

PURCELL SCHOOL OPENING STATEMENT TO IICSA

1. Chair, members of the Panel, I appear on behalf of the Purcell School for Young Musicians.
2. Parents entrust their children to educational institutions to provide academic tuition, a space for personal development and for fostering their individual talents. In turn, those educational institutions bear responsibility for the proper safeguarding of children to ensure, as far as possible, that no child within their care becomes a victim of abuse. Schools are meant to be places of safety. If an allegation of abuse is made, the expectation must be that the school environment is one in which that allegation is taken seriously, is investigated thoroughly and diligently and that no culture of impunity is allowed to subsist. Where mistakes are made and expectations are not met, it is important that past conduct is scrutinised. We must understand what went wrong, what could have been done better and what we can do to ensure that it does not happen again. Safeguarding must permeate every aspect of school life. It is an ongoing process that ought to be subject to careful and periodic scrutiny. This is what the Purcell School is committed to doing.
3. The Purcell School is Britain's oldest specialist music school originally established in 1962. From its current site in Bushey, Hertfordshire, it provides exceptionally talented young musicians from the ages of 10 to 19 with outstanding teaching in a supportive school environment. Although the School began life as a day school, it now offers boarding as well to its cohort of 180 young people.
4. Much of the evidence that is before the Chair and the Panel and which will form the subject of oral evidence over the course of this week concerns a time in the history of the Purcell School when, in the late 2000s and early 2010s, safeguarding at the school

was not as well developed as it should have been. The School always acted in the best interests of its pupils, taking advice where necessary and liaising with external agencies. It recognises, however, that there were weaknesses in its systems. More could have been done to ensure that there were clearer and more comprehensive policies and procedures in place, that these were adhered to and implemented as appropriate, and that staff had a deeper understanding of safeguarding in the environment in which they operated.

5. Perhaps one of the greatest influences on the strategic direction and culture of an educational establishment is the character of its headmaster. The advent of Paul Bambrough's tenure as Principal of the Purcell School has brought about a wholesale commitment to safeguarding. His key priority is to sustain a safe, happy and healthy environment in which students can flourish. He has been consistent in communicating this message from his interview for the post and his first letter to parents in June 2018. In his witness statement to the Inquiry, he acknowledges that his first term at the School made it clear to him that whilst many things were done well, there were many aspects of safeguarding which could be better managed.
6. It was in pursuit of this aim that the Purcell School commissioned an independent safeguarding review carried out by Jane Cooper, a former Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools. That review examined past case studies for lessons to be learned and reviewed the School's current safeguarding provisions making recommendations as necessary.
7. The fruits of that first review in March 2019 have been instructive for the School. They led to the development of an Action Plan and the implementation of a variety of new measures aimed at improving the safeguarding provisions and getting the School that much closer to ensuring that all of its pupils are happy, healthy and safe. This has included reconfiguring the senior leadership team and separating the role of Head of

Boarding from the new position of Head of Pastoral and Safeguarding; increased security arrangements governing access to and manoeuvre around the school site; safeguarding training for all staff; more rigorous recruitment procedures with an emphasis on safeguarding and clearer, more comprehensive policies.

8. By the time of her second review of the School in September 2019, Jane Cooper observed “*considerable changes in both safeguarding procedures and in the way that they were implemented and monitored by senior staff. Management systems for monitoring and control were much sharper and more effective with the result that the atmosphere and culture of the school had changed appreciably.*”
9. That is not to say that the School considers that its work is complete. In Jane Cooper’s words: “*The School has already done a great deal to bring about rapid improvement but in the next phase of development senior leaders should ensure that new procedures become firmly embedded, evaluate them for their impact on student’s safety, health and happiness and adjust them where necessary.*”
10. We hope that over the course of this week, the Chair and the Panel will be satisfied from the evidence before it that the Purcell School has reflected upon its past, identified what it can do better and has made great strides to embed safeguarding in all aspects of the School’s operation.

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