

Witness Name: Paul Ainsworth (on behalf of Ariel Trust)
Statement No.: 1
Exhibits: 0
Dated: 30 January 2020

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

—

**Witness Statement of Paul Ainsworth,
On behalf of Ariel Trust**

I, Paul Ainsworth, will say as follows:-

1. Ariel Trust is not in a position to comment on many of the issues that are the subject of the enquiry. This is because we have had no direct contact with either complainants or victims of sexual exploitation.
2. We provide a universal prevention education programme that has been used by 20 primary schools in St Helens. Our main direct contact is with the teachers who deliver this programme.
3. We did conduct some consultation work in St Helens during the development of the resource's content and this involved classroom based work with teachers and pupils from St Mary St Thomas Primary School.
4. Ariel Trust is a Liverpool-based education charity that specialises in skills-development education. As part of a Merseyside-wide project we developed an online resource, 'SafeSkills', for primary teachers designed to support them to work with pupils to improve a range of resilience skills including critical thinking & questioning skills (particularly in relation to the motivations of others), risk assessment and positive communication strategies. The resource takes an approach based on academic evidence that suggest awareness raising alone is not sufficient to change young people's behaviour and that programmes should focus on skills development. The content was developed through an intensive co-creation process involving young people, teachers and staff from Liverpool City Council's Targeted Youth Support Team. The development of this resource was supported by funding from Merseyside Police and the five local authorities, matched by grants from Charitable Trusts & Foundations.
5. Merseyside Police also funded a programme of teacher training and evaluation across the five Merseyside boroughs, this included two teacher training events in St Helens on 1 November 2016 and 4 July 2017. These events were attended by teachers from 20 of St Helens' Primary Schools. The resource was positively

welcomed by schools, who felt it was both user friendly and that it supported key priorities.

- a. *'Clear and useful training, easy to implement into school.'* **St Theresa's Catholic Primary, St Helens**
 - b. *'children will have the chance to develop a skill set for safer behaviour.'* **St Austin's Catholic Primary School, St Helens**
 - c. *'encompassed into whole school safeguarding policy.'* **St Mary's Blackbrook, St Helen's**
6. Teachers who attended the training event were then provided access to the nine lesson programme of activities, access was only available to those who attended the sessions.
7. Ariel is committed to a process of ongoing evaluation and improvement of our resources. We have conducted two cycles of the evaluation of the SafeSkills programme, including one supported by specialists Dartington Service Design Lab. This evaluation has shown positive signs in terms of young people's openness and willingness to discuss their risk taking behaviour, allowing teachers to implement additional safeguarding measures (see response c below). We have also seen young people actively engaging in discussions about risks, e.g., adding unknown people online, and this leading to positive responses, in them removing some 'friends'.
8. Ariel can identify an example of good practice in one St Helens Primary School, Newton-le-Willows Primary, where the delivery of Ariel's SafeSkills resource has, in their view, supported the school to better risk assess and safeguard pupils. Our key contact at the schools is Maria Needham, the Pastoral Lead & Safeguarding Officer; even as an experienced teacher Maria has described the positive impacts that she feels SafeSkills has had.
- a. *"SafeSkills has made me less judgmental as a teacher, it allows me to listen more and to be better able to prevent risks rather than tell them they shouldn't do things"*
9. Maria described to us how the SafeSkills session encouraged young people to engage and openly discuss their experiences.
- a. *"All staff felt that the children may not have previously disclosed the information they shared within the 'SafeSkills' sessions. For example, many of the children spoke openly about their online habits and worryingly, 29 of the 57 (51%) of the children in Y5 admitted to befriending an unknown person online (often through online gaming), with little or no understanding of the hidden agendas that these people may have".*
10. *"As a result of some of the discussions within the SafeSkills lessons teachers have made internal referrals in relation to specific young people to the schools safeguarding team and Safeguarding alerts have been sent to parents."*

11. As well as talking openly about their risk taking behaviour with teachers in a classroom, some children went home and discussed this with their parents; Maria Needham went on to say,

- a. *“The school are also aware of a number of children who have spoken to their parents and those parents have come in to school wanting to discuss the issues further”.*

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed:

DPA

Dated: _____ 30 January 2020 _____