



Safeguarding Briefing - 6th December 2021

[Download Arthur Labinjo-Hughes - School summary - Andrew Hall v.1.3](#)

Arthur Labinjo-Hughes

The horrendous and cruel treatment of six-year old Arthur Labinjo-Hughes at the hands of his father and his partner has disturbed many of us.

The Government has launched a national review and local inspection 'to determine what improvements are needed by the agencies that came into contact with him in the months before he died.' (See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-action-following-murder-of-arthur-labinjo-hughes>)

I suspect the review will conclude in the same way that so many have before. These outcomes are so familiar they are listed in Keeping Children Safe in Education, see paragraph 55. (https://www.keepingchildrensafeineducation.co.uk/info_sch_part_one_sg_info.html?zoom_highlight=55)

You will have seen the media coverage over the last few days, some of it unwatchable. Yet the visceral feelings we have experienced give us only a tiny insight into the fear that this little boy must have felt.

Many articles have been written and broadcast about this case over last few days. I've followed the trial since it began in mid-October and I thought it would be useful to look at what happened only from the school's perspective.

The learning reviews may well reveal more information, but this article comes mainly from court reports, with some additional reporting.

Many will ask, what were the school doing, but schools can only act on what they know, what is shared and what they observe. They are often conduits to other agencies; some are cul-de sacs. In lockdown, schools lost their 'super-power' - the daily check-in.

Arthur became an 'invisible child'. In normal times, his daily attendance at school (or lack of) would have identified his deteriorating condition, physically and mentally.

Before starting school

By the time Arthur Labinjo-Hughes started school in February 2019, he had already suffered dreadfully. Arthur witnessed terrible rows between his mother and his father, Thomas Hughes, and on one occasion ended up 'cowering under the covers' as they tore into one another.

After his parents separated, Arthur now lived with his mother, who struggled with drug and alcohol. In November 2018, he was in the home when she stabbed her new boyfriend in the arm. On a visit four months later, his father had physically wrestled Arthur from his mother to take him to a safer place. A week later in mid-February 2019, after a furious argument, Arthur's mother stabbed and killed her partner. She was remanded in custody pending a trial later that year. Arthur was told his mother had joined the army and gone away.

How much of this history had been shared with the school is unclear.

February 2019

After starting at school in February 2019, Arthur settled well. His school's lead for Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) told the court, 'He settled in really well. Really happy little boy. Well engaged with adults and other children. He was presenting as a really well looked after little boy.'

September 2019

On 10th September 2019, Arthur's natural mother was found guilty of the manslaughter of her 'on-off' partner due to diminished responsibility. (However, in August 2020, after legal arguments this conviction was quashed and a retrial was ordered; in July 2021, she was found guilty and sentenced to 11 years imprisonment.)

October 2019

The school said there were no concerns when Arthur returned to school after the summer holidays, but by October 2019 the SENDCo at his school told the court that Arthur had 'deteriorated', had become more 'reserved and anxious, not quite as smiley'.

(It seems that Arthur has now become aware that his mother has been jailed.)

Continuing with her evidence to the court, the SENDCo says that Arthur had become 'fixated with death, murder and guns'. He was also becoming fixated with his dad disappearing from his life, being taken away from his dad, his dad killing him as well as the news.'

November 2019

The SENDCo met with Thomas Hughes (Arthur's father) and Thomas' mother to discuss Arthur, as he had changed considerably at home. Later in November 2019, Hughes and his mother had a meeting with the school and a paediatrician, at which they spoke of their concerns for how vulnerable Arthur was, how he was clingy, babyish and obsessed with cuddly toys.

They were told by both the school and the doctor that these were normal symptoms for a child in Arthur's situation and they should respond with love and understanding and not to punish him or take away his toys.

The school made a referral to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). (This assessment took place in March 2020 shortly before lockdown. The school didn't receive a report about this meeting because they were an outside agency, said the SENDCo.) Earlier referrals had been made to mental health services and Barnardo's children's charity which the SENDCo said were turned down because Arthur was not displaying anxiety.

December 2019

The school's lead for SEMH, told the court that in December 2019 Arthur become really upset whilst rehearsing the school's nativity play. She said, 'We were doing the Christmas production with him. He got upset when the baby in the nativity scene was taken out of the crib.'

2020

In early 2020 the DSL became aware Arthur had told fellow pupils his mother was in prison. She recalls telling Arthur his friends were 'not the people who would readily receive that and know how to handle it' adding that she encouraged Arthur to speak to her about it.

February 2020

In February 2020, the SEMH leads stepped up her work with Arthur after his class teacher started to see behaviour which was 'an indicator for us to act on'.

March 2020

On the 4th March, Arthur was upset and 'sobbing' because his father had taken away his favourite teddy. The SEMH lead called Hughes who explained that this was because Arthur had been 'unkind to his new partner and her children'. She advised Hughes to reassure Arthur he was 'loved despite all of the changes that were going on'. When she called Arthur's father again on 18th March, there was no reply.

On the 23rd March, the UK went into lockdown and schools were closed except for children of key workers and vulnerable children (those with a social worker or an EHCP).

After Arthur's mother had been remanded in February 2019, Thomas Hughes took custody of his son and moved into an annex at his mother's house. When lockdown began, Arthur's father took him to live with his new partner (and her children) at her home.

By March 2020 Arthur's grandmother told the school there had been a breakdown in the relationship between her and Thomas Hughes and that she no longer had the access to Arthur that she had previously. The SENDCo said in court that she was not aware Hughes had started relationship with a new partner.

April 2020

Arthur is now out-of-school. There are two weeks of 'remote school', then two weeks of Easter holidays. The school opens again on Monday 20th April 2020.

The DSL tells the court that when school reopens after the holidays, Arthur's paternal grandmother, telephones to say she has made a report to the MASH (multi-agency safeguarding hub) about Arthur.

The DSL told the court that '[Arthur's grandmother] said she had seen Arthur and he had bruises, I think on his back. She said she was concerned that the relationship was not a positive one...She expressed that she felt [the relationship]...between Thomas and the partner was coercive.'

The school's DSL told the court she received feedback from social services after they visited the family: 'They had seen Arthur. Said the injuries were from boisterous play. The family relationship seemed okay. They had no concerns.'

The DSL said 'all parties' were happy for the school to continue to try and support the family afterwards. 'We just felt we could continue to offer support. It was a difficult situation for Arthur to be in, we wanted to offer support, just check in and see if he needed anything.'

It was agreed for the school to have 'weekly contact' with Thomas Hughes after the external agencies 'closed the case'. The DSL states that Hughes declined 'life story work' because he felt Arthur was not ready.

Over the next few weeks the school contacted Arthur's father by telephone and Class DoJo (a school communication platform).

April 21st - Phone Call from SEMH Lead- Hughes: Arthur was 'playing happily in the garden'

April 30th - Class DoJo - Hughes: 'Arthur has been grand. He's found it quite challenging not being at school and not having that routine.'

May 2020

May 7th - Class DoJo - Hughes: '[Arthur] just wants to see his friends now as he's missing them quite a bit.'

May 12th - Phone Call from SEMH Lead - Hughes: 'Arthur wasn't getting on with the other children, he was being rude to Mr Hughes' partner.' The SEMH lead says she told Hughes how difficult the situation would have been for Arthur and encouraged him to spend one-to-one time with him. She also spoke to Arthur on that occasion 'but it was just one-word answers'.

May 19th - Phone Call from SEMH Lead - phone not answered

May 26th - Phone Call from SEMH Lead - phone not answered

May 27th - Email from SEMH Lead - She says that Hughes replied explaining he had difficulty with his phone and also said: "Arthur is doing okay still experiencing difficulties with him and behaviour. Trying different ways to get him out of it and find out what's bothering him. Apart from these issues he's been playing cricket and football in the garden."

The school's SEMH Lead told the court that 'she was aware Thomas Hughes had fallen out with his mother, and that the impact on Arthur being away from his grandmother and extended family would have been 'massive'.

June 2020

Arthur's primary school opened to all children on Monday 8th June 2020, but Arthur did not attend. The school's pastoral support co-ordinator (PSC) told the court contacted his father: 'Hughes said Arthur had had a 'bad night' and had not slept, but that he might return on either June 9th or 10th. When she spoke to him again on the 10th June, Hughes was 'more positive', but that on 11th June he 'raised concerns' about Arthur's behaviour.

The pastoral co-ordinator recalls the further conversations she had with Hughes had then explained Arthur had been having eating issues. 'He did stress Arthur had lost a lot of weight and did say to me on the phone 'I just want my chunky monkey back'.

'He was worried if Arthur returned to school he would be sick or faint and that also he wouldn't eat because of the eating issues they had been having at home.

The pastoral co-ordinator adds: "He said he would see how Arthur goes over the weekend and think about him returning on Monday or Tuesday (June 15 or 16) of the following week.'

Arthur never returned to school. He died in hospital on 17th June 2020 from 'unsurvivable' head injuries.

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We all know Arthurs, Peters, Daniels and Victorias; along with all the many others killed by their parent and carers.

Arthur Labinjo-Hughes was killed by his father and his partner. They were deceitful and hid the truth. They were violent and cruel people. We will never understand that.

In sentencing, Mr Justice Wall said: 'This is one of the most distressing and disturbing cases with which I have had to deal.'

He continued, 'In the last three months of Arthur's life he was subjected to the most unimaginable suffering at the hands of both of you. You both told lies to conceal what was happening in that house – you, Tustin, to social services who came to visit in April and you, Hughes, to the school when Arthur did not return after lockdown.'

(See here: <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/R-v-Tustin-and-Hughes-sentencing-031221-4.pdf>)

If you are affected by the content of this summary, please access support. One excellent source of support is the **Education Support Helpline 08000 562 561** www.educationsupport.org.uk

Thank you for all the work you do in keeping children as safe as possible. We will never know how many child deaths or serious harms are avoided by the work that you do. God bless you all.

Andrew

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