



## Child Q Safeguarding Practice Review June 2022

### 1. What happened to Child Q?

Child Q, a 15 year old, Black female child, was strip searched on her school premises in Hackney by police officers. The search involved the exposure of Child Q's intimate body parts without an appropriate adult present and with the knowledge that Child Q was menstruating.

The strip search followed concerns expressed by teachers that Child Q was smelling strongly of cannabis and may be carrying drugs. No drugs were found during the search.

### 2. Safeguarding concerns

It was found that the best interests of the child were not upheld by those who should have been protecting her. If children smell of or are suspected of carrying drugs, it requires a safeguarding response to ascertain the contextual risks to that child. Adultification bias (whether conscious or not) is believed to have been a significant factor in the decisions that led to a largely criminal justice and disciplinary response over a child protection response. The child's vulnerabilities were not considered, and appropriate action was not taken to identify risk and provide help and protection.

### 3. Racism / Adultification Bias

The review evaluated the actions of professionals 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.' The review highlights the presence of 'adultification bias' - where children from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities are perceived as being more 'streetwise', less innocent and less vulnerable than other children.

### 4. Findings

**1** The school was compliant with expected practice in responding to their concerns about Child Q smelling of cannabis. **2** However, the decision to strip search her was not in her best interests. **3** School staff deferred to the authority of the police without challenge. **4** School staff had insufficient focus on the safeguarding of Child Q. **5** The law and policy governing strip searches is ambiguous. **6** The absence of a specific requirement to seek parental consent undermines safeguarding. **7** Covid-19 restrictions were a barrier to communication. **8** The family felt racism was a key factor.

### 5. Recommendations

**1** Clearer understanding of requirements for engaging an Appropriate Adult. **2** Relevant police guidance governing strip searching to clearly define a need to focus on children's safeguarding and follow up actions needed to help and protect children at potential risk. **3** Children's Social Care should always be contacted when there are safeguarding concerns. **4** Awareness raising programmes about stop and search activity by the police should be rolled out across educational establishments. **5** Multi-agency adultification bias training. **6** Anti-racist charter and guides.

### 6. Key Questions

- Are agencies assured that professionals adopt a 'safeguarding first' approach, identifying contextual risks and prioritising child welfare?
- Are professionals aware of police powers in relation to the stop & search of children?
- Are children aware of their rights in relation to stop and search?
- Are professionals aware of adultification bias and how to ensure it does not influence their decision-making?
- Do agencies carry out anti-racist work to support the eradication of racism and discrimination across its local safeguarding arrangements?

### 7. Further Information

For the full report - [City & Hackney LCSPR Child Q](#)

[Adultification bias within child protection and safeguarding - HM Inspectorate of Probation Academic Insights](#)

[NSPCC Learning - Safeguarding children who come from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities](#)

[DfE guidance on searching, screening and confiscation updated on 13.07.22 \(schools must "assess & balance" risk of potential strip search to pupils' well-being before calling police\).](#)