

ROCHDALE AIDS UNIT. 20th March 1991.

KNOWL VIEW SCHOOL - REPORT

INTRODUCTION

This report follows a training day at the school on Friday 15th March 1991. Trainers were Julie Southgate and Phil Shepherd from Rochdale Health Authority AIDS Unit. We had been asked to commence training around Sexuality with eight Social Care Workers. The request came from the Head - Mr Poulton via Kath Widdowfield P.S.E. Coordinator. Another member of my staff had previously worked with some of this group in June 1990 around H.I.V./AIDS issues.

Most of the day was spent with the staff voicing very strong feelings about problems at the school, in particular concerns about the safety and behaviour of some of the 36 boys. What emerged was a picture of what had until recently been a disorganised school, lacking co-ordination and co-operation, and a sense of frustration from undervalued staff. The last term has seen vigorous efforts by the temporary head to pull the school together, but time has not been on his side.

Most of what follows is biased information from one group of staff and is obviously not the whole story. Attempts by me to clarify what action if any has been taken by various agencies involved with the boys has so far been fruitless. Nevertheless I feel that the information is valid in as much as these house-parents spend a great deal of time with the boys and are in a good position to judge how they are affected by broader issues within the school.

Knowl View School is a residential school for boys aged approx 8 - 16 years. The boys have learning difficulties due to behavioral problems. For some referrals, Knowl View is a last resort. The residential part is split into four units; 2 senior (13-16 yrs) Norden and Egerton, and 2 junior (8-13yrs) Ashworth and Bamford.

Present difficulties came to a head in September 1990 when an intruder entered the school, two nights running and had some sexual contact with one or more of the boys. This matter is apparently in police hands. One suspects that sexual problems of one sort or another have been a feature of the school for some time. The present situation within the school as described by staff is as follows:

*One boy who is homosexual has contact with an adult outside the school.
Several of the senior boys indulge in oral sex with one another.
Reputedly five of the junior boys have been or are involved in "cottaging" in and around public toilets.
Men as far away as Sheffield are believed to be aware of this activity and travel to Rochdale to take part.
One 8 year old is thought to have been involved. The police are aware of the problem. What action has been taken is not known.
One "rent boy" has been removed from the school.
The suggestion that he may return soon has angered the staff.
Some boys have been "forced" to have sex with others.*

This degree of sexual activity, if it is factual, points to fundamental problems within the school. Most people, not least parents of children at the school would be horrified were these facts to be made known. Unless some incisive action is taken soon it is more than likely that this activity will become a public scandal.