

Witness Name: Sir Daniel Moynihan

Statement No.:

Exhibits:

Dated: 6<sup>th</sup> May 2025

## UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

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### WITNESS STATEMENT OF Sir Daniel Moynihan

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I, Sir Daniel Moynihan will say as follows: -

1. Sir Dan Moynihan is a teacher and Headteacher by profession having led two London secondary schools as Headteacher before establishing the Harris Federation as Senior Executive Principal and CEO and leading it from its inception in 2006.
2. **Harris Federation – An Overview**  
The Harris Federation is a multi-academy Trust comprising 55 academies located in London and Thurrock, educating 44,000 students. The Trust comprises 20 Primary schools, 29 Secondary schools, 3 All-through schools and 3 Sixth Form academies. Harris Federation employs around 5,000 staff.
3. In 2020 prior to COVID, the Trust comprised 47 academies, 18 Primaries, 23 Secondaries, 3 All-through academies and 3 Sixth Forms schools. In 2021, there were 50 schools. Just before COVID the group educated around 35,000 pupils.
4. Harris is a turnaround Trust specialising in the transformation of failing schools, usually in the most disadvantaged parts of the capital. Some two thirds of our schools joined in categories of failure, the remaining one third are new schools which we opened, usually in areas of disadvantage.
5. Around 40% of our pupils have an annual family income below £7,400 before benefits and so are eligible for free school meals, another 25% are also in poverty but with incomes slightly above the free school meals' threshold.
6. Harris has always been a highly performing Trust with academic results well above average,

124. Younger children found sustaining concentration to be harder as did those with special needs who would normally be assisted by a teaching assistant in the room. Engagement was better at the top end of Secondary school where proximity to examinations focused minds.
125. There were also problems for families with children in multiple year groups. They were sharing devices, sharing spaces in the house and sharing bandwidth. In many cases, the timetabling of sessions was difficult for families.
126. In our primaries we were mindful of the amount of time children were spending sitting in front of computer screens, so we ran what we called 'switch off Wednesday'. On Wednesday afternoons offline activities were shared with families to enjoy together - outside in a park or garden or in the kitchen making something. On the return to school, we replanned our design technology curriculum to fill the gaps children had missed during lockdown and ensured there was at least five hours of PE each week.
127. Prior to lockdown we had already instituted a centrally created curriculum and this proved to be an advantage during lockdown. Remote learning was a varied experience as some families and schools had better access to devices and connectivity than others. We had to constantly problem solve individual situations and try to provide training or equipment to solve issues. Many families and staff were not sufficiently digitally literate to be able to cope with running lessons remotely. It was also difficult for staff running sessions from home who might have their own children self-isolating and using devices, space or bandwidth.
128. For the Trust, non-specialists in IT had to be quickly brought up to speed and the supply of devices and dongles became a necessity. Teachers and teaching assistants also needed a lot of support in creating lessons and sessions using Teams software and navigating the Microsoft Platform.
129. Unhelpful challenges included the National Education Union Regional Representatives at one point demanding that Harris teachers teaching lessons online at home should be allowed to turn their cameras off for reasons of privacy. This was clearly not something we were able to agree to given the disruption to learning.
130. Furthermore, the National Education Union also demanded during the period that schools were open for vulnerable children and children of key workers that black staff (of which there are a number at Harris) should not have to teach in person but should be at home teaching online to children in school due to higher rates of COVID illness among black people.