve the way data is stored, ensuring it can be

shared more easily ..."

Where is those information standards and code of practice to be found? Or where will they be found?

A. So I think that work links to the single unique identifier. So obviously, in having the single unique identifier, we are going to use the NHS number. Then we need to help systems better talk to each other, or at least be able to transfer data securely to link those up. So I think those two pieces of work go together.

Q. Then, if we can just look onto paragraph 27. You say that:

"The information sharing duty has been introduced by section 4 of the ... 2026 Act. This means there is a clear legal duty on relevant persons to share information with other relevant persons where it may support safeguarding and promote the welfare of children."

Pausing there. So far, so straightforward and so important. But you then say this:

"This would include situations where a child may pose a risk to another child."

What's the problem with that?

A. The problem with the words, or with the problem with the --

Q. Yes, "this would include situations where a child may

pose a risk to another child"?
A. Do you think it should say adults, to anyone?
Q. That is the issue we are tackling in this area, that as soon as you get into this issue -- and we will see a bit of detail on this -- that there is a concern that the 2026 Act, in focusing on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, does not sufficiently make clear that that includes risk to others and where it does get into risk to others, there is a concern that the emphasis is on the risk that a child may pose to the risk of another child.

I am sure unfairly, but I'm seeking to explore with you the fact that your own statement does that and says: this would include situations where a child may pose a risk to another child. So the challenge is, what about a risk to an adult, whether a member of staff or the public generally?
A. So good question. So, I do know that the brief that the team gave me does say that stops at age 18 but they also did say that information can be about the family, so the family wouldn't just be under 18. So I don't know if there is a barrier -- maybe you do better -- in the legislation, because you have looked at it and if that is, then please tell me, straightforwardly, the point.

But as I understand it, the intent for this duty is

that it is to share any information that would help the other statutory agencies do its job and that is not limited just to the child. So it can be about the family as well. So, I don't --
Q. All right. So, when you said a moment ago, Ms Dixon: I do know that the brief that the team gave me, I don't criticise that for a moment -- we have covered the fact that you have been getting information from others -- but when you say: the brief that the team gave me does say that stops at age 18 --
A. Yes.
Q. -- but they also did say that information can be about the family --
A. Yes.
Q. So the family wouldn't just be about 18. What stops at 18, the duty to share information?
A. So, what my notes say: duty to share in the interests of child safety and welfare, sharing with another statutory service to help them do their job -- they are my handwritten notes from a verbal briefing -- includes information about the child and their family, includes information where a child poses risk to others, stops at 18.

So I don't exactly know what that means.
Q. All right. So DFE000295, if we have the bottom half of

the screen, please. There's always relatively little utility in just reading out statutory provisions, but this is the statutory provision. We see this section applies where a person to whom subsection 4 applies:

"(a) holds information about a child or information about another individual that relates to the child, and ...

"(b) considers that the information is relevant to safeguarding or promoting the welfare of the child."

Then in (3), we see, just at the bottom of the page:

"... the duty imposed by subsection (2) does not apply if the relevant person considers that the disclosure would be more detrimental to the child than not disclosing the information."

So anterior requirement is that the information is relevant to safeguarding or promoting the welfare of the child and one pauses to observe that that provision does not say anything about risk to others being included or excluded; it is silent. That gives rise to subsection (2) to a duty to share it. But then there is an exception if the person considers that the disclosure would be more detrimental. Then, we have looked at this with others, as I am sure you are aware, but if we look at how the statutory guidance has panned out, it is ILT000362. It is page 20 ILT000362_0020.

As I have explored with others, it is the section in the middle of the page "sharing information", and it tends to jump from one to the other. So:

"The information sharing duty extends to information about any other individual connected to a child, provided it is relevant to a child's safety and welfare ..."

So it starts off with appearing to suggest it is connected to the child:

"... therefore, it includes sharing information about a child who potentially poses a risk to another child."

So that seems to be limited to other children. But then it says:

"Information should not be withheld solely because the child, as the information subject, is not at risk themselves but instead potentially poses a risk to the safety and welfare of others."

So not limited to children. Then the next paragraph:

"Often, children who display harmful behaviour toward[s] other children have unmet ..."

So it seems to jump back. On any view, that ambiguity is, would you agree, unhelpful?
A. Yes. I think -- you know, possibly since the Act went

through, the view and the argument that a child who is posing a risk, or commits violence against others, has done themselves a disservice in terms of their own safeguarding and welfare, has strengthened. So I don't know if actually, that principle could be better used to bring into scope the risk to adults because if they are a risk to anyone and the feedback loop was then they were therefore a risk to themselves because of the consequence of that action, that might be sufficient.

I will go back and ask the question if that is (a) correct and (b) whether we could explain that better because I think the words you showed me in the first instance and repeated here "poses a risk to another child", if that -- if my argument is correct or defensible, then that would make things clearer, wouldn't it, if we changed that "to anyone"?

Q. Yes. There are two possible outcomes from this. One is that the Act, which one reminds ourselves gained Royal Assent in the spring, but not in time, I think, to take into account this Inquiry's Phase 1 report. But either that provision -- the statutory provision is not wide enough to take into account the risk to the general public and adults, in which case it might be thought there is a problem with the primary legislation?

A. Yes.

Q. Or it is wide enough and the problem lies with the statutory guidance?

A. Yes.

Q. But either way, would you agree, there is a problem here?

A. I don't know if there is a problem but it could be clearer. If there is not a problem, then we could make it clearer that there isn't a problem.

Q. Yes, but if there isn't a problem with the statutory provision, there is a problem if it could be made clearer in the guidance?

A. Yes, and certainly the inclusion of the second "child" feels like it is narrowing something which may not need to be narrowed.

Q. Yes. Mr Baisley, in his evidence, referred to this and he referred, I think, to the careful drafting of your statement in relation to this, but did suggest that he thought that this was inadequate too in the lack of clarity?

A. Fine, and we want to give clarity to the people that need it, so ...

Q. Thank you. If it is helpful in the discussions -- I don't think it is necessary to bring it up, but Stephanie Roberts-Bibby, who will give evidence on Wednesday, also says, in relation to this:

"While we have outlined the legal basis for information sharing under agencies' safeguarding duties, uncertainty will remain unless the legislation and guidance are revised to provide greater clarity." (As read)

A. Fine. Helpful, thank you.

MR MOSS: Thank you. Sir, I see the time, would that be an appropriate moment to break? I wonder if we might break for 45 minutes?

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Yes, certainly. We will sit again then at 1.55 pm. How are we doing for time, Mr Moss?

MR MOSS: We will get there.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Very reassuring.

(1.13 pm)

(The short adjournment)

(1.55 pm)

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Yes, Mr Moss.

MR MOSS: Thank you, sir. Ms Dixon, my next topic is to look at the appropriate pathway in the future for VFIs and also what is to be done about a screening and triage stage.

So can we start with the triage screening stage because that would be first in time and if we could look in your Phase 2 statement, it is page 19 DFE000297_0019, paragraphs 82 and 83.

So you refer there, quite correctly, to the fact that the Inquiry is considering whether Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs could provide a provide a potential structure to lead and own work on VFIs. That's obviously not the only option and we'd be interested in alternative ideas, but what you say in your statement is:

"I would caution against this approach. MASHs are intended to act as multi-agency forum for screening and coordinating referrals into [children's social care]. They have important limitations. Firstly, they are not a statutory function and do not exist in every local authority; where they do exist, their form and role vary. Secondly, they aren't set up to deal with adults, and finally MASHs are not generally case-holding bodies and do not themselves own risk, responsibility or accountability for what happens after triage."

Now, those three features are, if I may indicate, familiar ones to the Inquiry and are known problems and challenges with MASH acting as a big front door for referrals in this area.

So, take it as read, if you would, that if MASH were to have an expanded role to act as the front door, they would need to be up-scaled and resourced to do it, consideration would have to be given to it being placed

on a statutory footing, so that there was a MAPPA-like duty to co-operate and share information and there would need to be up-scaling to also ensure that nationwide, across England and Wales, they dealt with adults as well as children, which I think happens in some areas but by no means all.

Against that background, do you have a more principled objection to MASH carrying out this role or is it a practical one, grounded in the three concerns you raise?

A. I think it is a bit of both. So, you could solve all the practical -- if you could solve all the practical, that certainly is an option of using the MASH. I think, as I talked about this morning, I think my preference is for a Prevent gateway, obviously multi-agency would need to sit behind that in order for it to work and for the different interventions to happen. I think the reason that there is -- I think there is a police and crime threshold and role. So I think that's why that would be my preference.

Q. Can I pause you there. It is also -- it must be right that if the MASH were going to take referrals of this kind, although as currently constituted they do have a police presence, again, take it as read that that police presence would need to be enhanced and there

would need to be Counter Terrorism Policing knowledge within the MASH because they would be taking referrals that, at the moment, would be going to Prevent. So, again, I think that that is well-trodden ground in terms of the change of role for MASH. But I'm really interested in whether there is anything more principled than how far MASH are currently from reaching that target that they would need to be?

A. Probably not principled. I think pragmatism is that the Prevent system exists and essentially, this is setting up a different parallel system rather than building on something that already exists. So it is probably a pragmatism rather than a principle. I suppose, my other -- and this is always a challenge in multi-agency, is the question of lead responsibility and in an acute operational response, where violence is involved, then, it usually is the police that who are listened to in the first instance with the most authority. So I think I have that kind of issue to work through. That's not insurmountable. You could provide guidance and legislation behind those sorts of things or equality of partnership.

So, I think that's a bit behind how it would work but not an in-principle objection.

Q. So a point of challenge to the view that Prevent,

perhaps with greater resource, could be the screening and triage function. On one view, that's what Prevent are having to do by force at the moment in any event. Because all sorts of referrals are going to them, only a minority of which are taken on by Channel.

The challenge that Dame Rachel explored in her evidence in this and in her report is that such a large proportion of cases -- and she took education as being the key example -- you have an education referral to Prevent and I think she indicated that of the cases that were referred back to any agency, not having been taken on by Prevent, 65 per cent of them just bounced back to education.

The difficulty with that is that, first of all, there is an element, it might be thought, of as delay before then any further steps are taken, but also Prevent is not really acting and wouldn't normally act as convening multi-agency meetings to discuss what best steps could be taken for that case other than Channel. So when they are not adopted what tends to happen is they refer back to the most appropriate single agency.

All of that might be thought to be a very ineffective screening and triage stage for the cases that aren't taken on by Channel.

A. So I think in my mind you would sit something like

a MASH but you maybe wouldn't -- in your first example, if you replace it with a MASH, then you need some sort of standardisation of the MASH which is not insurmountable. You can do all of that. If you sat the multi-agency behind a Prevent system, then what you would be doing is you either refer onto Channel or you refer to a greater range of interventions, which would involve looking at your safeguarding partners. So it's like your MASH sits behind your Prevent door.

Q. So an opportunity, whatever it is labelled, for Prevent to refer a case on to a multi-agency process other than Channel --

A. Yes.

Q. -- for cases that do not meet the statutory threshold?

A. Yes and I think we are presuming that there would be a greater number that were taken on by this Prevent or expanded Prevent and some of them would meet a Channel -- not meet the threshold -- a Channel intervention would be appropriate and others you would be looking at a wider range of interventions, probably a number of the interventions that already exist but maybe more of them in the current system. So having that multi-agency behind seems appropriate.

Q. So we are getting into the discussion about the VFI pathway itself and we got ahead of ourselves earlier in

your evidence, and you indicated that you thought something Prevent-like, or an expanded Prevent, is the best home for these cases. And if we have page 3 DFE000297_0003, paragraph 12 of your statement on screen please.

You say, bottom of the page:

"There is a greater role here for a Prevent type system, a criminal or risk of criminality system with a justice or youth justice response."

Then you say this:

"Education and childcare, [children's social care] and out of school settings can support this work, but, because their core purposes do not align with a criminal and justice system response, they are not best placed to lead it."

Sir, just for your note, you may wish to have paragraph 85 of Ms Dixon's statement available alongside that, we don't need to look it up; it covers similar ground.

What might be thought to be striking about that, Ms Dixon, is that you are emphasising, whether through Prevent or a criminal justice type system, that they should be in the lead and that contrasts with a range of evidence the Inquiry has heard, which includes Dame Rachel, who was clear on the need for children's

social care to be involved and was really emphasising if it is a risk to others and it is a child, that is a risk to the child themselves.

We also heard from our expert cadre who really aligned around the most appropriate pathway being a multi-agency process that had co-chairs of social care and police but probably hosted by social care and who also, in their evidence, not dissimilar to aspects of your statement, were stressing that if you are going to tackle this cohort and minimise risk, you need to deal with the underlying needs and vulnerabilities.

So, in other words, a public health type response. We also heard, on behalf of the National Police Chiefs' Council, from DCC Court who said, in effect, policing shouldn't be leading on child protection issues and he was including there on dealing with this risk cohort.

So there's that body of evidence which is contrary to this approach and is saying: yes, of course, there will be a role for policing, criminal justice, potentially Counter Terrorism Policing, but that needs to be at least co-chaired with social care and probably hosted by social care because you want the emphasis to be on that type of intervention, health intervention, social care intervention, support from education. But of course, having police advice and in some cases there

may need to be disruptive action where you would be taking police against. So against that background, why the emphasis on a criminal justice lead for the pathway?

A. So my view was that there is a huge number of referrals into children's social care and at the moment only a very small number of them, compared with Prevent, a very small number of Prevent referrals and that this cohort might be double the Prevent referral, something of that order -- I'm picking it out of thin air but just to give a sense of proportion -- and they would get quite swamped and lost in the bigger children's social care referral system.

I also thought the seriousness of the risk, albeit the way to address is it is through vulnerabilities to the individual, suggested basically a line that actually a criminal or police-led line would be helpful, and that given that was the sort of front door, the referral in of the system, then -- and it was a system that was currently understood and in place, then that would work and then -- but you are right, the vulnerabilities of the child and actually the interventions are -- some of them are very small. A subset of them might well be criminal or youth justice or even the sort of threat of that, you know, an arrest maybe that doesn't lead to a prosecution or something. But then the large

proportion of those would then be school attendance or mentoring or engagement in a club or activity or online behavioural. So, it was a way of basically having a pyramid and tiering it.

Q. Thank you. Another aspect we have been exploring is probably mutual as to whether it is police-led or social care-led, but is really about the process that you have and whether there should be a nominated lead agency who has the primary responsibility and potentially a named professional, within that, to lead the response.

The alternative school of thought appears to be that that isn't the best way and the best way is to have a clear lead multi-agency process and really, the chair or chairs of that process hold the ultimate responsibility and that line of thought says, if you nominate one agency as the lead, there's the risk that other agencies will drop off and will leave things to the lead agency.

Does the Department for Education have a view on the best of those two options?

A. So I think the model that I was trying to describe would be, you know, initial responsibility, if it went through a Prevent type system, there would be a lead, in the first instance, of deciding whether the significance seriousness that needed to go onto Channel or --

Q. Yes, can we get past that stage and look at the stage where, whether within Prevent, the case has been -- you might be adopted in Prevent but if it is adopted somewhere else, how does that pathway run, lead agency, or the process itself and the chair of the process carries the ownership?

A. Yes, so what is I was trying to describe is a first instance there is a lead agency but then, if it goes to the multi-agency, there isn't a lead agency because the interventions are wide and could fall to a number of different -- however, I do see, if actually the judgement, at that point, is that what you are trying to address are the underlying vulnerabilities of the child and because their behaviours are crossing over lots of different risk factors, then I can see a case, at that stage, for children's social care being the lead responsibility in terms of safeguarding that child, including the risk they pose to others. But because it is about addressing the vulnerabilities of that child.

If it is really clear that the only intervention that's decided on is mental health support, then, children's social care might then pass that responsibility on to health. But it is more likely, I think, that a number of different interventions might happen at that stage. So I can see the case for

children's social care being the most appropriate agency there.

Q. So it may be that what you are describing is a process not unlike MAPPA, where at level 1 there is a lead agency approach and that doesn't mean there won't be any multi-agency working because there may be multi-agency meetings but there will be one team who is nominated as the lead agency, and then at level 2 there is multi-agency working.

Are you describing that sort of process where, at a lower level, it might be acceptable to say: right, this agency is in the lead, they own the case, they may need to liaise with others?

A. Yes.

Q. But once you get into more complicated cases and higher risk, is it needs to be multi-agency?

A. Yes.

Q. Thank you. Taking it as briefly as I say, and it may be obvious, but since you are for the Department for Education, it is important ground to cover. We should understand, is this right, that the pressures and other responsibilities of DSLs in schools mean that realistically schools would not normally be a lead agency and they are not viable contenders to be chairs or co-chairs of a multi-agency process? They would need

to be involved -- education would need to be involved, but they are not viable contenders to be co-chairs?

A. I think that is right, yes. They have a lot to offer in terms of interventions but they are unlikely to be the lead agency.

Q. Thank you, and I anticipate that you would agree that the process needs to allow for those who turn 19 and are no longer children, but also needs to address the significant changes that can happen at age 16 and in education, that includes that they are no longer obliged to be attending school?

A. Yes. So, making -- the school makes it more complicated; is that the point?

Q. Yes.

A. Agree.

Q. Thank you. My next topic is a very short one. We heard evidence from Mr Emmett of the Home Office and Mr Abbott from the Cabinet Office -- and I think we have put you on notice of this -- of this apparent commission that was made for some early mapping work to be done, by the Home Office and the Department for Education, of the existing landscape of the relevant police and local authority-led multi-agency structures and interventions. The Cabinet Office have not been able to find the product of that work or indeed any written confirmation

of the commission. But it looks, from the paper trail, as though DfE, along with the Home Office, were tasked with that. Have you been able to find anything in relation to that?

A. Yes, I asked some questions and somebody from my team was seconded into the Home Office team quite early on in the process and he has been able to find both an email commission that he sent to other colleagues in the DfE in April 2025, asking them to comment on a first start that he had made, of mapping different multi-agency and other, you know, youth intervention(?) panels, et cetera, other bodies. So he started that. I asked him if he had a final product or knew where that would be. He was working in a Home Office team at the time. He's provided me with the latest draft he could find on his current system -- IT system but thought that there might be something more from the team in the Home Office, that was a more final version or otherwise.

Q. Just pausing there. Could you please ensure that those emails and the latest version of sits on DfE's systems are disclosed to the Inquiry, please?

A. Yes, no problem.

Q. Forgive me, I interrupted you.

A. That's fine. He found those for me over the weekend. Then I was going to say another thing which was it may

well be useful -- I am sure it will be, as a useful start -- we are also now working, in the context of ministers asking us to think about devolution, with MoJ and the Home Office to think about -- it has been driven by youth justice devolution questions but we are also doing a process of mapping what exists there as a piece of work to inform devolution. So it may well be that there is some useful work to come that DfE have contributed to that would also answer a similar question.

Q. Thank you. I think that is separate but we will obviously gladly receive anything in that second area as well that's relevant. But, Ms Dixon, the first area is a gap in current Government disclosure around an important area, which is the complexity of the landscape and the early work that was done. It may be that there's nothing more to it than that but we are keen to close that gap.

A. Yes, of course.

Q. Thank you. Multi-agency working, some particular aspects --

A. Sorry, can I add one more thing? Part of your question was: was there a clear commission? We have looked for that and haven't found it, but the two pieces of information, I will share with you.

Q. Thank you very much. So just some further aspects of multi-agency working, as it were regardless of what pathway solution is found. In terms of the involvement of education, Ms Swan raised the fact that, under the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, education have not been made a statutory safeguarding partner. Their status, if I have understood it correctly, is that they are automatically included as a relevant agency under the provisions of that Act and that's set out in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act policy summary notes of June 2026.

First of all, have I summarised it accurately?

A. Yes, you have.

Q. Secondly, could you explain what the thinking was in not making education a statutory safeguarding partner but instead, giving them automatically inclusion as a relevant agency?

A. I can't, but I can give you two points. So I know there's been debate, should they or shouldn't they. I have definitely heard that within the Department as the Bill was being drafted and the legislation was going through. I think the answer to that was that -- a bit to your point before -- it is very complicated, there's not one obvious person. So the ask was to ensure there was education expertise which might come from a number

of different places involved in multi-agency conversations but they weren't made the fourth statutory partner.

Q. Thank you. There is reference, in the open-source information on this, to the thinking having been that making education a statutory safeguarding partner would actually encompass a significant increase on the types of statutory duty that are held by education authorities and by individual schools. So that it is not a desire to exclude them from the process, more -- my words -- a benign desire not to overwhelm teachers and DSLs with further duties.

Are you familiar with that or is that something that's best dealt with by others, or perhaps by follow-up information?

A. Yes, I am not familiar but I obviously do hear in the Department an awful lot about schools are picking up things that don't fit somewhere else or the role of schools, in looking after the child and families' entire life, has grown and the burden on them and how they attempt to help but it is not statutory responsibility --

Q. Right, can we deal with it this way. If my summary is not accurate and there were significant reasons --

A. Other reasons, yes.

Q. Other reasons, could you please ensure that the Inquiry is informed what they were, from the DfE's point of view?

A. Yes, of course.

Q. If it wasn't a concern about overwhelming education with additional duties?

A. Yes.

Q. Because that's something, as I say, that has been raised by our expert cadre as to why they weren't. I'm very grateful.

A. No problem.

Q. Then on multi-agency working, again, if I can just come back to the concept of shared risk assessment and chronologies. We looked at that in what was said by the unions about the lack of an assessment tool specifically for teachers and DSLs. Looking at it more widely, one of the things that our expert cadre said in relation to this was that, in the short to medium term, short of having a risk assessment tool that is truly multi-agency, that all agencies can use and speaks to each other on the different Government systems, which may have its complexities, they said that a lesser but still important ambition would be to have a shared working chronology which should encompass key events -- not a 200 to 500-page, very detailed chronology, but key

events -- but also an accurate summary of the child's or young adult's key vulnerabilities, that shared and kept up to date.

That seems to have had widespread support amongst witnesses as a good idea. First of all, is it something that the DfE would support?

A. So I heard various views on it and a lot of people saying they supported the principle of it but a lot of people asking about the practicalities and how it would work. So I think that, yes, if it were for a small number of cases, perhaps if you follow my model, whatever model is decided, when you have narrowed it down to the cases that you are particularly focusing on, then definitely some sort of shared understanding of what the risks are and the timelines are. That is a very useful thing for a multi-agency meeting. If you tried to do that for the 650,000 cases coming across children's social care, then that is a very complex and big operation and I'm not sure it would necessarily merit the risk.

But for a small subset of cases, something that allows professionals to speak off a shared understanding would sound sensible to me.

Q. Are there any viable alternatives? Envisage each region having a multi-agency process of some kind, whatever

label is given to it, which has to bring together, social care, education, policing, potentially Counter Terrorism Policing. No doubt, amongst others, there may need to be psychological input, but coming together for a periodic review of cases against an action plan that's agreed. What other alternatives are there? Because there doesn't seem to be a single system upon which the case management could sit at the moment.

A. No. So you are right, designing something new would be necessary at the moment. I guessed that this work on the single unique identifier might lead you to a place, after a while, where that information could be linked up and shared, stored, but it is unlikely to be tomorrow. So you might need the sort of stopgap system first.

Q. Thank you. I want to turn to the question of interventions. I want to ask you about that generally in a moment. But just looking at current guidance, if we can go back to Keeping Children Safe in Education, please. DFE000263.

It is page 42 DFE000263_0042 please, and we have to look at paragraph 156 first. So this is in a section on "Opportunities to teach safeguarding".

And:

"Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that children are taught about how to keep themselves and

others safe, including online. It should be recognised that effective education will be tailored to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of individual children, including children who are victims of abuse, and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities ..."

So, pausing there. This seems to be speaking to the sort of child/pupil, population-level, general education. So giving all children the knowledge and information and tools to keep themselves safe online. But then more tailored and specific interventions for children who are particularly vulnerable. Have I read it correctly?

A. I don't think so. I think it is meaning that the delivery of the general education might be tailored to the specific vulnerabilities of the children, rather than it be -- so the content might be general, you might be teaching about online safety, but then you would think about the delivery of that specifically for the children in your classroom.

Q. All right. So that's tailoring it to the type of class and age that you have, or the needs of a particular class?

A. Yes, I think so.

Q. All right. Paragraph 158 explains that:

"Schools and colleges play a crucial role in preventative education."

I won't read out what follows, except that it says:

"... prepares pupils and students for life in modern Britain and creates a culture of zero tolerance for sexism, racism, misogyny ... homophobia, biphobia, sexual violence/harassment, derogatory behaviour or other forms of physical violence and conflict."

Then over the page, please DFE000263_0043. We see that there is a list and I wonder, Amanda, if you can make sure we have the whole of the bullet list on.

So the programme to tackle -- please understand, I'm not denigrating the importance of those that are on the list -- but one sees:

"Supporting children to develop the skills that form the building blocks of all positive relationships.

"Healthy and respectful relationships.

"Boundaries, consent and kindness in relationships.

"Stereotyping, prejudice and equality.

"Body confidence and self-esteem.

"How to recognise and report concerns about an abusive relationship, including coercive and controlling behaviour.

"The concepts of, and laws relating to, all forms of sexual harassment and abuse, and how to access support.

"What constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and why these are always unacceptable, emphasising that it is never the fault of the person experiencing it ..."

Then:

"Understanding online harms [in particular, so] such as sharing images, the prevalence of deepfakes, pornography and misogynistic influencers and when and where to seek help."

Of course, one recognises the risk of being Southport-centric but nowhere on that list do you see, even on the section on online harms, extreme violence material, gore, listed at all?

A. Yes. I can't see where it is placed in the wider document but this looks, to me, like it is going through, largely, the curriculum on relationships, health and sex education. Again, this was written a year ago, the world moves on, and there are a number of things that we are doing in the Violence Against Women and Girls programme that happened since this, including the misogyny work, and thinking about resources and whole-school approach there.

So, my point is things move on. I do not think there would be any objection to including more. Absolutely understand the job that you are doing,

looking for places to emphasise the reference. I'm very happy to take that away and add it to my list of things.

Q. It is not for me to judge and the learned Chair will obviously take account of the nature of this list. But one view is: well, you are getting into the more specific Mr Moss and you can always add specifics to it and we will look at it. Another interpretation of this is that, even in the Keeping Children Safe in Education updated version on 2026, there is still a bit of a blind spot to the risks of extreme violence content and gore.

I mean, if one takes the sort of warnings that we have heard from our seminars and from the NCA, from Tech Against Terrorism about quite how prevalent -- and for the Home Office -- a million hits on the leading gore sites in a month, this type of guidance is slow to catch up with extreme violence content and gore, which shouldn't overtake or overshadow very important aspects, like sharing images, the dangers of that, pornography and misogyny but need a place alongside it and it's not actually: that is a specific point, we can add it. It shows it is not being given sufficient attention at the moment?

A. Or certainly, when the guidance was written perhaps. So I think you are right, the majority of that list is about sexual or relationships and the spotlight we shone

on that area of risk and safeguarding to children a few years ago and we did a lot of work and are still supporting the sector, to have those conversations and increase their confidence. The last point goes partway towards into the online but you are right, it could say more and I am sure that teachers and leaders would appreciate more support in teaching those issues proactively but also having an approach -- I can't remember the way -- it was talking about the pastoral support and the whole-school approach.

So, obviously you can teach things in the curriculum but you can also have greater awareness and guidance and confidence of teachers and school staff outside of the taught lessons, to be recognised and there is a know-how to tackle them.

Q. If the answer to why this list is drafted as it is currently, with no reference to extreme violent content and gore, is: it reflects the curriculum, again, the challenge to that is: exactly so, and that's the problem, that the curriculum -- in what it teaches about relationships and online harms, that the curriculum hasn't caught up either with -- I'm not going to say "emerging risk" because it may be said now it is sufficiently clear. Do you think that is a problem, that the curriculum doesn't cover extreme violence and

gore material?

A. I am sure there is a balance to be sought but I think you are right, talking about gore and Com, that's all -- it is quite recent but also quite worrying and that probably teachers don't have the confidence, or not all of them have the confidence and knowledge -- it is certainly something that I have definitely learnt more about.

In terms of -- there is always the debate in teaching about difficult issues to children, like how you do it, at what age you do it, how much detail you go into and whether you are addressing the issue specifically: so do you have a whole lesson about gore, and are you presenting that to children? Or do you think about the sorts of things that might draw them into that and try and teach about those things, in terms of -- there, you might go in terms of online, what's an appropriate boundary or --

Q. But, Ms Dixon, forgive me, that is not an answer because that applies equally to issues like deepfakes and pornography; you have those challenges very clearly in those areas too and yet, they find a home?

A. I am not disagreeing that the world has moved on and we should reflect that. What I'm saying is, there will still be a judgement to think about how we support

schools, to be able to do that --
Q. Of course. There needs to be nuance and guidance about which ages it would be, say, for pornography. So when can we expect to see extreme violence and gore being something that is reflected in the curriculum and in this sort of a list in what is, after all, current guidance? I'm not taking you to a three-year-old document. As you know well, this is a 2026 guidance document. So when can we see it included in the curriculum and in the guidance as to what children need to be educated about in terms of online harms?
A. So, my areas of responsibility are Keeping Children Safe in Education, they are Educate Against Hate, where I can get materials there quite quickly that can support teaching and my training to Prevent coordinators, which may well be expanded depending on what we do -- depending on who that system is for. I can't give you an answer on the curriculum --
Q. So on those areas that are within your bailiwick, in your directorship, when can we expect it? Will that feature in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2027?
A. Referring back to my previous answer, when we do either a fuller update, or a -- my suggestion of the longer annex, that would be my recommendation to ministers, that we put more in there about these issues and

re-balancing it out. I can't -- it is a ministerial decision as to whether there is a technical update or a fuller update but I can and will recommend that we put more in some way out into the system and I can do that through Keeping Children Safe in Education.
Q. Thank you, and could you ask the question about wider curriculum? Because obviously there is teaching in relation to, quite appropriately, human relationships, relationships with consent and the matters that we see listed here, but in terms -- insofar as that gets into a wider curriculum issue, could you ask the questions in relation to that and ensure that the Inquiry is updated so that we can know how realistic it may be? I'm not suggesting for a moment that it needs to be something that has to have a lesson a week, or anything like that. But that extreme violence and gore has a home within this group of subjects that currently appear to be part of the curriculum but don't refer to extreme violence and gore material?
A. Yes, I can certainly ask where this list came from, was it based on the curriculum and what would be our next opportunity to update that and I know there's been a lot of changes to the curriculum and in particular to RSHE fairly recently. If that is not the preferred approach, then I do think the references I made to getting

materials out there to support schools, to have conversations about things to do with Educate Against Hate, is another and quicker option than updating the curriculum.
Q. Thank you, but could you also make sure the former is addressed --
A. Yes, of course.
Q. Then I wanted to ask you from your experience, because you have a senior responsibility in the area of safeguarding, including radicalisation in DfE. I wanted to ask for your personal insight as to what interventions work well in this area and what we need to be doing more of, in this type of a case, of violence fixation. Do you have some insights in relation to that, that you can share?
A. Thank you. I was hoping you would ask something along those lines because there's been a lot of discussion about how to get people into the system. But I think we are not confident, as a system, about knowing exactly what interventions work for what risks and behaviours cohort. That is very hard to do because you are always stopping something bad happening. But we have done some work with Counter Terrorism Police to think about some of the interventions that might be possible and tested. So, there are a number in the preventative space and

that is a lot of what the Department's role and the sector's role in -- and I have rehearsed a few of those before, you know, actually a child in school, having a sense of purpose, having a sense of belonging, having relationship with trusted adults and being visible is a massively protective factor. However, not all children are in school and not all children are responding to that.

So A number of other interventions including mentoring, including making use of the out-of-school settings landscape in terms of clubs and activities. Sometimes providing a gym membership or a sports club membership are a very power of set of interventions and not that hard to come by. So, then I think we have talked about RSHE teaching, but I think again, behaviour online is an increasing part of the puzzle. That is also not just for the individual, that might be for families, and I wanted to make the Inquiry aware of a website that we have been working with, what is now DCMS -- you may know about it -- but Kids Online Safety is a growing resource for children and families and is also quite a quick way of updating in response to new information in a very accessible way for parents. I can talk a little bit more about that, if helpful.

I talked a little bit about misogyny. I think there

is a big overlap between ideology, Prevent, and violence in terms of misogyny and that's what we are seeing, so we have been doing some work on that and providing some resources which we are testing in schools.

The last thing I wanted to say was, I think obviously unnecessary criminalisation of children is something that everybody wants to avoid but in some instances, an arrest might be a helpful intervention because it allows access to devices and to see what's been going on online. So we have seen cases where, actually that has been helpful in unlocking more of the risk and understanding. Obviously minimising criminalisation and youth justice interventions is the right direction of travel but they have got a purpose and a role and I think we talked about, in Phase 1, some of the questions about how do you mandate intervention? And that does offer a greater force of mandation or a greater nudge, if is there is that sort of sharp shock in the system. So I do think there is a place for that. So thank you for letting me talk about that.

Q. Thank you. So, perhaps two aspects is of that. One may be that it may not ultimately end in a prosecution but the opportunity of an arrest and a search to obtain devices to get better visibility, used in a discriminating fashion -- I mean "discriminating" in

the appropriate context -- in the appropriate case, you are saying that needs to be considered. So you need to have the policing, and sometimes Counter Terrorism Policing input, alongside what may be thought of as more supportive conventional interventions. You need to have those options for the appropriate case?

A. Yes. I think you do, and, in addition, again, if there is a lower level criminalisation, that may also be in the toolkit because it may prevent a worse thing happening and it may mandate service intervention, so I think --

Q. Yes. So even going on to a prosecution may be beneficial, would this be right, in the absence, at the moment, of any civil order that applies specifically to the VFI cohort --

A. Yes.

Q. -- you could get, through referral orders and other orders available on conviction, some powers of compulsion which would otherwise be lacking?

A. Yes.

Q. Again, used with a forethought, with an eye to proportionality and reasonableness but also with risk to the public, should we understand that what you are saying is you need to have the right experts round the table, to think about all those options and how they

might apply in the individual case?

A. Yes.

Q. Rather than just saying: you mustn't arrest a child, that must be absolutely last resort?

A. Yes.

Q. Thank you. I wanted to ask next about online harms but perhaps we can link that to the question of interventions by going, in your second witness statement, to page 10 DFE000297_0010, paragraph 42.

It is the bottom of the page, please:

"The government launched a call for evidence which closed in June 2026, to gather research how screen use affects children ... This will inform new, practical, evidence-based guidance resources for parents to be published in autumn 2026."

Then over the page DFE000297_0011:

"An independent expert group, co-chaired by the Children's Commissioner and the former DfE chief scientific adviser, Professor ... Viner, will review the evidence and develop recommendations. This guidance will focus on what safe and developmentally appropriate screen use looks like ..."

Then these words:

"... helping parents make informed decisions about screen use outside of school hours."

Now, one of the challenges emerging from Phase 1, but I think also from our case studies, is the difficulty of tech-savvy adolescents and understandably moderately less tech-savvy parents.

I mean, a narrow view would be that schools and colleges principally have to tend to online safety within school and college. We will come onto the monitoring and filtering, but there is this difficult area of what happens in the private/domestic home and who owns, at the moment in Government, the mitigation of that risk? Is that DfE because schools and colleges should be bringing in the parents of 11 and 12-year-olds and educating the parents about that risk? Or does that sit with DCMS, as part of online safety? Which part of Government owns that?

A. So there is a contribution from us both. So the DfE role is in teaching skills to children and young people to stay safe online and aware of what they might be seeing, disinformation. We have talked a fair bit about that. Schools will also talk to parents, usually at the beginning of the school year, off the back of Keeping Children Safe in Education. I certainly know from my own children's secondary school talks there was quite a big focus on their online behaviours and giving more confidence to parents about understanding it, setting

boundaries. But that -- is outside of the school environment and the education side, is not schools' responsibility or duty. I think they do step into that, for example, the DSL in my kid's school said: I am going to say this, it's not going to be popular, but my view is you shouldn't have your phones overnight in your bedrooms, children or parents.

I thought that was very brave and bold and brilliant of her. But the risk outside of schools is a DCMS-led one. The guidance that's referred to here is going to be the best evidence that we have got for children about screen time, rather than online safety; I make that distinction. DCMS obviously are leading a big programme to look at things I don't understand and the technical side of things. They are also leading the under-16s social media ban work. We have fed into that. We -- DfE have responsibility for phones in schools and the guidance not to have them. So, it is shared and the website I mentioned is a shared resource between us and what was DSIT, now DCMS, and that is attempting to support the parents' space which I think where the overlap is most significant.

Q. So, trying to put this into sort of practical concrete terms, what it might be thought was needed in AR's case was robust advice to his parents, to the effect of --

and they didn't even have parental control settings on, but -- to the effect of: we are very worried about what AR has been looking at or trying to look at, at school, and we are worried about what he's been saying to his peers and to his teachers about what he is looking at outside of school, so you need to have eyes on that and in order to do that, not, obviously: the school is going to provide you with this, but: in order to do that, you need to have the following things. So at a basic level, parental controls, but then you need to have software on your home system which will give you visibility of what your son is viewing online, and there are these options and these softwares which you can buy and install and these people who can give you guidance on it. Is that happening at the moment and if so, who is leading on it?

A. So, I suspect schools are doing more than -- not that they should, than they are responsible for, is probably the answer.

Q. Forgive me, but it doesn't sound as though it is extending -- I appreciate what you are saying and phones and I feel duly chastised about where I keep my phone -- but it doesn't sound as though it is getting to the level of: you need software to give you visibility of what your child is looking at because it is better that you, the parents, do that at this stage rather than any

sort of state surveillance, but just empowering parents to do that. Then they have to have the conversations with their children about why they want to do that. Then, if the child is evading it, that says something about risk. But that is a step on from saying: think about what your child is looking at, have these conversations. The school can give that, but once you get into the tech aspects and the software aspects of the kit to do that in the family home, it doesn't sound as though schools -- it's not a criticism but it doesn't sound as though they are doing that?

A. I think they would be overstepping their responsibility and -- I think it would be wrong for schools to be doing that. I think schools are nudging, at the moment, parents to tell them: you don't know enough and these are some of the places you might look. But I don't think it is right for that to be a school's responsibility because it could quite significantly backfire. Whose responsibility? It is very difficult, isn't it --

Q. Do you know if social care are doing it, do you know if policing are doing it?

A. I think if it is a chosen intervention because someone has come to the top of the list and that is the vulnerability and risk, then yes, I think that's most

likely happening in some places, perhaps not extensively and it could well be offered as an intervention but I don't think that's everywhere, and I don't know whose responsibility it should be. So, I guess this is where it comes to a multi-agency. It could have crossed a criminal threshold, in which case then the police might be offering that kind of intervention or that kind of an advice. If it is the vulnerability of the child, then children's social care might well be there.

I think some of the work that DCMS are doing is trying to step into the parent space, to offer guidance but also looking through the tech companies and seeing what they can do, in terms of shutting things off at source. But you are right. It is moving faster than -- you and I work on this area and we are not doing it right.

Q. Thank you. I mentioned filtering. I think we can deal with that briefly. So schools filtering. If we can look at page 9 DFE000297_0009, paragraph 36 of your statement. Two aspects of this. So first of all, you indicate there, that you are consulting -- you said in the autumn I think -- in relation to, right at the bottom of the page:

"We are consulting in the autumn about independent safety ..."

Then over the page DFE000297_0010:

"... certification of filtering and monitoring systems to ensure schools know which products align with the standards."

Has that happened yet or is that still a work in progress?

A. So I think -- that is still in progress. I thought it was interesting preparing for this because you pressed me quite a lot, in Phase 1, about whether schools should have a QA'd list of this and at that point, I was saying "no", but I think we are asking now the question to your -- to feedback from them and you: do they know -- it is the same question: are they techy enough to know what they are buying? Are they buying the right things? The responsibilities are there, set out there in KCSIE, Keeping Children Safe in Education, but is there more that we can do? That is what the consultation is asking.

Q. Yes, and part of that, as you rightly remind me, being pressed on that, is it feels like an area where central guidance can help, in terms of saying: we are not saying you should only buy one product, but these are leading contenders that are known to be good --

A. Or: these are the things you should be asking for from your supplier. Actually, these are a few extra sets of

questions that might help you buy a better product. Yes.

Q. So that was a reference to that consultation, the autumn. Again, could you keep us, the Inquiry, informed about that?

A. Yes.

Q. Then similarly, page 10, paragraph 39, so a little bit further down, you say that, ensuring that schools have completed an annual check of filtering and monitoring systems will form part of Ofsted's inspections from September 2027.

The longish lead-in time for that is because what?

A. Because they set their inspection framework and they have just -- they've changed it and it wasn't in it. But that is a direct change, from Phase 1 of the Inquiry.

Q. Thank you. Final topic from me is on knives and bladed articles. I want to start, in relation to that, just to look at monitoring. Could we look please at page 16 DFE000297_0016, paragraph 68. I touched on this earlier. I won't take too long.

But this is the graph which shows, from the survey that's done, the upward trend in knife crime as a safeguarding issue you and talk about, in the earlier paragraphs -- about there is variability during the

course of the school year, perhaps for reasons we don't need to go into. But the conclusion is, sadly, it is on an upward trend. Yes?

A. Yes.

Q. If we could look at page 17 DFE000297_0017, paragraph 72, the second way that you have eyes on, on that issue, apart from the survey that's been done, is where:

"'Use or threat of use of an offensive weapon or prohibited item' ..."

Is marked as the reasoning for a suspension or permanent exclusion. Again, the figures speak for themselves in terms of, after the Covid period, sadly a gradual rise in that as well?

A. Yes.

Q. Now, against that background, if we look at page 14 DFE000297_0014, paragraph 62, although the Department seems to have visibility from a survey and partial visibility from the exclusion and suspension figures, you say that the Department:

"... does not hold data on the name of students found to possess knives or bladed articles at schools in England."

Isn't that data that the Department should be maintaining and obtaining?

A. So, I was also briefed that there is a new duty for schools to report incidents involving weapons. So, that will go some way to answering that question, I think.

Q. Thank you. Could you include that information -- it is not a criticism, there is a lot of ground to cover, but I do not think detail of that is in your statement. If I'm wrong about that, I'll be corrected --

A. I don't think it is.

Q. I see your shakes of head. So if you could update us on that, I would be grateful. Then, bearing in mind the extent of material we have to cover, if we just look at page 12 DFE000297_0012, for the Chair's note, starting at paragraph 51 please, you deal with knives and bladed articles and you set out, starting at paragraph 51, a number of aspects of preventing serious violence.

If we go over the page DFE000297_0013, some of the specific points that you raise are 53, "a new Preventing and Responding to Violence guidance hub". Paragraph 54:

"For schools [with] the greatest challenges, the cross-governmental Safety in and Around Schools Partnership ('SIASP') ..."

If I'm pronouncing it correctly, and 55:

"... strengthening place-based prevention in the wider serious violence system by embedding learning from Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed ... Taskforces ..."

Which you say were school-led partnerships established in serious violence hotspots.

There is further detail in 56 and 57. Are there any particular aspects of that, that you wish to emphasise or update on, since your statement was written?

A. So there's also a programme, the acronym is APST, so what does that stand for? Not sure. But that is -- goes alongside the Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed Taskforces and they are a different set of partnerships in local areas, not extensive across the country. But we are learning from both of those, which have ended, what they have learnt and feeding those into multi-agency arrangements.

One more thing was the Youth Endowment Foundation were very keen for us to update our pupil premium guidance that allowed pupil premium spend to be spent on addressing violence and we have done that. So that's another point on that.

Q. Just pausing there, is APST "Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforces"?

A. I think it is, thank you.

Q. Thank you. Sorry I interrupted you.

A. I think we probably covered the other things. We talked about relationships, health, and sex education. We have talked about Ofsted framework. We have talked

extensively about Keeping Children Safe in Education. You mentioned the datasets, suspension and inclusion, the DfE Omnibus survey, which I'm not sure if it is -- was published last Thursday or this Thursday -- maybe I shouldn't say it, if it is this coming Thursday, because I might be in breach, but there is some data there on schools dealing with knife crime. So we can share that with you, if that would be helpful.

Q. That would be helpful. Thank you. Finally, on this topic, in the last of my questions, has thought been given, as part of the reducing violence efforts, to introducing the use of rounded knives in schools? So where it is appropriate, whether it is food tech or other lessons where knives need to be used, of using rounded tip knives instead of conventional knives? Essentially, to help normalise their use and to set a good example? That's one of the issues that the victims and survivor teams have asked me to be raised. Is anything happening on that at the moment?

A. I don't know. I can find out from the team that's dealing with knife crime.

Q. Thank you. The challenge, I think, which they pose is, given the benefits of normalising the use of rounded knives, and the apparent lack of any obvious downsides, would it be a good thing to do to start setting the

trend early? So if that's something you could look at and update the Inquiry on, I would be grateful.

A. No problem.

MR MOSS: So the victims and survivors teams and Youth Justice Board do have permission to ask questions. I think Mr Chapman had none. I don't see the Youth Justice Board -- you do? Yes.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you very much, Mr Moss. Yes, Mr Stein.

Questions by MR STEIN

MR STEIN: Good afternoon, Ms Dixon. Could you please put on the board Ms Dixon's statement at page 3 DFE000297_0003. Ms Dixon, I'm going to see if I can get to this as neatly as I possibly can. If you could have a look, please, at paragraph 8 on the page we are looking at. You are saying there:

"This system could, however, be adapted to more effectively identify children who pose a risk of harm to others."

Then you go on to say:

"Our sectors have a good instinct for spotting behaviours that indicate when something isn't quite right."

And the next part:

"With the right framework and training, education

and care professionals would be able to play a key role in a system for identifying when a child may be at risk of causing harm to others ..."

Just pausing there. There is a question that arises in relation to whether there is, therefore, the adequate framework at the current stage. Is there a need for legislation to, in fact, make sure that there is a statute that looks at the question of a child that poses a risk to others?

A. So I don't know the answer to that but I do know that legislation takes a long time. So if it was decided an expanded Prevent was necessary and the Prevent duty therefore needed to be changed at legislation, the answer to that question would be "yes". If, however, we are building on the current system, then the answer might well be "no".

What I was seeking to say in that paragraph there is that we spent a lot of time on what my view, or the Department's view, might be on definitions or big front door or whatever it is. I was seeking to say there that I feel like there is a good middle- to back-end system that my sectors provide and if it is decided that there is a different front end and some guidance about exactly what that is and what they are being asked to look for, I think that they could fall behind that very easily and

well.

So, I can give my opinion on the front end but I feel like my sectors could respond to whatever decision is taken and be trained and educated because I think, in their professional judgement and curiosity of safeguarding, it is always evolving and this is a significant evolution. So that is what I was seeking to say in that paragraph.

So for me, it depends on whether you change the front end significantly as to whether you would need a change of legislation. If you stayed within the current legislation system, I still think there is more that we could do, with additional input with some of the guidance frameworks that I have talked through in this session.

Q. So this appears to be right: the answer depends on what the eventual big front door policy looks like?

A. Yes, I think it does.

Q. Does the Department have a conception -- or is it working towards a concept of a big front door or, in one sense, do you need to await for the Inquiry, to make that decision?

A. So, we have moved, within the current system, to raise awareness and different behaviours -- share behaviours, related to this issue. I think -- and the Chair has

said that he is hopeful and looking towards his opinion about what would be the best system. We have looked at that across Government. We haven't gone for one yet. So I think this Inquiry is moving at pace. So I think we will wait for that.

I have tried to give my view but I'm also, in sharing my view, which is some expanded Prevent system, not closing the door to saying anything else wouldn't work. But yes, that's the plan, as I see it, from me and the Department and the Government.

MR STEIN: Thank you, Ms Dixon. Those are my questions.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you very much, Mr Stein. Ms Dixon, we have asked you to deal with a very considerable amount of material, spanning a lot of issues and I'm very grateful to you for your assistance.

A. Thank you very much.

MR MOSS: Sir, thank you. We are 14 minutes behind schedule. If we were to break for 10 minutes, if we were able to sit until 4.45 pm, the time estimate for Mr Owston is an hour and a half. So we are not far behind.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Yes, that's fine. Yes, certainly. We will sit again at 3.15 pm.

(3.06 pm)

(A short break)

(3.15 pm)

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Please remain standing for a moment.

MR LEE OWSTON (sworn)

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you very much, do have a seat. Yes.

Questions by MS WOODS

MS WOODS: Thank you very much, sir. Good afternoon. Please could I ask you to give your full name?

A. Yes, my name is Mr Lee Owston.

Q. I believe you have provided the Inquiry with a statement, which is at OFST000056. Could we have that up on screen, please. Thank you very much. We can see that is dated 6 August of this year and if we go to the final page, page 26 OFST000056_0026, we can see a box redacting your signature.

Can you confirm that the contents of this statement are true and correct to the best of your knowledge and belief?

A. Yes.

Q. Thank you very much. Amanda, could we go back to page 1 OFST000056_0001 of that statement, please. Looking just at paragraphs 1 and 2 there, we can see that you are employed by Ofsted and that you are the National Director for Education. Could you just give us a very brief overview of what that role entails?

A. Absolutely. So as National Director for Education, I'm responsible for all of our policies and practice regarding education inspection. So I write, with my team, the materials that we use on every education inspection. I write the training for our inspectors and I'm also responsible for some of the quality assurance around what our inspectors find on the ground.

Q. Thank you very much. We can see looking, still at paragraph 1, that you have held that role since January of 2024, is that right?

A. I have.

Q. Prior to that, you were the Deputy Director for Cross-Remit Education for a number of years and your background is as an Ofsted inspector and also working in schools and local authorities; is that right?

A. It is.

Q. Thank you very much. We are going to go through a number of topics today. I'm mindful of the lateness of the hour in the afternoon. We are going to start by talking about the role that Ofsted plays in relation to VFIs, moving on to different kinds of inspections that Ofsted conducts, looking at guidance on violence-fixated individuals, talking very briefly about information sharing, about structures for managing VFIs in future and finally, looking at some proposed reforms which you

have raised in your statement.

Beginning then with the role of Ofsted. Could we move down to paragraphs 3 and 4 on this page. Thank you very much. In fact, could we turn to the next page, looking at 4 and 5 at the top of the page OFST000056_0002. Thank you very much. Ofsted, we can see, is the "Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills".

Is it right that Ofsted's role is focused on the inspection of services for children, including VFIs, rather than the provision of any direct services to children themselves?

A. The powers that Ofsted have, in terms of their inspection or regulatory powers are all set in statute. So we work within the law. We don't set our own standards. In terms of what we hold all of those different types of provision to, that is all set by Government, predominantly the Department for Education but other Government departments also.

Q. Thank you very much. This morning we heard, Ms Dixon -- we don't need to go to her statement -- describe Ofsted as being the primary mechanism for monitoring compliance in state-funded schools, and for those following along, that reference is DFE000297 and that's paragraph 21. Would you agree with that characterisation of Ofsted's

role: the primary mechanism for monitoring compliance in state-funded schools?

A. Compliance generally, so Ofsted has a wide remit in terms of the quality of education and care and within that, I consider the safety of children and young people too. We are used as the main vehicle to report on the quality of education in care in all 98,000 institutions in England. We obviously provide a report for each of those institutions. But equally, from time to time, we aggregate the insights from our work, to shine a spotlight on particular areas, help the sector to improve, although we are not directly an improvement agency and of course, also help, I suppose, public policymakers in terms of where they might need to go next in terms of their thinking.

Q. I want to understand the limitations on Ofsted's ability to do that compliance and monitoring role, as you described. Quite a broad role, I think it's fair to say. Could we turn to page 25 OFST000056_0025 of your statement, paragraph 63. There, you draw to the Inquiry's attention the fact that Ofsted "only inspects schools and colleges for a few days every 4 years" and you say "therefore any reassurance given on inspection would be point-in-time and given every few years."

You say:

"If the Inquiry wanted more reassurance on safeguarding from Ofsted, it could recommend that the government takes forward its manifesto commitment to commission and fund Ofsted to complete annual safeguarding inspections."

Does the current frequency of Ofsted's inspections limit its ability to have oversight, in particular of safeguarding, and the handling of cases involving safeguarding concerns?

A. I don't think it does. I think what's set out in statute is that we inspect, particularly schools, every five years. We actually inspect schools broadly every four years, so much sooner than that five-year window. The approach that we take is not just about compliance, it is not a tick-box exercise, it also includes significant elements of quality, what is the quality of provision within an individual institution.

But it is, as I have said in my statement, every four years and for schools, that's two days out of every four years. However, we do implement a risk-based approach. So if an inspection shows that a school has an area in which they are lacking, or a weakness, any grade that's less than expected, then of course, we do return far more quickly, which would include where safeguarding is judged as not met.

So, in those instance, we would return every term for up to two years, to make sure that those really crucial improvements, particularly around safeguarding and safety, are kind of being realised and leading to children being kept safe and the provision keeping them safer.

Q. Does Ofsted have a view on the manifesto commitment you refer to here? Is it necessary to increase the frequency of inspections to provide more reassurance in that area?

A. We have obviously had discussions with the Department for Education in terms of whether that would be possible, what would be the parameters in terms of, I suppose, a greater commission or commitment to annual safeguarding inspections. But the DfE haven't taken those conversations any further than the preliminary ones we had about a year ago, 18 months ago.

Q. Could we turn to page 7 OFST000056_0007 of your statement, bottom of the page, paragraph 18. I want to understand the extent to which there is a way of Ofsted ensuring oversight between inspections where there isn't this sort of remediation, every term, inspection required. You say, at 18:

"Inspection activity is not the only route by which concerns about an individual or a school's or college's

handling of safeguarding matters may come to Ofsted's attention. These may also come in the form of a complaint to Ofsted or to the [Department for Education]."

Then over the page, OFST000056_0009, you say, going to the second line:

"... Ofsted only inspects schools and colleges every 4 years for a few days ... but any complaints or concerns that show there are likely systemic issues may result in an inspection outside [those] timeframes ..."

Who can make a complaint to Ofsted?

A. So we have a "complaints about schools", often referred to as "CAS", C-A-S, process. So parents, members of the public can make any representation to Ofsted through that process. We obviously have a triage approach. It does have to meet certain thresholds. For example, the complainant has to have exhausted all other routes available to them. For example: have you spoken to the chair of governors of the school, the headteacher, the local authority, the safeguarding partners, et cetera. So if it doesn't meet that threshold, we obviously write back to the complainant and say: that's the route you should take, first and foremost.

However, we have a waiver process. So if we read something that gives us cause for concern and if it is

directly relevant to something we would consider on inspection, then we can -- we call them emergency inspections or focused monitoring inspections and we would always react to those cases.

To give you a sense, we receive -- I think the exact figure is something like 16,700 notifications a year about schools. 70 per cent of those notifications have a safeguarding element to them and over the last reporting year, about 25 emergency inspections were stood up, whereby we go in and inspect other than at the usual time.

For all of those cases where we don't stand up an emergency inspection, we keep those on file so that the relevant His Majesty's inspector, whenever that school's inspection does crop up, has a sense of what kind of complaints have been submitted and they can take that into account in terms of the lines of enquiry that they might pursue on the routine inspection.

Q. You've told us about a threshold of effectively last resort, that all other measures have been exhausted. Is there also a threshold of seriousness for Ofsted to act on a complaint to receive? So I think the word you use in your framework is "systemic" issues. Does Ofsted respond to individual cases or concerns that have been mishandled, or does it have to be a systemic level of

issue in relation to a school or college?

A. So I think the important thing is that we are not an ombudsman, we are not an adjudicator, we are an inspectorate. So we don't step in and do the work of other bodies. But where there are serious concerns, particularly, I would say, of a safeguarding nature, or often of leadership or governance. If there has been a failure of the senior leadership of the school, then of course we would, through our regional teams, react.

Q. Turning then to the second topic. I want to ask you a little bit more about how inspections work. In particular, I want to focus on three types of inspections: education inspections first; then inspections of local authority settings; then turning to thematic inspections.

Starting with education. Could we turn to page 2 OFST000056_0002, paragraph 6, please, of your statement. You explain there that inspections are undertaken using a framework called the "Education Information Framework". So looking just at paragraph 5 at the top, the "renewed EIF".

Then at paragraph 6, you say it was introduced in November 2025. You describe there, in paragraph 6, the different areas of practice which Ofsted looks at in the course of an ordinary inspection. One of which is

safeguarding.

At the bottom of paragraph 6, you say:

"Generally these evaluation areas are graded on a five-point scale. The exception is safeguarding, which is either 'met' or 'not met'. Ofsted inspects how schools and colleges identify and manage VFIs through its inspection of safeguarding."

First, why is safeguarding treated using a different metric to other areas?

A. I think the binary judgement is relevant to the seriousness of safeguarding. You can't be a little bit safe; you are either safe or you are not safe. A school is either keeping children safe, or they are not keeping children safe. There is a very clear distinction. There can't be an intermediate level of safety because of the nature of Keeping Children Safe in Education and the criteria that is relevant there.

I also think a binary judgement, particularly when it is not met, gives a sense of urgency about the response that's needed from the school, the local authority, and of course that urgency, as I said earlier, leads us to more frequent visits to those schools until the necessary improvement has been seen.

Q. Could we turn now to page 8 OFST000056_0008, paragraph 19. I want to ask you specifically about

inspections in relation to VFIs. So you say there:

"Although Ofsted does not use the term VFI in its inspection frameworks or published guidance, inspectors do encounter cases involving children and young people who display behaviours that may indicate fixation with violence, serious violent behaviour, concerning online activity, extremist influences or significant risks to others."

You say these:

"... concerns are generally considered through inspection of safeguarding, including the Prevent duty, behaviour, attendance and child protection arrangements rather than through a distinct VFI category."

If Ofsted does not use the term "VFI" in its framework or guidance, but inspectors are encountering VFI cases when they inspect schools, is there another term which Ofsted uses to describe this cohort?

A. So first of all, our toolkit is based upon Keeping Children Safe in Education. So we try to ensure that we use exactly the same language, that we are not confusing schools in terms of the requirements upon them by law. If Keeping Children Safe in Education was to change, and introduce the term "VFI" then of course, our inspection materials would follow. However, just because we don't use the phrase "VFI" doesn't mean, as my statement

presents, that we do not look at some of those cases where they crop up on a school inspection.

I think they crop up in a number of ways. They can either be through our behaviour evaluation area, so physical violence against other children. It can be an element of safeguarding. But equally, there are other areas of our framework that do shine a spotlight on some of the -- I suppose the contributory factors that may lead to a child being violently fixated. For example, attendance looks at absence and persistent absence and severe absence, just as much as we look at bullying issues or how our schools are dealing with physical violence.

In our safeguarding evaluation area, in our materials, we do have a specific section on child-on-child violence. That's something we introduced with an update to our framework about 18 months ago. That's where you will see -- not reference to VFI, but to physical violence against others, including the use of knives or bladed articles.

Q. Does that mean that VFI as a cohort are not conceived of or spoken about as a cohort by Ofsted inspectors or Ofsted as an institution?

A. It wouldn't be a term that Ofsted inspectors use currently. That could change, as I said, if Keeping

Children Safe in Education changes. But I do believe that we get underneath those case, in terms of the lines of enquiry we will pursue on inspection. For example, inspectors have what we call an inspection data summary report. So they get that before they arrive at a school. Within that report, it talks about the reasons for suspension and exclusion, of which "violence against other children" is a category. You can see whether that's been a case for a particular school or not. You can see whether there's been any use of a knife or bladed articles.

So again, if that's relevant, you can ask -- pursue a line of enquiry at the point of inspection. So while we don't use the definition "VFI", we do manage to cover the cases where that will be so across the framework.

Q. Is the corollary of not recognising that as a distinct cohort, not using a specific term for it, that Ofsted inspectors don't receive input or training directed to violence-fixated individuals? I'm not talking indirectly through training for other cohorts. Do Ofsted inspectors receive training on VFIs?

A. Via the Prevent duty. So yes, they would have very specific training on Prevent, which links to the material that the Department for Education and others have produced. The Prevent duty training does talk

about the avenues for referral through Prevent, what some of the characteristics may be and that's certainly mandatory training. So you cannot inspect unless you have had that training and you keep up to date with that training.

Q. Could we turn to page 6 OFST000056_0006, paragraph 14 of the statement, please. Here in your statement you set out the specific standards against which schools' safeguarding arrangements are assessed. You will be relieved to hear, I'm not intending to run through them all, but I just want to ask you about the first few, if I can. You say:

"When inspecting schools and colleges inspectors will:

"(a) [is checking] key safeguarding requirements set out in the guidance ..."

We will come back to guidance shortly:

"(b) [is reviewing a selection of safeguarding incidents [to see] whether appropriate action has been taken ..."

In relation to that, can I ask, when Ofsted is looking at a selection of cases, do they sample for specific types of cases? For example, are they looking for cases of sexual abuse, case of neglect, cases of children who pose a risk of violence to others, to

ensure that the different categories of safeguarding are appropriately covered by the setting?

A. Yes, they would. So at the start of every inspection, we ask for a list of open cases or open referrals. We also ask for a selection of closed cases, or closed referrals. So that we can then sample, as you say, as broad a range of categories as possible. Again, linked back to my previous response about the inspection data summary report and what the particular contextual characteristics of a school might be.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Ms Woods asked you specifically whether, within the various categories of things you are looking for, whether one of those was a risk of violence to others. Is that specifically one of the things that you are -- to which you are directing your attention?

A. We don't go as far as to say specifically: always sample a case X, Y and Z but of course, the professional judgement of inspectors would be to have a range of cases, based on, as I said, the context of the school, the list of cases when they scan down and see what the themes or the context might be.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: I see. So there isn't a list of things which you are almost going to tick off, which you are looking for? You look at what's revealed and then decide?

A. Yes, we are very responsive to the individual circumstances of the school.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Sorry to interrupt, Ms Woods.

MS WOODS: Not at all. Following on from that, it is possible to envisage a school, for example, which is very capable and confident in handling certain categories of safeguarding but which does not have developed mechanisms for addressing children who pose a risk of serious harm. How confident are you, absent a specific requirement to check for those cases, that you would be able to identify that weakness in an inspection?

A. Overall, in terms of safeguarding, we look to see whether there is an open culture. So again, through some of that work around sampling the cases, we ask: what is the learning that you have taken from some of the cases that have closed? Have you learned from past safeguarding incidents in terms of what you, as a school, may have had to improve? We look to see whether there is a genuine belief that it could happen here. You know, sometimes we encounter communities or schools who believe: well, that would never happen to us, that's not the kind of demographic that we serve.

Again, that would be an indicator to me as an inspector that I had to unpick a little bit more

carefully what that meant, in terms of their systems and processes.

Q. Mr Owston, is that going to tell an inspector whether or not a school understands the correct pathway for referral for a child who poses a serious risk of harm to others?

A. Yes, and we would always ask a range of staff across the two days that we are there, how -- hypothetical questions, I suppose. So not always about just what they have experienced themselves but: what would you do in the case of child protection, or child-on-child violence?

Q. Could we turn to page 10 OFST000056_0010 paragraph 22 of your statement, please. I have been specifically asked by the victims groups to put some questions to you about the results of Ofsted's inspections of education settings. Looking at this paragraph you say:

"Ofsted's inspection evidence suggests that the vast majority of schools and colleges fulfil this role effectively and therefore identify and manage VFIs as expected."

You give some statistics. You say:

"Between 1 September 2023 and 31st May ... [of this year], we found that 39 ([that's] 0.5%) state-funded schools and 3 ([being] 0.3%) [of] further education

providers had not fulfilled their safeguarding requirements."

You say Ofsted does inspect some independent schools. You say:

"Between 1 September 2023 and 30 April [of this year], 32 ([which is] 3%) [of] independent schools inspected by Ofsted had not fulfilled their safeguarding requirements."

You acknowledge that is a higher rate of school compared to state-funded schools. What does it take for an inspector to find that a safeguarding requirement is not met? Is it an absolute binary; is one case being badly mishandled sufficient for a school to fail? Can you tell us a little bit about how that works, in practice?

A. Absolutely. So we always triangulate our evidence, so it is always be direct, first-hand evidence of observation around the school, play times, corridors, classrooms. Equally, we will talk to children, to staff, to leaders. We will even contact on the local authority and talk to them. Equally, we look at the questionnaires we send to parents and there is always a question on that around: do you believe the school keeps your child safe? There is an open text response box to that questionnaire we send to parents. Again, we

make sure we are carefully triage those responses because that could be where a parent raise as concern about the safeguarding or welfare of their children. Ultimately, if that evidence in the round points to a significant weakness in there is not an open culture, that their systems and process have a gap and that ultimately, children either have been significantly harmed or are at risk of being significantly harm, then we can't say that the safeguarding valuation has been met.

There is an element of professional judgement, that's why we send HMI into settings but of course, that will only be whether something is an administrative error that can quickly be corrected, normally during the course of the inspection. If it is not an administrative error and if children, as I have said, either have been significantly harmed or at risk of significantly harm, then that would result in a "not met" grade for safeguarding.

Q. So would it be possible to have a school where, during an inspection, inspectors identified a case of a child who posed a serious risk of violence to others and that case was not found to be handled or referred appropriately? Would that school nonetheless have been found to have met safeguarding requirements?

A. Not if, as you have said in that situation, if an inspector found they had not followed the right processes or procedures, or indeed, if the school wasn't aware that there could be a potential child that was violently fixated or aggressive towards other children then, of course, that would speak to the lack of an open culture and a lack of training, or systems and processes, or often a lack of leadership and governance oversight, to be driving those mechanisms in school outside of an inspection.

Q. You would expect, in that situation, that a school would be found to not be meeting its safeguarding requirements, is that right?

A. Absolutely.

Q. To that extent, do these statistics help us to have confidence that the inspections are able to pick up weaknesses in the handling of VFI cases within education settings?

A. Obviously there is more to be done because, as I said, "VFI" isn't a term that's currently in our materials or in the language of -- I would say actually schools as well as the inspectorate. But I would say, in terms of the parameters set out in law in which we can operate, and the capacity and resources that we have, in terms of how often we inspect, that we can give confidence that

if that open culture is there and we see that the systems and processes are working, that the school will meet the requirements of Keeping Children Safe in Education.

Q. Looking at those statistics, are you able to give us any more detail? Specifically, what I want to ask is in how many cases where safeguarding requirements were found not to be met, did those failings involve a violence-fixated individual, or a student assessed to pose a risk of serious harm to others?

A. I wouldn't be able to give you that information today. I can certainly look at those 39 cases to give you an indication in correspondence. I think what jumps out at me is obviously the difference between state-funded schools and further education providers. We have to remember that further education providers extend not only -- well, extend beyond childhood into adulthood and there are different requirements on adults to children.

The vast majority of further education providers do offer training only to adults and therefore also different thresholds there. The 0.3, again, I can share in terms of correspondence often refers to the 14-16 age group, where Keeping Children Safe in Education does apply.

The other difference is obviously between

state-funded schools and the non-association, independent schools, which are the group of independent schools that Ofsted has an obligation to inspect. But we need to remember that, out of the non-association independent schools, around 70 per cent are specialist provision. So they are schools for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and often those with the greatest and most complex needs.

Therefore, often in those inspections, we find, as I have said in my statement, it could be an unreasonable use of force, it could be unreasonable use of seclusion spaces. It can be failures to make referrals to local authorities or indeed, more child protection issues, or safer recruitment issues in terms of the checks that schools are supposed to do on the individuals, the adults that are looking after those children.

Q. Including, Mr Owston, it may well be failure to appropriately manage children who pose a serious risk of harm to others, and for that reason, I will ask you, if you could, to provide that information to the Inquiry?

A. Yes, absolutely.

Q. Thank you very much. Turning then to local authority inspections and I think we can take this more quickly. Could we have page 4 OFST000056_0004, paragraph 10, please.

You explain, in that paragraph right at the top, there:

"... Ofsted also inspects local authority children's services ..."

You refer to the framework, the "Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services ... Framework ..."

Is that ILACS?

A. ILACS.

Q. Moving down, we see also a range of different provisions are inspected under the "Social Care Common Inspection Framework", the SCCIF.

My first question is, do inspections of local authority provisions occur with the same frequency as education inspections?

A. It varies across those different provisions. So for example, children's homes are inspected every year because of the vulnerability of those placed there. ILACS inspections is on a more common cycle to schools and it is broadly every four years.

Q. Could you help us with the difference between the ILACS framework and the SCCIF, at a very high level, if you could?

A. So in terms of the SCCIF, the Social Care Common Inspection Framework, which covers a broad range of provision, so different groups of social care providers.

That is more akin to what we do in a school, in terms of an individual's response to the children in their care. Whereas, ILACS, so Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services, is more about the system as a whole; how well is the system working in this local area? Particularly for those children that are known to social workers, whether that is children in care, looked-after children. Those have obviously been referred and that referral has met the threshold of support.

Q. Looking at that paragraph at the very bottom of the page, you say:

"Although extremism is unlikely to be a routine line of inquiry during inspections of the secure estate and other inspections carried out under the SCCIF, the framework guidance makes it clear that inspectors should be alert to risks of extremism, including any signs of violence fixation."

You give us some examples of ways they may be looking for that, in that context. Can I ask, as with schools, is it right that VFIs are not specifically addressed in any of the framework guidance for inspections of local authority provisions?

A. I think, in terms of ILACS, so children's social care, obviously that is based in the legislation in Working

Together to Safeguard Children. Currently, that doesn't have an element of: do these children cause harm to others. It is more about, through social care, whether the child poses a threat or a harm to themselves and how we protect them as an individual.

I do know, however, that the Department for Education is consulting on whether, for example, extra-familial harm, so VFIs and others, could be part of Working Together to Safeguard Children, and of course, through that consultation, if it is, then obviously our frameworks will adapt and adjust to that.

Q. But is it right, just for clarity, at present, the VFIs are not addressed in the local authority framework specifically?

A. Not as a term, but if there were elements of violence fixation in the looked-after children or children in need, then of course, that would be part of the consideration of that inspection.

Q. Is safeguarding assessed on a pass/fail basis in a local authority context, or are different metrics used?

A. There isn't a specific safeguarding grade in our ILACS inspection but it is part and parcel -- because, by nature, the children who are part of social work, if you like, in the local area are all vulnerable; they have met a threshold of requiring support, whether that's

through child protection or other measures. So of course, it will always be a consideration of how well they are being helped and protected, as part of those services.

Q. If there's no specific safeguarding metric and in effect, the entire inspection is looking at safeguarding arrangements, in what way would you expect inspectors to assess or measure compliance with requirements for managing VFI cases?

A. It would come through in the particular grades and reporting of ILACS. So for example, just to give you a sense, there is a grade around how well are leaders following social care practices. Which obviously will come through Working Together to Safeguard Children. We also look at the experiences and progress of children who are in need of help and protection, and we look at children in care and care leavers as separate grades. Within those, there will be an element of care and obviously their safety.

Q. It may be that this is another one to take away, Mr Owston, but are you able to give us any sense of how many local authority settings inspected by Ofsted, in a similar period to that which you gave us for education inspections, have failed to meet requirements -- I'm going to call them safeguarding requirements -- in

relation to the management of children who pose a serious risk of harm to others?

A. It would be something I would have to take away and respond to you in correspondence.

Q. I would be very grateful, thank you.

The last category of inspections I want to ask you about is thematic inspections. Could we turn to page 5 OFST000056_0005, paragraph 11. We can see you say:

"Ofsted works with other inspectorates" and you give a list, on "Joint Targeted Area Inspections". "JTAI" is the acronym?

A. JTAIs.

Q. You say:

"JTAIs focus on specific themes relating to the experiences of vulnerable children and evaluate the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and partnership working in an area."

You say:

"Findings from JTAIs contribute to wider understanding of effective safeguarding practice and areas requiring improvement."

Then you give us a list of some recent JTAIs which has been given by Ofsted and other inspectorates.

How is a theme for a JTAI chosen?

A. It can be proposed by any of those individual

inspectorates, or Ofsted. It is obviously done in conversation with the Department for Education. It may be raised through the Secretary of State, for example, if there is a particular area of national concern. So it is jointly chosen and agreed. JTAIs are part of our inspection framework, so they are something that we do within the natural part and course of our work and we often want to shine a spotlight, as we did in the very recent past, around serious youth violence, to shine a spotlight on something that we know is a topic of debate and discussion and therefore our work would be helpful in furthering some of those debates.

Q. I am going to take you to that specific JTAI on serious youth violence in just one minute. Before we do, I want to ask you about the outcomes of JTAIs. So if that joint inspection finds failings in relation to safeguarding arrangements, what is the consequence? Does a JTAI operate like a research paper, simply presenting findings? Or is it more like an inspection of an education setting, where there is a consequence to findings being made?

A. A little bit of both. So it is part of our mechanism of sharing our insights on the system. As I said earlier, that is about supporting institutions or local areas about what works but equally, also what we have seen

systemically doesn't work. In terms of JTAI, obviously the report becomes a discussion piece, it is for policy thinkers and the sector. But equally, we can raise areas of priority action through those JTAIs. If we raise a JTAI that is relevant to, let's just say, constabulary fire and rescue, then obviously they would pursue that through their individual inspections of those areas, as we would in terms of our ILACS inspection, or others if it was something that was Ofsted related to children's social care.

Q. So an Ofsted specific inspection of a setting could result from a JTAI making a finding of failures, is that right?

A. It could.

Q. Could we turn to OFST000022. This is the JTAI you mentioned on serious youth violence.

We can see there this is a "Multi-agency responses to serious youth violence: working together to support and protect children" research analysis document. Published on 20 November 2024.

If we go to the next page, please OFST000022_0002. We can see, under "Introduction", that the report sets out findings from six JTAIs carried out between September 2023 and May 2024. It lists the participants in it. It says:

"... we looked at how local partnerships and services respond to children and ... families when children are affected by serious youth violence."

It goes on to say that this JTAI looked at the work of individual agencies as well as multi-agency working arrangements and it lists the participants.

Could we turn to page 20 OFST000022_0020 of this document, please. I don't want to go into too much detail here. The Inquiry that is this document and will review it carefully.

We can see here, there are some findings from this JTAI set out on this page. It starts out by saying: we did find some examples of strong practice and that is recorded there. If we move down the page, we can see:

"We saw some strong examples of the [Youth Justice Service] having good oversight of children ..."

It goes on to say:

"Some areas were developing, or had in place, arrangements for transitional safeguarding to support older children [recognising] the ... needs of young adults affected by serious youth violence."

So it is important to recognise that there were positive findings made in this case. Moving down.

Down the bottom:

"We saw too many examples in which ...

"Serious youth violence was not consistently recognised as a safeguarding issue."

If we move over the page, OFST000022_0022, too many examples in which:

"The wider needs of children affected by serious youth violence were either not recognised or not met."

Carrying on:

"Those making referrals were not always clear about the thresholds for referral for protection and support for harm outside the family, and were not clear whether action was taken or how to escalate concerns about a child."

We can take that document down. There are some pretty serious findings there about the way that youth violence -- serious youth violence is managed by multi-agency frameworks, including schools and children's services.

How do the findings of that JTAI square with the fact that Ofsted is finding the vast majority of schools are passing their safeguarding requirements in relation to this same issue? Does that mean that Ofsted inspections are not managing to capture the failings identified in the JTAI? Are you able to help us?

A. I think, in terms of schools, it links to what I think a lot of your previous witnesses have described, which

is the route that they often have to take is through Prevent, and if they take that route, there is a high proportion of those referrals that come back as not having met a threshold. There is no, then, obvious other route for schools to follow, other than if they understand that there are additional vulnerabilities for that particular child. So whether that might be child protection, social care, whether that might be mental health, whether that might be through the special educational needs and disabilities route.

From my experience, both as a leader in schools and as an inspector, the vast majority of people working in schools want to do the absolute best and keep children safe and I think, without more specific guidance on what they can do, they often try and find the best possible route to get a child known within the system overall. By "system", I mean children's social care, or SEND, or via the police. But I think what I think is clear, both from my evidence and that of others, including the first phase of this Inquiry, is that guidance does need to be strengthened for schools to understand, when all of these cases are coming back: what is it that I can do, as a non-specialist -- and I'm talking on behalf of teachers and leaders there, who are there to educate children but importantly, have this role in terms of

keeping them safe -- to ensure that children do get the timely support and intervention that they need to stop horrendous things such as what we are here for today from happening in the future, to the best of everybody's ability.

Q. Indeed, the next topic I'm going to take you to is guidance; I'm going to ask you precisely about that. One final question on this JTAI before I do. This JTAI was completed and published in November 2024. What was the outcome? What, if anything, was done as a result of these quite serious failings which were identified in the management of youth violence?

A. I think it certainly put a position into the national psyche, if you like, in terms of the importance. As I think some of the JTAI findings found, this is far more prevalent and influencing young people's lives than perhaps anybody thought previously. The one that stands out to me is that too many children, sometimes as young as 10 and 11, feeling that to carry a knife or a bladed weapon is the only form of protection that they can have in their community. I mean, some quite shocking things about the state of the nation, essentially.

It has supported some of those conversations with the Department for Education. I think, in part, that has led, amongst other evidence, to conversations about

Working Together to Safeguard Children, extra-familial harm, including VFI. So I think it has led to where we are today in terms of that consultation and what Working Together needs to include to ensure that extra element of not only protection of the individual child but of their -- how we safeguard others that may be victims of serious youth violence.

Q. I fully recognise that raising awareness and sparking a conversation is important. But were there any concrete actions resulting from the findings of this JTAI? I'm talking about inspections, or proposed changes, or actions within Ofsted to address the issues which were identified?

A. I think, within Ofsted and talking specifically about the education inspection framework, we certainly took the findings of this and now, we have a specific section in our framework around child-on-child violence. It specifically mentions work around child-on-child physical assault, use of knives and bladed weapons. So I think it has certainly helped improve our training for inspectors which then, in turn, enables us to ask better questions and unpick, on inspection, whether these are concerns or whether the school is aware of them.

Q. Turning then to the question of guidance. I understand, from your evidence, that inspectors are reliant on

guidance in order to assess the settings which they visit. In that context, I want to understand the adequacy of guidance in relation to violence-fixated individuals. Can we turn back to your statement, please, page 2 OFST000056_0002, bottom of the page, paragraph 7.

As you have told us already:

"When evaluating safeguarding ..."

So this is in an education inspections context, you make:

"... close reference to Department for Education ... statutory guidance on safeguarding ..."

Including KCSIE, Keeping Children Safe in Education, and over the page, OFST000056_0003:

"Working Together to Safeguard Children ..."

As you have already told us, you go on to say "Ofsted does not set those standards".

Does Ofsted formally assess schools or local authorities against other statutory guidance, such as the Prevent duty guidance?

A. Absolutely. Prevent duty.

Q. What about non-statutory guidance? What role does that play in assessing compliance for inspection purposes?

A. So our education inspection materials are based on both statutory and non-statutory guidance. There is

certainly more non-statutory guidance in the education sphere than there is statutory. Obviously, non-statutory guidance does come with the assumption this is what you should be doing unless you have a very clear reason about why you shouldn't be following that, but of course, there is an awful lot of it. For keeping Children Safe in Education alone is, I think, nearly 200 pages long and increases every year. Obviously, that bears the question on how can training keep up with new things that emerge or indeed, that constant need of training for the workforce, so that as you said earlier, even if you haven't necessarily experienced that in your school yet, it is something on your radar in terms of what could happen potentially in the future.

Q. Could we turn to page 8 OFST000056_0008, paragraph 20. As you said earlier in your evidence, Mr Owston:

"Ofsted does not currently use the term VFI but would adopt it if it were added to KCSiE and/or became widely used across the education and care sectors."

You say:

"Although neither [of the documents] contain information about VFIs specifically, the approach that Ofsted would expect a school or college to take to the identification and management of VFIs ... is mostly clear from these documents ...."

Then you say -- you suggest some changes and refer to what you have already told us that there is, as you understand it, ongoing consultation on changing Working Together to incorporate further clarity on extreme violence.

If neither KCSIE nor Working Together contains specific information about VFIs, does that pose challenges for inspectors in measuring schools' responses to serious violence posed by a child?

A. I think this gets to the heart of the question around the Prevent duty and whether that is for probable ideological reasons or non-ideological reasons and that is the route. The Prevent duty is the route that schools should take if they have either of those concerns about VFIs or physically violent individuals towards others in their school.

Q. You say here that the approach to be expected for the identification and management of VFIs is "mostly clear from the documents".

Does that mean that inspectors are having to interpret the documents, to draw out an approach for this cohort from information that applies to other areas of practice?

A. I think both schools and inspectors. I think the Prevent duty itself offers guidance in terms of the

referral route that you should follow. I think, if you look at the Prevent referral form, if you click on that and see what's included within it, I think there are some really helpful characteristics, or predispositions, that schools would like to, or should consider. But of course, that isn't included within the Prevent duty itself nor is it kind of outlined necessarily in KCSIE or Working Together to Safeguard Children.

So I think there is more that can be done to make it clear to schools, how they can spot and look out for the signs and symptoms that this might be something that's happening in their community and in their school. Then obviously, if they are aware of that, then they can do a better job in terms of referring the right individuals through the right pathway.

Q. So it is possible for schools and inspectors to interpret a way through, from a combination of different sources, but looking at these core statutory guidance documents, it is only "mostly" clear. From the perspective of your inspectors, just for the minute, is "mostly clear" good enough?

A. No, I don't think it is and I do not think it is good enough for schools but I think what the vast majority of schools do is put a referral via the Prevent duty and the national referral system there. But I think using

that is why so many then come back and I believe it is around 60 per cent that come back, because it is probably not the right referral route because it hasn't met a threshold. Then schools are left thinking: well, what do I do with that cohort of children now? Therefore, they find -- or try and find another route to get those children the support that they absolutely need.

As an inspector, our first and foremost -- because the route we have in England -- is to say: well, have you referred them through Prevent? What was the outcome? If the outcome was it did not meet threshold, what did you do with them next? Again, in all of my experience, the vast majority of leaders and staff want to do all they possibly can but often feel frustrated that they can't find the right avenue quickly and therefore, are trying to do everything within their gift to support these individuals.

After they have tried multiple pathways and perhaps it hasn't met a mental health threshold and it hasn't met or a special education needs threshold, or it hasn't met a child protection threshold, that's where we do ultimately get to the end of the line and we start -- schools start thinking about suspensions, they start thinking about managed moves. Sadly, as a last resort,

we often get permanent exclusions and as we know, permanent exclusions can then lead to children then going out of sight, or missing from education, because they are either electively home educated in some instances, or they go to unregistered provision, or they just fall off the radar altogether.

Q. Could we turn to page 20 OFST000056_0020 paragraph 49 please. In light of what you just said, you say here:

"... it seems to me that KCSiE could be stronger on how to identify children and young people who may be a risk to others at an early stage."

Would you, would Ofsted, support this statutory guidance, KCSIE, being amended to incorporate specific, clear information on the management of VFIs?

A. Yes, and I think there is -- I mean, we were privy to some early draft kind of question-and-answer guidance that, I think, initially plugged a gap in terms of what do you do if a child is neurodivergent or has mental health concerns. I think that hasn't made it into the interim guidance that was published between writing my statement and today. I would applaud that it is going in the right direction. But I think there is more that could be done. I think, as I have said, when I found wherever that draft guidance currently existed, I think it was on one local authority's website --

Q. We are going to come to it.

A. -- it wasn't part of KCSIE. I have also said, the national referral form for Prevent has a lot of information in it that I think would be useful, in terms of some of the factors that you can look out for, or the combination of risks, whether that's social isolation, whether that's neurodivergence, whether that's pre-dispositions to particular topics, whether online, or fascinations with things.

Q. You were talking specifically about KCSIE. What about Working Together? Do both need to be updated to incorporate this information, or would it be enough to simply to update Keeping Children Safe in Education?

A. In terms of education inspection, we definitely use Keeping Children Safe in Education as our main guide. However, we are cognisant of all the guidance that exists. I think in terms of ILACS inspection, that tends to use Working Together to Safeguard Children more, at the system level. So, I think, if it is going to be updated, it would be well worth updating both at a system and an individual provider level, in terms of the main guidance that is used.

Q. You have made reference already to some Prevent guidance which you speak about in your statement. Could I ask that we turn to page 21 OFST000056_0021 paragraph 54.

You say there:

"I would moreover like to see ...(reading to the words)... Home Office."

Which you say you found on the website of a particular local area training hub.

Could we turn to that document, please. That is OFST000048. We can see this document isn't branded it isn't on formal heading. It starts with the heading:

"Key principles of Prevent: FAQ."

If we turn to page 2 OFST000048_0002, paragraph 4, we can see the heading:

"Can an individual get support from Prevent if they are fascinated with violence?"

Following Mr Moss KC's example, I'm not going to read through this in detail but if we pause with it on the screen for a minute and then flip to the following page OFST000048_0003, I would be grateful. It sets out, as we can see, information on how to manage VFIs, in the context of Prevent referrals and thresholds, over the course of a number of pages.

If we could turn OFST000048_0004. Thank you very much. We can see another heading:

"Does Prevent deal with 'violence fascinated individuals'? What is the difference between 'fascination with extreme violence and mass casualty

attacks'?"

Going down to point 6:

"What about 'violence fascinated individuals who are not considered suitable for Prevent?"

We have a number of pages in this FAQs document addressing the very specific question this Inquiry has been grappling with, about where this cohort sits in relation to the Prevent thresholds. Looking there, just above paragraph 6, we can see a paragraph that starts:

"Our advice remains ..."

It says:

"Our advice remains: where there are concerns that someone may be drawn into terrorism, they should be referred to Prevent, even if the ideology is not clear."

When someone, whether a frontline professional or an inspector, is not sure whether or not a Prevent referral should be made in relation to a person within the VFI cohort, is that kind of absolute statement, that kind of clear guidance, helpful?

A. Yes, I think it is helpful.

Q. Is that the kind of guidance which Ofsted would be looking for incorporated into statutory guidance, to give direction about the appropriate referral pathways?

A. I think schools would certainly find that beneficial and obviously, if schools find it beneficial and know

precisely what they are expected to do, then, of course, as an inspectorate, we could hold them to account for those requirements. I think what I'm not privy to, obviously this document references some pilots, I'm not sure what the outcomes of those pilots were, or are, but as a package, I would say, while the updated guidance takes a really important step forward, I still don't think it is perhaps as useful, in terms of the separate referral pathways, as this Q&A document happens to be.

Q. Mr Owston, you have gone ahead of my next question. I was going to take you to the new guidance that has been brought out. Chair, for your reference, that is ILT000372. That is the new Prevent duty guidance for education settings. I do not think, in fact, we need to go to it.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: I agree.

MS WOODS: We have spoken a little bit about it this morning with Ms Dixon and, as you know, it was released on 2 October, so it's brand new.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Absolutely.

MS WOODS: Thank you very much, Mr Owston, in relation to that. One further point on guidance, if I may. Could we turn to your statement again, page 22 OFST000056_0022 paragraph 56.

You say that:

"Further guidance may be helpful for schools and colleges on ...(reading to the words)... condition."

You go on, a little further down, to say:

"Without such guidance there is a clearly a risk that ...(reading to the words)...need to do so."

You say:

"A fair academically robust statement of the research in this area ...(reading to the words)... such as Ofsted."

Is there currently any guidance for education settings about how to factor mental health or neurodevelopmental conditions into the risk assessment of children who may pose a risk of violence to others?

A. To the best of my knowledge, I don't believe that there is.

Q. In the absence of guidance on that topic, how does Ofsted assess compliance with that, or the efficacy of arrangements for that within a school or a local authority?

A. I suppose this comes back to my response earlier about what I know about leaders and staff in school, is they will obviously try and find another way to get the help and support that individuals need. I don't have any facts or figures to share with you but I am particularly interested in whether -- does that contribute to the

increase in referrals that we see for SEND, or why CAMHS, your mental health support, is overwhelmed in terms of the number of referrals that are received? I am sure there will be other reasons but I suppose I was suggesting there that there need to be some investigation about how all of those different referral pathways work together or not and then, how schools can be better supported, to understand what the best route might be.

I think there is also some work, which this Inquiry has already highlighted around, I suppose, can we operate -- I think the correct term, from research, is how do we reflect on our own biases or knowledge shields? I think some of the guidance and research suggests about when we know one vulnerability, does that stop us from looking at other potential vulnerabilities that might also exist? Do we overly compensate for one vulnerability, without recognising that there could be a multitude of other aspects that a child or a family might need support with.

Q. Is that also an area that might be supported and addressed by the implementation of guidance in this area?

A. I agree.

Q. If there were guidance on that point, particularly

statutory guidance, is that something which Ofsted could potentially incorporate into its inspection framework?

A. We could, potentially. I would always want to understand whether it is inspectable. Is it something that we can do within the legislation that we have for our inspection work? But also, I suppose, the time element of inspection. You know, it is a finite resource. We always have to think about can we physically get underneath as much as we would want to on a two-day inspection.

Q. Thank you. I want to turn, very briefly if I can, to the question of information sharing and specifically looking at changes in relation to information sharing following the Phase 1 report.

Could I ask that we turn to CHAIR000002, which is the Phase 1 report, volume 2, CHAIR000002_0375, page 375. We are looking at paragraph 159. Down the very bottom of 159 please. We can see, at the bottom, part of the Chair's findings there, sir:

"I consider there are grounds for a wider system of auditing to ensure that safeguarding information is being passed between schools, whether via DfE guidance, input from Ofsted, or local educational authorities ...(reading to the words)... chapter."

Those recommendations are on page 480

CHAIR000002_0480, looking specifically at recommendations 59 and 60. We can see there, recommendation 59:

"The Department for Education should carry out an audit to ensure that safeguarding information is reliably being passed between schools and should consider what further role Ofsted [might] play to strengthen protection in this area."

Then recommendation 60:

"The Department for Education should ensure (either by direct guidance or through Ofsted) that all schools are required to record safeguarding information in a system that is fit for purpose."

I want to understand, if you can assist us, what, if any, progress has been made towards these recommendations? I should caveat by saying we do have the Government's response to this report's recommendations, but from Ofsted's perspective, has inspections information sharing in schools or local authorities changed, following the release of the Phase 1 report?

A. I don't have that evidence available to me today. I know that information sharing has been something that we have repeatedly raised as a weakness across a number of our JTAIs and other work. So it is something that

needs to improve. I know that there is a consultation on information sharing that we contributed to and it has, again, taken an important step forward, identifying that information around safeguarding should be shared when pupils move between schools or institutions. I think that guidance has carefully navigated this sense: do I need consent for that information to be shared? Well, not if it supports others in exercising their statutory duties.

Recommendation 60, schools are currently required to record safeguarding information in a system that's fit for purpose. That is something that we check, as a matter of routine, on every single inspection. I can remember some inspections coming across my desk only recently where schools were operating a paper-based system which didn't allow any analysis, oversight, follow through. You can't share a piece of paper readily or easily with others. That institution got "not met" for safeguarding because it couldn't demonstrate that its systems and processes were fit for purpose.

I think most schools have some form of electronic recording system. However, schools are free to choose a commercial product that suits their needs and not all commercial products necessarily speak to each other

easily. If I'm transferring information from my system, to, say, yours and it's different. We do ask about points of transition: have you received all the information that you need?

Of course, back to one of my very early responses, inspectors are pre-disposed to ask about that, particularly where there is a lot of pupil movement in a community or in a school, to understand who have you received and how you are supporting them in terms of prior information that another school might have given you. Or indeed, what information have you passed on, if, for example, there is a managed move of an individual from your school to another.

Q. Two points arising from that, if I may. The first is you refer to changes in relation to information sharing and safeguarding in a consultation which Ofsted took part in. Is that the introduction of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 --

A. Yes.

Q. -- and the information sharing duty, which has come into play? The Inquiry has heard something about that and I'm grateful, we have a copy of Ofsted's consultation response. I don't think we need to go to it.

A. Thank you.

Q. But just to confirm, we do have that. The second point

arising is I think you said you couldn't confirm whether there were specific changes or actions which were developed following the publication of that Phase 1 report. If that is something you could take away and come back to the Inquiry with, we would be grateful.

A. I suppose the information sharing duty is only -- was it at the end of last month that came into effect?

Q. September 2026 --

A. -- so if it has made a change, in terms of we are finding on inspection, those inspections are unlikely to have been published yet, but it might be something we could refer you to in the future.

Q. Thank you very much. Our next topic is structures for managing violence-fixated individuals.

The Inquiry has heard repeated evidence about the complexity of the current frameworks for managing those who pose a risk of violence to others and specifically, VFIs.

Is that complexity something that impacts upon Ofsted inspectors, when they are inspecting either education settings, local authority settings, or conducting thematic inspections?

A. Yes, I suppose that's to a lot of the evidence that I have given this afternoon, about knowing the right referral pathway, trying to check whether that was the

right route to take or not and without sufficient clarity and guidance, all we can do is ensure, well: is that child in the system somewhere? Are you doing all that you can, within the powers available to you, within school, to ensure that this child is safe? Sometimes that means, on inspection, if we are not confident that a child or children may be safe, through the systems and processes that we can see, or the vigilance of leaders and governors, that we have to make a referral ourselves.

We do that, I suppose, as an ultimate, active -- my duty to keep children safe as part of my role; we would always try to speak to the local authority first, as the responsible body for safeguarding in a locality. But we would also then make my referral. So I, or my inspectors, in good conscious, weren't leaving a setting with some children that are at risk of significant harm.

Q. Let's turn specifically to that section of your statement. It is page 7 OFST000056_0007 paragraph 17. You say:

"Where disclosures are made directly to inspectors, or where inspectors believe that a school or college has not shared information that they should have with other agencies, the inspector is responsible for making any referrals that may be needed."

If an inspector in that situation is required to make a referral about a child in relation to whom there are concerns about violence fixation, where would you expect them to refer that case?

A. Inspectors?

Q. Yes. So if an inspector is in a position you describe in paragraph 17, they need to make a referral about a VFI, where would you expect them to make that referral?

A. I have actually been in that position myself as an inspector. I made that referral directly to the local police and I completed the referral pathway form myself. I also contacted the local authority to make sure -- going as high as the director of children's services, to ensure they were aware that on X inspection this is what I found. I was not convinced, as an HMI, that the school would make the referral themselves, although I made them that were it should be and therefore, I suppose in terms of a safety net, in case that school wasn't going to make the referral, that I also did that myself as the inspector.

Our guidance actually says that the inspectors themselves can make that referral or they can ring our duty desk where there's always a senior inspector available and the senior inspector can do that duty on

their behalf.

Q. Could we turn to page 17 OFST000056_0017, paragraph 44 of your statement, please. I want to ask you a little bit about the proposal that there should be a lead agency responsible for the management of VFI cases. Before we get into the specifics of who that lead agency might be, can I just ask, in principle, do you support the use of a lead agency for coordination of these categories of cases?

A. I mean, it is why we are here this afternoon. It is a complex issue. It involves a number of organisations and agencies and I think a lot of the ambits, or the spheres of influence, that those organisations hold would have to change as a result, including through legislation.

But I think -- from the evidence I have shared with you, I think that would be a way forward, in terms of ensuring that there is a dedicated pathway and that there was clarity in terms of when it should or shouldn't be used.

Q. So looking at paragraph 44 then, you say:

"On the question of whether there should be a statutory lead agency for managing VFIs, my view is that mainstream schools or colleges would not be best placed to discharge this role."

You say that:

"This view is based on Ofsted's insights and inspection evidence relating to ..."

You give some examples. If we turn to the next page, please OFST000056_0018. You give reasons why schools are not, in your view, best suited to take on the lead agency role including, second line, you say:

"... many will have neither the expertise nor the capacity [you say] by the time that many children are involved with children's social services, [CAMHS], Youth Offending services, and the police, a significant number would have ceased to attend a mainstream school or ... any school at all."

And you say:

"It would be a significant extension of the role of a stool to make them responsible for the wellbeing of a children who have not attended regularly for several years ...(reading to the words)... timescale."

If we go further down, you say:

"More widely, it should be remembered that VFIs (and other individuals who may be a risk to others and who need support from several different agencies) may not be of school age, and handling the convening role to schools could lead to a 'cliff edge' between child and adult support services if a ...(reading to the

words)... other agency."

You conclude by saying, down the bottom:

"In my view, in terms of expertise of both expertise and experience of being a convening agency for child protection ...(reading to the words)... in cases like AR's ..."

Some of the problems which you identify with schools taking on a lead agency role would apply equally to local authorities, is that right? For example, the cliff edge of transition to adulthood would apply from children's services. Local authorities, like schools, don't have enforcement powers to compel other agencies to comply. In that context, why, based on Ofsted's inspections, do you prefer local authorities as a lead agency?

A. So again, I will reiterate, I think it is a complex issue. I think in my statement I was trying to draw out the individual schools -- the leaders within them do not have experience of system leadership. They are leaders of an individual institution and of course, leaders and staff in school are educators, first and foremost. They are not experts although they are well trained in lots of the facets that we have explored this afternoon about some of the predispositions to VFI.

Schools, undoubtedly, are significant places but

they don't offer services beyond education. They try and secure other services for the benefit of their children but they don't provide them. I think whether that's children's social care or another system leader or agency, I think would be a better place. I think there are probably others who are better placed to know what that would be.

However, I would also just like to say that, more so than ever before, in England's education history of recent time, I would describe children's journey through education is more fragmented than it ever has been before. So we cannot be assured that an individual child will spend six years in a primary school and then five years in one secondary school. If we look at the stats alone, we have nearly a million young people not in education, employment or training. We have a rising number of children who are electively home educated. We have rising numbers of children in alternative provision and including unregistered alternative provision. So I think having one school as the lead wouldn't necessarily work, particularly for the most vulnerable, who we do find have a more fractured or fragmented experience of education these days.

Q. Thank you very much. If there were to be a role for the local authority, children's services, for example,

acting as lead agency in relation to this cohort, is that something that could potentially, subject to how the frameworks were developed, be inspected by Ofsted as part of their inspections of those provisions?

A. I think the Children Act would have to change. As far as I'm aware, social work is about harms to the individual, it is not about extra-familial harm in terms of how an individual may then impact on others. The Children Act, Working Together to Safeguard Children, of course, at that point, then our inspections would consider is that something that our ILACS inspection could pick up, as something that is important within the wider education and care system.

Q. In your review of the evidence of this Inquiry so far, you will have heard extensive discussion about the different options for managing VFIs moving forward. There has been discussion about the feasibility of using existing multi-agency structures, such as MASHs, about the creation of a big front door for triage and referral, or potentially an even bigger front door that plays an ongoing role in management. Does Ofsted wish to express any view about which of those structures should be preferred for the management of VFIs?

A. I don't think it is clear which of those structures should be applied. As I have outlined, I think each

would -- each would bring its own positives and negatives. MASH work in some local areas but not in others. Even where there is a multi-agency support hub, safeguarding hub, they don't necessarily all work in the same way or to the same parameters. So I think it is a very mixed picture and therefore, I wouldn't want to say one was any better than another and indeed, I think policymakers in Government are probably best placed in terms of making that overall decision.

As far as my statement and my evidence goes, I would go as far as to say I don't think individual schools should hold that responsibility, but those with wider system leadership, whoever they may be, are better placed to fill the gap that this Inquiry and the evidence would suggest needs to be.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: I was hoping you were going to have the answer.

A. Unfortunately not. I think that just speaks to the complexity of the issue but one that we all have to commit, if our own parts, to getting underneath.

Q. Sir, this is the final topic now, which is matters raised in your statement, Mr Owston, as proposed reforms, or matters you wish to bring to the attention of the Chair. I think we can take this relatively quickly. There are three matters I want to touch upon,

if we can.

The first is in relation to managed moves. Could we go to document OFST000052, please. This is another JTAI. I am not going to go through it in any detail. This is "Safeguarding children and young people in education from knife crime", specifically "Lessons from London", published in March 2019. So of some age now. We will, I am sure, return to this report in relation to Topic 4 in due course down the line. For now, can we go to page 20 OFST000052_0020, please, paragraph 70. It is a very specific point. You say, Ofsted inspection found here:

"We do not think that any single body has a clear picture, either in London or nationally, of the number of children who are 'managed-moved' to different schools, how long for and where to or for what reason. We also do not know what the educational outcomes for those ...(reading to the words)... in the long term."

We can see above, recommendation 3 is for data to be gathered on this point.

This report was published in 2019. Are you able to help us, is that still the case?

A. I think we do have better data. So I refer to the inspection data summary report that does identify to inspectors, I would say, all forms of pupil movement.

How many children have gone off-roll, how many have been on-rolled, in terms of arrived, other than at the point you would expect, beginning of school, end of school. I think the issue with managed moves is that they are voluntary. They have to be agreed between headteachers of both schools and with the child and with parents themselves.

In essence, from my experience of managed moves, while a new environment might give the child every opportunity to be better supported, it equally might not. For all of the reasons we have explored this afternoon about other vulnerabilities that might be at play. We also have something called local area access panels. So, again, protocols in local areas where, if you exclude a child, then actually you take a child who has been excluded from elsewhere. So again, playing your part from within a wider local community.

So yes, you are recognising, as a last resort, this child might have to be permanently excluded. But equally, you are giving an opportunity for a child from another school who has been permanently excluded to come and work with your school. So I think there is still more we can do there. Is that potentially an area we could explore further? Absolutely. I hear less about managed moves now, than did I, say, at the time of this

report. But they are still there and available as an option for schools, if that's what's deemed appropriate and everybody that I have mentioned agrees to them.

Q. Is there any mechanism for inspecting or providing oversight or assurance in relation to managed moves and is that potentially a role that Ofsted could perform?

A. We do. So again, if there is -- we always ask if there's, I suppose, adverse pupil movement? So again, identified through our data summary report, that will be a line of questioning on an inspection. Equally then, that would escalate to: what information did you receive from the school that was sending a child to you? Was it about their academic achievement? Was it about their safeguarding concerns? Was it is about open referrals that one school had made but perhaps hadn't closed in time for the managed move to happen?

Q. Thank you very much. The second issue is persistent school absence. Could I ask that we turn to your statement, page 22 OFST000056_0022, paragraph 57. You talk about persistent absence being a risk factor in the context of VFI cases. So we can see, at 57, if we go halfway through the paragraph and start at -- first of all, you start by saying the importance of meaningful engagement with education. Then you say:

"Conversely, where children and young people become persistently or severely absent ...(reading to the words)... reduced."

You say that:

"... education attendance and engagement can be important protective factors within the ... safeguarding system."

If we turn over the page OFST000056_0023 to paragraph 58, you talk about this particular relevance in the context of AR, and you give some statistics. Halfway through the paragraph, you say:

"Statistics published by the DfE show associations between regular absence from school and crime (the proportion of children that had been cautioned or sentenced for any offence that had ever been persistently absent was 81% and for serious violence offence[s the number] was 85%)."

We have those statistics at OFSTD000051. Are responses to persistent absence from education something that forms part of Ofsted inspections of education settings?

A. Absolutely. Absence, generally is -- while improving -- has still not returned to pre-Covid levels. It is something that, in Government and in Ofsted, we are rightly concerned about. It is an element of inspection

in its own right; attendance and behaviour. We think the two go hand in hand because if you feel like you belong, and that you can succeed and achieve, then of course, you will attend.

I think there is 1.3 million -- if I remember the statistic right -- children in England are who are persistently absent. That is a huge figure. One of the questions we always ask on inspection is: who is absent today and can you assure me that you know where all of them are? Again, depending on the response, that might be something that inspectors want to pursue further. I think there is also an issue with something called "severe absence", which is where pupils are absent for 50 per cent or more of their sessions. Again, while that's a much smaller figure, it is, again, something that if you are not in sight and sound of a school, then where are you and who is looking out for your best needs? Because I do absolutely believe -- and one of my roles as national director was to craft an education inspection framework with my team that really held schools to account for the protective features of education.

Obviously: are you engaged in learning? Are you achieving? Are you succeeding? Are you -- can you see that this is benefiting you as an individual? Are you

attending? Because you can't benefit from that unless you are there. Are you forming productive relationships with other children and adults? Have you got effective pastoral support? And: do you get a sense that you belong, not only to school but where it sits within your community? Those are absolute facets that we explore on every single inspection.

However, if you are not there, it doesn't matter how great the curriculum and teaching, it doesn't matter how great the pastoral support, you are not going to benefit from it. I suppose, it also speaks to my comment earlier about the fragmentation of education, in that we cannot guarantee that every child, and particularly the most vulnerable, will have the consistency of one school. They will inevitably be in alternative provision, a PRU, electively home educated, online education, or indeed, be managed -- a managed move across multiple institutions.

Q. I'm very mindful of the time. There is one further topic. Before we move to that, may I just ask you about the final line of paragraph 58 there. I don't want to keep us late, but you say there, in relation to persistent absence:

"The Inquiry may want to consider if further powers are required in respect of attendance for 16- to

18-year-olds."

What further powers would you suggest would be beneficial to address this situation?

A. Compulsory school age and staying on in some form of education, employment or training beyond the age of 16. But we don't have the same mechanisms, in terms of knowing the figures, being able to look at the patterns and the trends at a very simple level, just simply knowing what attendance looks likes for that age group and where those particular young people may be in terms of their education. Because again, that links to the nearly 1 million, or just over 1 million young people, who are not in education, employment or training.

Q. Final point you wish to raise with the Chair is at page 25 OFST000056_0025, paragraph 65. This is in relation to unregistered schools, or alternative provisions. So third line down, you say:

"I should mention that Ofsted has the power to inspect ...(reading to the words)... but have failed to register."

Again, in paragraph 66, you talk about the application to AR. You say:

"While the law currently requires that a setting must be registered if it provides full-time education to a child with ...(reading to the words)... registered

school ..."

You say:

"When you consider the expertise that would be needed to educate a child like AR ...(reading to the words)... alternative provision ..."

Is the point there that if a VFI is attended an unregistered school, there is currently no consistent Ofsted inspection or oversight to ensure that the school is complying with its safeguarding obligations and Prevent duty?

A. Absolutely. So, Ofsted, have a long -- I think the last decade -- have championed changes to the law to ensure that all alternate provision is registered and therefore, in oversight of the inspectorate. Particularly when we know that the most vulnerable children are often educated in alternative provision and therefore, again, some of the horrendous investigations that we have done in this space, where, you know, squalid conditions, adults who are not fit to be working with young people, a curriculum that none of us would want our children to necessarily follow. If we are not able to inspect those provisions, then we can't secure or play our part in ensuring that they are well educated and, first and foremost, safe.

Q. Can I ask, do you have any sense of the scale of the

problem? How many children attend alternative provisions?

A. I think we only have best estimate and I did write a figure down. I think it is around 10,000 individuals. That is an estimate because, again, there is no record, necessarily. That's us making an estimate, based on the work we have done over the last ten years. Registered alternative provisions, so it is registered as an independent school, such as a Pupil Referral Unit, or an alternate provision academy, that is around 15,866. It is the world of unregistered AP that gives us the most concern.

Q. Looking at the very bottom of paragraph 66, on the screen, if we can bring that up again, you say, this is:

"... concerns about the use of unregistered alternative provision to provide education to vulnerable children who have exhibited poor behaviour."

So is it right that it is often high-risk children with particular vulnerabilities who are outside registered education provision?

A. I don't think that is right but I think it plays into what we have discussed all afternoon, and it's schools trying to find an avenue best to support those individuals. Whether that is alternative education or whether that is more therapeutic approaches, for part of

the week, versus all of the week. But, again, if a child attends more than one institution, then obviously the risk is that they fall between the cracks or that information isn't shared as readily as it should be between all of those different players.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: And whatever it is, it should be within the sphere of inspection?

A. We would agree.

MS WOODS: In your statement -- we don't need to go to it -- but paragraph 68, for those following on, you make reference to voluntary guidance for unregistered alternative provisions. As the Chair said, it should be in the realm of inspections. Does the voluntary guidance go far enough? Does it solve a problem?

A. Well, again, it plugs a gap but it is voluntary. So you don't have to follow it and we are talking some of the players here that work in the shadows of the education system. So if they are not appointing adults who are suitable to work with children, they are using warehouses, industrial estates, squalid conditions for children to be educated, then they are not going to pay any attention to a voluntary set of standards. So it has moved us on but it is not quite where Ofsted would want to see oversight of this particular part of the education system.

MS WOODS: Thank you very much. Mr Owston, that is all my questions. If I just look to my left, there may be some Rule 10 questions from Core Participants.

Questions by MR CHAPMAN

MR CHAPMAN: (off microphone) I did have one in relation to paragraph 56, of Mr Owston's statement, please. OFST000056, page 22 OFST000056_0022.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Paragraph 56?

MR CHAPMAN: It is.

Mr Owston, I ask questions on behalf of the bereaved families, and I want to ask you a few questions about paragraph 56. This is the one where you talk about your belief that further guidance may be helpful for schools and colleges on how to assess risk and manage referrals, where children have or are believed to have SEND or a mental health condition. That is your view and remains your view.

One of those conditions you refer to is Autism Spectrum Disorder which of course we know was a feature in AR's case. There are two risks of getting this wrong, I suggest. One is that the child itself doesn't get the treatment that that child needs, agreed?

A. Agreed.

Q. And the other is and this was also as feature in AR's case, was that teachers and other professionals minimise

or explain away worrying VFI type behaviour because of a diagnosis or a suspected diagnosis like that. Is that right?

A. I think it is complex and ASD is complex in itself, in terms of how individuals might display within that diagnosis. I think there are a whole host of vulnerabilities and I think we have to be careful that we don't get into a position which this Inquiry and this statement hasn't, that we are not saying there is a causation there, but we do have to be alert to particular vulnerabilities like neurodivergence or ASD may be a component of VFIs.

Q. Yes and you have said very clearly there is no general association between autism and violent behaviour and I would wish to repeat that that is also the families' position. Nonetheless, back to my question, in your experience as an Ofsted inspector, has it happened that worrying behaviour, VFI type behaviour, has been dismissed by teaching professionals because of a known or suspected diagnosis of this type?

A. I haven't come across that. Certainly as an inspector myself, but also in terms of the evidence that's come across my desk from all the inspections that we carry out, I think this may depend on again which referral pathway are schools following and I think it can be easy

to be drawn into the SEND referral pathway and forget that there might be other mental health, there might be child protection issues, there might be other concerns, layered vulnerability, I suppose, beyond just ASD.

Q. I said there were two risks but I think you have stated another risk in your statement about the need for guidance.:

"Without such guidance there is clearly a risk that concerns about a child's or young person's mental health ...(Reading to the words)... need to do so."

That is a risk you have identified there. Is that something you have experienced?

A. I think, yes, there is definitely a nervousness in schools about what information constitutes a safeguarding concern. I spoke earlier about a common transfer file which includes academic achievement as well as any safeguarding concerns. Would SEND automatically present itself as a safeguarding concern? Well, no, not in its own right, but it is those other vulnerabilities, every individual child and an understanding of the -- I suppose, the interrelated nature of different vulnerabilities and the more vulnerabilities a child exhibits, potentially, the riskier -- the higher the risk in terms of what they may or may not be drawn into.

Q. You say there that:

"A fair academically robust statement of the research in this area ...(Reading to the words)... bodies such as Ofsted."

Is that something separate from the guidance that you recommend at the start of that paragraph?

A. Yes. I mean, in trying to navigate this space myself, as you can imagine, I don't think there was. I might not have been able to find it; clear, irrefutable research, if there is such a thing, in terms of helping schools or the inspectorate try and figure out and navigate how those vulnerabilities interrelate.

So, I think, both clearer guidance for schools at the point of referral and provision, but equally, nationally: what do we understand about this space that we can all learn from it and, therefore, the guidance can be the best possible that's available in the future?

Q. Presumably, the guidance should be informed by the fair academic research?

A. Absolutely.

Q. Who do you suggest carries out this or should commission this research?

A. That's an interesting question. I don't think it is necessarily for Ofsted to pursue because I think the issues are wider than the inspectorate. But it is one

that Government will have to grapple with in its widest sense because again, as we have explored, there are multiple pathways but there isn't a function to pull them all together, which I suppose is at the heart of this Inquiry.

Q. So it should be done but Ofsted is not going to do it?

A. We can certainly play a part. So JTAI can play a part; some of our other thematic inspections. But as we explored in the evidence this afternoon, that can cause further thought and debate, but we are not Government policymakers ourselves.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: It is a very big topic too?

A. Yes, it is huge. Our finite resource I think it is best used for individual inspections and that protective effect that we know all schools should be offering.

MR CHAPMAN: So guidance and academic research. What training do inspectors get on this topic about neurodiversity and risks associated with that?

A. There is a mandatory training programme. It covers both the Prevent duty and an awareness that there may be multiple vulnerabilities which could include various concerns around mental health, special educational needs, child protection.

We also developed a special educational needs training programme, in terms of sharing with our

inspectors what different conditions or diagnoses might mean in practice. But it is a huge area and there is always more to learn. I think this is where both staff in school and inspectors often feel that they can always know more because, again, they are not experts in all elements of SEND, but they need to know enough to be able to challenge those that they face on inspection about what referral route they have taken.

We do from time to time invite guest speakers from various specialist associations to speak to our inspectors to give a perspective on different elements and different conditions. I know from our work in initial teacher education, so those right at the very beginnings of their profession, that the number one thing they often ask for more on is: (1) elements of safeguarding because it is so vast; and also different SEND additional needs; so that they can feel best equipped to deal with whatever their first classroom, first set of children might look like.

Q. That was a very full answer but I have one more question which was in relation to a news report over the summer. You probably saw it in the Guardian. A controversy over this whole issue, which is a sensitive one. Where the education minister was reported as saying that the updated training document no longer includes reference

to children with autism. Can you confirm whether that's true or not?

A. I'm not sure what the minister is referring to.

Q. Would it help if I just brought up the news article. I appreciate it is not your document, but it is ILT000193. I don't know if we can zoom in on the text, please. This was in the Guardian, 5 July this year.

A. Yes.

Q. Do you recognise this article, for a start?

A. Yes.

Q. I thought you might.

A. So this was linked to an old training package on Prevent, that was long -- it was archived, it wasn't in use. In fact, we had more up-to-date training on Prevent that was active at the time.

In the old training package that this article refers to, we made a reference to some of the vulnerabilities and statistics from Prevent. Obviously, there are campaign groups and individuals that felt that that link was a causation, when actually what we were saying in that package was that it is another vulnerability that schools have to be aware of. However, it may or may not be relevant in terms of VFI.

Our current training package doesn't reference an individual, additional need. It talks simply about

vulnerabilities which may be a special educational need or disability; it may be mental health, et cetera.

Q. So is it our misunderstanding? Just looking at the second paragraph which says:

"An education minister has disclosed that an updated ...(Reading to the words)... discrimination."

The answer to that is a qualified yes or no?

A. So our current Prevent training doesn't reference children with autism at all. It references vulnerabilities, including various aspects of special educational needs, which may be a factor that plays into VFIs/Prevent.

Q. Thank you.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you very much.

Mr Owston, you provided the Inquiry with a very detailed report and I'm particularly grateful to you for the frank evidence you have given about gaps, deficiencies and things that need rectifying and it has been very helpful.

A. Thank you very much.

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: I think we have a shorter day tomorrow, Ms Woods?

MS WOODS: Yes, sir. We are expecting to commence at 10.00 am. May I express my thanks to you and of course to the witness, for sitting late this evening?

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: It is why we are here, Ms Woods. 10.00 am tomorrow morning.

(5.00 pm)

(The Inquiry adjourned until 10.00 am the following day)

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