

## The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

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### OPENING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF WELLS CATHEDRAL SCHOOL

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1. Wells Cathedral School is an independent day and boarding school with 767 pupils aged between 2- 18 years old and over 400 members of staff. It is one of the oldest schools in the world, with a history tracing back to its foundation by the second King of England in 909AD.
2. Wells Cathedral School strives to provide an all-round academic and co-curricular education of the highest quality. In addition to its core academic, sporting and other co-curricular programmes, the School provides a specialist music programme for instrumental and vocal pupils, education for the choristers of Wells Cathedral and a specialist mathematics provision for gifted young mathematicians.
3. In his witness statement on behalf of the School, Head Master Alastair Tighe, who has been in post since September 2018, stated, *“Wells Cathedral School is totally committed to ensuring the wellbeing and safety of all our pupils. We see safeguarding our pupils as our primary responsibility, and work tirelessly to ensure that our culture, policies and processes reflect that commitment.”* Review of the documents disclosed to the Inquiry by Wells Cathedral School will show the truth of these words and demonstrate the enormous time and resources which the School dedicates to its safeguarding responsibilities.
4. The School acknowledges its historic relationship with Wells Cathedral, which demands close cooperation between the School and the Cathedral’s dedicated Safeguarding Teams to ensure the safety and wellbeing of choristers in particular.

5. However, despite the School's current commitment to safeguarding, we are acutely conscious that, at times in the past, abuse has been committed at the School by individuals who were entrusted with the care of children. In his statement on behalf of the School, Mr Tighe has offered a full apology to survivors of abuse.
6. He has asked me now, on his behalf, to say to anyone who suffered historic abuse at the School that his door is open. Contact details have been posted on the School's website for anyone who wishes to reach out, to speak about their experiences or to meet with Mr Tighe or other members of the School's current safeguarding team.
7. The School has worked hard to establish an open safeguarding culture in which pupils are regularly reminded how they can raise concerns and staff are aware that safeguarding is the responsibility of every employee. To assess how effective the School has been in establishing that culture, and to ensure that the best possible protections are in place to protect its pupils, the School has participated in multiple inspections and has commissioned independent safeguarding reviews.
8. The most recent ISI inspection was completed in September 2018. The report raised one minor point related to safeguarding – the Admissions Register had not been recording the destination school of some pupils who had left the School before the end of the Upper Sixth form. That has now been remedied. In all other respects, the School was found to be fully compliant with all welfare, health and safety requirements.
9. In addition to the regular cycle of ISI inspections, the leadership and governors of Wells Cathedral School commissioned an independent safeguarding review from the Education Safeguarding Advisor for Support Services for Education in 2017. SSE is a local government body which provides safeguarding support and training.
10. The authors of the report recognised that the School had been cooperative with their inspections with full access granted to the School's safeguarding arrangements and records, which was described as "*reflecting an open and transparent culture within the School*". The report made some helpful recommendations, including for improving the physical security of the School by placing additional locks on the gates

and clearer signage in the Junior School. It also concluded that, at that time, the School could more regularly scrutinise and update its safeguarding policies.

11. The authors concluded, *“there is no doubt from the observations and interactions with children and staff that the safety and welfare of pupils is taken seriously with lots of evidence of good practice”*. A further report on the School’s safeguarding culture in 2017 reached similarly positive conclusions.
12. In response to the SSE report, and in order to ensure that its recommendations were understood and effectively implemented, the governors of Wells Cathedral School commissioned a further independent review in May 2018. The review was undertaken by Wiola Hola, a former Ofsted Inspector and Safeguarding Consultant.
13. Ms Hola concluded, *“This review sees no reason to disagree with the overwhelmingly positive findings of the Somerset Safeguarding Review.”* She endorsed the recommendations of the SSE report, but disagreed that more regular review of the safeguarding policies was necessary: *“This review finds that regular and thorough scrutiny of safeguarding policy and practice does indeed take place through the work of the Welfare, Whole-School Safeguarding and Site Safeguarding Teams, by the DSL, by the Safeguarding Governor and by the Board of Governors as a whole.”*
14. The report found that an action plan to address the SSE recommendations had been drawn up and many items had already been actioned. It concluded, *“The school’s work on safeguarding is thorough and impressive in furthering its aims to keep pupils safe at all times through constant review and improvement.”*
15. Although these reports are positive, Wells Cathedral School recognises that there is always more work to be done to ensure that pupils remain safe in the school environment. It recognises that Safeguarding is in large part about ongoing monitoring and review.
16. Wells Cathedral School therefore welcomes the opportunity to work with the Inquiry to ensure that its safeguarding policies and procedures are of the highest possible standard and to reinforce what Ms Hola described as *“the culture of vigilant care”*

which exists within the School. In the interests of transparency and cooperation, Wells Cathedral School has made full disclosure to the Inquiry and has waived legal privilege over those documents so that the Inquiry can conduct its work effectively and fully scrutinise the School's safeguarding practices.

17. The School looks forward to receiving from the Panel, where appropriate, practical recommendations which recognise the particular challenges faced by specialist music schools and which help to ensure that the strongest possible safeguarding measures are in place.