



## **Safeguarding Briefing - 14th March 2022**

Dear ,

### **Child Q - Safeguarding Practice Review**

I was shocked this week, as you will have been, to read about the case of Child Q who was strip searched by two female Metropolitan Police Officers in a school, even whilst being on her period. The review report by City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership published this week makes dreadful reading. There are a number of shocking aspects to the case, not least that no-one from the police or the school spoke to a parent. Child Q was so distressed about what had happened that her mother took her to the GP, and it was the GP that contacted Children's Services.

### **Strip search of Child Q should never have happened**

The review report is 'clear that the strip search of Child Q should never have happened and there was no reasonable justification for it.' The report found that the school was fully compliant with expected practice standards when responding to its concerns about Child Q smelling of cannabis and its subsequent search of Child Q's coat, bag, scarf and shoes. 'This demonstrated good curiosity by involved staff and an alertness to potential indicators of risk.'

It was what happened next where the situation worsened. As far as the review team are aware there has never been another incident of a strip search taking place in a school in these London boroughs.

### **School staff 'deferred to the authority of the police'**

The review found that the school staff 'deferred to the authority of the police on their arrival at school. They should have been more challenging to the police, seeking clarity about the actions they intended to take. All practitioners need to be mindful of their duties to uphold the best interests of children.'

In my career working with teenagers who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties, there have been occasions when I've asked for the police to come into school to support us. There is of course a tendency to defer to the police, they have police powers and I trust them to use them appropriately. However, I think the case of Child Q does ask us to reflect on that. One member of staff from the school concerned to the review, 'In hindsight I put my trust in the law; I know now that I need to understand the law better... For example, insisting on staying with a student at all times.'

### **Appropriate Adult**

Another aspect that comes through for me, is the role of 'Appropriate Adult'. A role that I now realise I didn't fully understand. Appropriate Adults are there 'to safeguard the interests, rights, entitlements and welfare of children and vulnerable people who are suspected of a criminal offence, by ensuring that they are treated in a fair and just manner and are able to participate effectively.' Appropriate Adults are not merely passive observers, they are 'expected to be an active participant. In order to be effective, they need to be assertive and speak up.'

### **Racism**

The review evaluated the actions of professionals involved on the day of the strip search in the context of Child Q's ethnicity and whether she was treated differently because she is Black. The report concluded: 'the disproportionate decision to strip search Child Q is unlikely to have been disconnected from her ethnicity and her background as a child growing up on an estate in Hackney.' As complex as racism is, one significant feature here is 'adultification bias' - where children from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities are perceived as being more 'streetwise', more 'grown up', less innocent and less vulnerable than other children. This particularly affects Black children, who might be viewed primarily as a threat rather than as a child who needs support'.