

Child Q 7 Minute Briefing

1. Introduction

- Child Q is Black Caribbean school girl who was 15 when she was strip searched by female police officers at her school in London in 2020.
- The strip search followed concerns expressed by teachers that Child Q was smelling strongly of cannabis and may be carrying drugs
- When questioned before being searched Child Q denied having drugs in her possession and a search of her belongings revealed nothing significant
- The search, took place on school premises, without an appropriate adult present exposed Child Q's intimate body parts, whilst she was menstruating which was known to staff.

2. What happened to Child Q?

- Child Q disclosed to her parents what had happened to her and they took her to the GP who contacted children's services
- City and Hackney commissioned a Child Safeguarding Practice Review because of the traumatic impact of the strip search and the suggestion of racist motivations
- One of the significant decisions to come under scrutiny was the absence of Child Q's parents being informed before the search and the absence of an appropriate adult
- The police weren't challenged at the time by the school
- Highlighted the ambiguous guidance on this subject and a clear loss of focus on the welfare of the child

3. 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 perception of Child Q and her family is that the search was racially motivated • 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 also 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

How to use this briefing:

7 minute briefings should be delivered face to face to promote discussions and not included with other day to day issues, to ensure impact. Please consider these 3 questions alongside the briefings:

What are your key thoughts and reflections?

How can we ensure the learning is embedded and how will we know this?

How can we integrate the learning into team or service improvement plans?

6. Key Questions

Are agencies assured that they and their staff have 'safeguarding first' approach where the welfare of the child is always of paramount importance?

Are staff aware of 'adultification' and how their own bias can affect their practice and decision making?

Do agencies include anti-racist statements in their policies and procedures?

Do policies and procedures include children from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities as vulnerable?

Are professionals aware of police powers in relation to stop and search and searches of children?

5. Recommendations

Clear unambiguous, up to date guidance about stop and search practices,

Guidance about the requirements for an Appropriate Adult need to be clear

The welfare of the child is always paramount in any situation

Awareness raising programmes for schools and the community about police stop and search powers

'Adultification' training

Local anti-racist charters

4. Key Findings

The school was compliant with expected practice

The decision to strip search was not in child's best interests

School staff deferred to the authority of the police without challenge

School staff had insufficient focus on the safeguarding

The law and policy governing strip searches is ambiguous

Absence of requirement to seek parental consent undermines safeguarding

Covid-19 restriction were a barrier to communication

The family felt racism was a key factor