



Child Q Update Report

Why was it me?

June 2023

Jim Gamble QPM, Independent Safeguarding Children Commissioner
Rory McCallum, Senior Professional Advisor

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Address: 3rd Floor, Hackney Service Centre, 1 Hillman Street, Hackney, E8 1DY

Telephone: +44 (0) 208 3564183

E-mail: chscp@hackney.gov.uk

Website: www.chscp.org.uk

Contents

1. Introduction	5
2. Immediate Response, Leadership and Coordination	7
3. Engagement	13
The Voice of Children	13
Discipline and Welfare	15
Racism.....	18
Searches of children by school staff	20
Engagement and Respect.....	22
Views about the Police	23
Next Steps	25
The Voice of Parents, Carers and the Community	26
Policing	27
Education	29
The impact of racism and racial trauma	31
Wellbeing, safeguarding and next steps	32
4. Action Plan Progress	33
Recommendation 1	33
Recommendation 2	35
Recommendation 3	37
Recommendation 4	40
Recommendation 5	43
Recommendation 6	44
Recommendation 7	45
Recommendation 8	47
Recommendation 9	49
Reasonable Grounds to Arrest.....	51
Recommendation 10	52
Recommendation 11	54
Recommendation 12	56
Recommendation 13	57
Recommendation 14	62
5. Trust & Confidence in the Police	64
The MPS – Size and Scale	69
Safer Schools Officers – Humanising Relationships	72
Safer Schools Officer Protocol	74
6. Schools & Colleges – Culture and Practice	77
Leadership	80
Workforce	81
Training	82

Curriculum – Educate & Empower	82
Policies, Procedures and Practice.....	83
Engagement with Children	84
Engagement with Parents and Carers.....	85
The Interface with the Police and Safer Schools Officers	85
Searching, Screening and Confiscation	86
Overall Impact	87
Child Q’s School	88
7. The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.....	89
The Dilution of Independence	93
8. Active Anti-Racism.....	96
9. Conclusion	103

1. Introduction

1.1 In 2020, Child Q, a Black female child of secondary school age, was strip searched¹ by female police officers from the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). The search, which involved the exposure of Child Q's intimate body parts, took place on school premises, without an Appropriate Adult present and with the knowledge that Child Q was menstruating.

1.2 On the day of the search, teachers believed that Child Q smelt strongly of cannabis and they suspected that she might be carrying drugs. On questioning Child Q, she denied using or having any drugs in her possession and a search of her bag, blazer, scarf and shoes revealed nothing of significance.

1.3 Remaining concerned, teachers sought advice from the Safer Schools Police Officer. Due to the restrictions arising from Covid-19, this officer was not on site. He recommended that the school call 101 and ask for a female officer to attend. A male and female officer subsequently arrived at the school, followed by another two officers (one of whom was also female). After discussions between the police and teachers, Child Q was escorted to the medical room where she was strip searched.

1.4 No Appropriate Adult was in attendance, teachers remained outside the room and Child Q's mother was not contacted in advance. No drugs were found during either the strip search or a search of the room in which Child Q had been waiting beforehand. Child Q was later allowed to return home where she disclosed the events to her mother.

1.5 Given these circumstances, a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (*the review*) was initiated by the City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership (CHSCP). It was published in March 2022, making eight findings and 14 recommendations for improving practice.

¹ There are a range of legislative powers and statutory codes of practice that govern when and how the police undertake a search. Child Q was searched under the [Police & Criminal Evidence Act 1984 \(PACE\) Code A](#) that applies to most stop and search powers. She underwent what is known as a '**More thorough search that exposes intimate parts**' or **MTIP**. For ease of reference and understanding, Child Q's experiences are generally referred to as a strip search within my report.

1.6 On publication and at the request of Hackney's Mayor, I committed to providing an independent update on the progress made in response to the review. This report provides that update. It sets out what people have told me, my reflections on the range of activity that has been undertaken and the impact that can be evidenced at this time.

2. Immediate Response, Leadership and Coordination

2.1 The immediate response to the publication of the Child Q review was characterised by shock, disbelief and fear. Shock that something like this had happened, disbelief that it had occurred in a school, and fear about how widespread such practice might be. Unsurprisingly, there was also profound anger.

2.2 Child Q's experiences had struck a chord with many and ignited a level of interest rarely seen in such reviews. Her ordeal was not only horrendous, but symptomatic of what some people, particularly Black people, could relate to in terms of their own interactions with the police. For parents and carers, the thought that this might happen to their own child whilst at school was chilling and enough to capture their attention.

2.3 Shock, disbelief, fear and anger manifested in a variety of different ways. Some individuals and organisations flexed their voices to condemn the events and those involved. Many took to the streets in protest, politicians debated in the Houses of Parliament, and conversations reverberated up and down the country. Some, however, adopted a more cautious approach to expressing their opinions. Some said nothing.

2.4 From both the police and Child Q's school, I saw defensiveness and whilst perhaps understandable, this wasn't helpful. Tensions quickly emerged, as did the level of professional challenge within and across the partnership.² This was not necessarily a bad thing, although it was on a scale I had never witnessed before. Good partnerships are often built on the willingness of individual organisations to reflect on their own actions and to question others. However, in these circumstances, there were consequences.

2.5 Working relationships became strained and from a partnership perspective, this delayed the strategic coordination of the response to the review. That is not to suggest

² The City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership comprises three statutory safeguarding partners and a range of relevant agencies. Our safeguarding partners in Hackney are the Council, the Metropolitan Police Service and the NHS North East London Integrated Care Board. Further details about our local arrangements are available [here](#).

organisations weren't engaged in significant levels of activity, they were, but their actions were very much centred on putting their own houses in order.

2.6 Again, this was also understandable, particularly given the commentary in the early days following the report's release. This focused on who should be removed from their role, who was to blame and what level of wrongdoing had taken place.

2.7 For several teachers with whom I spoke (from a range of schools not involved in the incident), they believed that some of this commentary had been overly politicised. In a few instances, that may have been true. However, local politicians are elected by local people so they can listen to, engage with and reflect the concerns of their constituents. That is exactly what they were doing.

2.8 At a national level, questions about the law governing strip searches, the extent of such practice and the significant media profile meant the review was always going to become an issue for central government.

2.9 Notwithstanding these immediate challenges, I saw evidence of strong and effective leadership from many organisations and individuals. This included those directly involved in the review's recommendations, alongside others who took a firm leadership position in line with their respective functions.

2.10 This has been no more evident than through the work of Hackney's vibrant voluntary and community sector. For many of these groups, they have taken the initiative to engage communities and to extend the debate about the implications of the review and what needs to change. They have done so with energy, passion and a clear focus on amplifying voices to make sure they are heard by those in power.

2.11 Whilst I describe some of this work later in my report, I recognise it only touches the surface of what local groups have achieved. Over the last few months, the voluntary and community sector has continued to drive an unswerving focus on the review's findings and for this I extend my sincere gratitude. Their collective impact in

advocating on behalf of Hackney's children has been outstanding and their role in this regard should never be underestimated or taken for granted.

2.12 Strong leadership has equally been seen in the efforts of Hackney Council at both a political and officer level. Whilst not directly named in any of the recommendations, the Council has helped strengthened coordination by defining and driving activity and holding other organisations to account.

2.13 I have seen a relentless pursuit of improvement by Hackney's Mayor, supported by the Deputy Mayor and cabinet member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care, the cabinet member for Community Safety & Regulatory Services, and the cabinet member for Employment, Human Resources & Equalities. There are others who have shown equal rigour, such as the Living in Hackney and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commissions. To their collective credit, local politicians have kept focus, applied curiosity and challenge and have been consistent in their call for change. They have asked and continue to ask the tough questions.

2.14 I have also seen the Council take firm action in establishing its own strategic leadership group, reflecting on the lessons from the review and implementing change. This has been particularly evident in the work undertaken on anti-racism, with Hackney's Children and Education Directorate leading much of the early activity following the review's publication.

2.15 From a police perspective, leadership at a local level has experienced a degree of volatility and uncertainty over the past year. The Commander of the Central East Basic Command Unit (CE BCU) left to take up a new position, and whilst an interim was appointed, this created a vacuum. For obvious reasons, this interim role was never going to be able to affect change in the way that a permanent appointment could.

2.16 That said, it is important to acknowledge this has since been resolved. Under the recent leadership of a new permanent Commander, I sense a degree of positivity from those with whom I have spoken. Whilst relatively early in his tenure, he has

shown an appetite to listen, understand and engage. I have seen our local police pivot to a clearer focus on both its policy and practice, and whilst neither underestimating the challenges ahead nor the potential limitations imposed by the MPS central command, there is tentative optimism.

2.17 With regards to leadership across the health sector, there was outstanding practice in what health professionals often do best - reflection and an active promotion of learning and improvement. Whether through designated staff engaging at safeguarding workshops, bespoke webinars, or the dissemination of lessons within supervision and training, leaders within the health community responded with pace and with focus.

2.18 For schools and colleges, effective local leadership was crucial in providing stability in the immediate aftermath of the review being published. This had to be delivered by school leaders in the context of what was an exceptionally challenging environment.

2.19 For many of these settings, there was a feeling of being unfairly under the spotlight and to a degree they were. Because of the need to protect Child Q's anonymity, details were sparse and this fed into speculation and accusation, most of which was played out on social media. The pressure was undoubtedly intense, with people demanding both answers and accountability.

2.20 My subsequent engagement with Headteachers identified evidence of thoughtful leadership, reflection and good practice. A range of examples are set out later in the report. That said, a few schools provided feedback that in my opinion indicated a worrying level of overconfidence.

2.21 For any professional to maintain a position that 'what happened' to Child Q could never occur in their own organisation, shows a misunderstanding of the review's findings. Beyond the strip search itself, there was a failure to take a 'Safeguarding First' approach to practice, an absence of professional challenge and the likely

influence of racism (deliberate or not). These are all features we have seen before and seen in a variety of different contexts. Sadly, will see them again.

2.22 In this respect, it's worth remembering one of the first and most fundamental steps that any organisation needs to take in respect of safeguarding children - maintaining an attitude of '*it could happen here*'. Complacency has never made children safer.

2.23 Another important step is listening. Indeed, whilst the Child Q incident primarily highlighted issues concerning the police and schools, my engagement with children, their families and community leaders has since suggested there is a significant absence of trust in all statutory agencies.

2.24 This view was expressed by many of the Black people I spoke to, and it requires us to place the Child Q review in a wider context. It is our collective system, not one agency, that feeds the alienation and isolation felt by so many Black children and their families. Indeed, whilst the MPS is rightly under additional scrutiny, there are questions for all organisations. For example, what are we doing to address the inequalities in housing and health, or the disproportionality seen in school exclusions and children coming into care?

2.25 These issues pose challenges to our wider network and reinforce the need to build trust, confidence and an actively anti-racist system that extends to all agencies. This is the front-line where local leaders must engage, collaborate and effect change. This is the front-line where Hackney's residents need to feel the difference.

2.26 Impact in this context will undoubtedly take time, but to ensure the best opportunity for success, our system must remain firm in its ambitions, resolute about the nature of the problems that need to be tackled, and cohesive enough to oversee the breadth of multi-agency activity being delivered.

2.27 In my opinion, this will require relentless leadership. It will also require coherent governance that allows for the strategic oversight of all activity that is both underway

and planned. The importance of such an approach can be seen in history. Too often, despite best intentions, the learning from published reviews fades, priorities are subsumed into various workstreams, people forget, or they move their focus to the next tragedy that hits the headlines. We owe it to Child Q to make sure that this doesn't happen.

Additional Recommendation 1: The Mayor of Hackney and his cabinet should consider how best to develop a comprehensive strategic mechanism to oversee the work of all the agencies and individuals tasked with eradicating racism and delivering levelling up opportunities. The function and/or individual lead should focus on an overarching strategic agenda (set by cabinet) that encompasses issues from housing to health, social care, education, and policing. This should result in strategic scrutiny and the production of a periodic oversight report, identifying what is working, what is not, and why. If an individual is appointed to lead this work, it should not be an add-on to a day job but a focused new role, working with the authority of the Mayor and cabinet.

3. Engagement

3.1 Following publication of the review a range of engagement activity was initiated to capture the voices of children, parents, carers, community members, and professionals. Undertaken via both face to face and online sessions, engagement was driven by different stakeholders (including key community groups) and rightly seen as a priority by many.

3.2 The number of events held is simply too large to reference within my report. This should be seen as a positive. It shows how Child Q's story impacted Hackney's residents, leading to public outcry, protest and events that sought to allow the community (in its broadest sense) to hear more about what had happened and to express their fears, hopes and aspirations for change.

The Voice of Children

3.3 For my part, I heard from nearly 100 children about their perceptions of the incident involving Child Q, how the review resonated with their own lived experience, and what the potential solutions for change might be. Some of what I was told I was expecting. Much of it I wasn't. Their insights have provided me with a unique lens through which to view the impact of the Child Q report and importantly, harvest additional lessons about what matters most and what needs attention.

3.4 I want to thank them all for their forthright engagement in this process. I also want to extend my sincere gratitude to the leaders of the various community groups and local schools who helped facilitate these meetings.

3.5 I tried to reach children in environments where they felt comfortable and able to speak openly, such as through their youth or sports clubs. I also met with others in their schools. Whilst some children were understandably angry and wanted to make a particular point, most simply sought to share what they and their peers experienced (good and bad) and how that made them feel. These were not unreasonable or irrational voices or children 'banging their feet' for attention. For those adults who

might be tempted to dismiss them as such, they risk repeating the same mistakes we have seen before – where an ‘I know best’ attitude ignores children’s voices (in this context, mainly Black children’s voices) and opportunities for improvement are lost.

3.6 Perhaps the most striking message was that for many children, they felt no sense of shock about the strip search of Child Q. Some were disappointed, but not shocked. Indeed, in stark contrast to how most adults responded, the children I spoke with felt there was a certain inevitability that something like this would happen and that in their view, Child Q was yet another example of a Black child being treated unfairly by the police.

“It’s more the adults who were shocked and surprised than the students. We are not shocked or surprised. The vast majority of us experience this in different forms. We are desensitised to it. It’s like the news, you get used to it and it’s normalised. This has been made public, but it’s just another thing”.

3.7 I was also surprised by the key themes that many children chose to highlight. I was expecting our conversations to be heavily focused on negative interactions with the police. However, whilst covered, most children talked about their schools and what some perceived as the insensitive practices within them.

3.8 On reflection, it was here that children could probably best identify with Child Q, drawing parallels with their own first-hand experiences. This was notable in what some saw as a deficit in their school’s focus on their wellbeing and a level of scepticism that a Safeguarding First approach would be applied.

3.9 This was by no means every child’s position, however, for those who felt this way, their feelings were exacerbated in schools that chose not to talk to their students about the Child Q report, share the facts and provide them with some reassurance. Whilst it is important to acknowledge that many schools used the opportunity to promote awareness through assemblies, workshops and classroom discussions, some did not. I cannot see the logic behind remaining silent and believe this was a

missed opportunity. Many children had not read the actual report, so their views were influenced by headlines, soundbites and social media.

“I would have liked to talk about it, but they never did.”

“There was an assembly in my school but the headteacher put their own views forward and said politics shouldn’t be involved in school matters.”

“It was discussed within the classroom once, but I got the impression they wanted to avoid talking about it.”

“[The school] did talk to us about it and was very good at addressing the issues. We had assemblies and could talk about it.”

“[The school] didn’t mention it. Everyone initially thought the school it happened at was [our school] because things like that could happen here. We get searched for things like phones and chewing gum.”

“It hasn’t been talked about in school. If things happened in other countries, then we talk about it. Need to raise awareness with more communication.”

“It’s been swept under the rug.”

Discipline and Welfare

3.10 One area of concern that attracted repeated commentary from children was how their schools managed behaviour. Some of those with whom I spoke expressed a view that discipline and sanctions were often unwarranted, unacceptably harsh and that the culture in their schools was simply prioritising ‘*the rule of law*’ over and above everything else. Some said this was having an impact on their relationships with teachers and consequently, their education. As one child said to me (supported by others in the room):

“Kids these days see teachers as plain clothes police officers teaching algebra”.

3.11 The clear message to me was that in some of Hackney’s schools, children experience what they perceive as an unhealthy and unhelpful culture of authoritarianism and on occasions, harsh discipline. Some believe it is the rigidity in these settings that can lead to children’s needs, including their safeguarding needs, being overlooked.

“Children do not feel welcomed. They come from a compassionate primary school into the secondary school culture. There is a need to rearrange the system to one where students want to be there.”

“It was strict authoritarian and there was no empathy.”

“I feel like mistakes aren’t allowed. Getting detentions for skirt rolling up or wrong socks. In class, they yell at you when you don’t understand. Their job is to help you understand.”

“There is not much room for children to be human. They are not allowed to make mistakes and if they do, there is no forum or place to share their views or opinions.”

“You have to do the detention and the sanction is put in place before they get to speak about why it got to that point.”

“This school has very strict rules. There is a clear hierarchy put forward. Students are below teachers and there is a clear separation.”

3.12 Whilst acknowledging the strength of feeling expressed by some children, I recognise that maintaining order, structure and discipline in schools is key to effective learning, safety and security. I think most parents and carers will agree. That said, these principles in themselves will have limited impact if they are the only ones that matter or if they are the only ones that children perceive to matter.

3.13 For those children I spoke to, most understood the need for rules, but also recognised the importance of placing values such as respect, support and fairness at the heart of a school community. Ultimately, this is about balance. It's also about creating an environment that actively mitigates the risk of something happening like it did to Child Q - where discipline, not welfare and safeguarding, were at the forefront of professional thinking.

3.14 Leadership will ultimately set the tone for any school and the priority placed upon these tenets are for school leaders to reflect upon. Indeed, as I heard during my engagement sessions, there are many schools that are actively promoting such focus. For those that aren't, I would urge them reconsider and not to dismiss either the message or its correlation to safeguarding. This isn't a request to ignore discipline. It's a request to recognise the value that your students are placing on their wellbeing and to talk to them about what you can do to improve. For example, one suggestion made to me by a child related to schools reviewing which staff they designate as offering welfare support – making sure that roles, primarily welfare and discipline, are not blurred and that pathways to support are not inhibited by fear of repercussions.

“It is the same teachers who are responsible for discipline that are the welfare officers - so the offer feels tokenistic.”

3.15 In my capacity as the Independent Safeguarding Children Commissioner, I have already committed to understanding more about discipline and welfare in schools. Furthermore, I am acutely aware that there will be a range of views from children and their parents and carers, and I do not want to give the impression that everyone has concerns or that this is a problem everywhere. Indeed, the positive findings from the first national behaviour survey³ will undoubtedly be mirrored in many of our local schools.

3.16 That said, I can't unhear what I have been told, and this is clearly an issue that warrants further debate and reassurance. Whilst I am certain there will be excellent

³ [National behaviour survey, Findings from Academic Year 2021/22, Department for Education, June 2023.](#)

practice in many of Hackney's schools, I sensed a degree of support and challenge might also be required. I have worked in the multi-agency safeguarding environment long enough to know that tensions will, at times, exist between agencies and their staff. These frustrations generally relate to the pressure the system is under, too few resources and too much work, alongside disagreements about decisions and approaches on both strategy and individual cases. Given their frequent and routine line of sight on children, school staff are no strangers to these tensions and often have their own legitimate concerns about the support they do or do not receive. During this update some of Hackney's safeguarding professionals fed back on their concerns regarding engagement.

"The narrative around Hackney schools (previous chaos and disastrous academic results) alongside academisation has led to schools being unquestionable."

"I'm worried that schools are so preoccupied with Ofsted and unless they prioritise it [wellbeing] then teachers won't prioritise it."

"There needs to be independent scrutiny of young people's experiences at school outside of Ofsted."

"I would feel overwhelmed as a VCS organisation in challenging a school."

"As a social worker, I had to challenge schools about their practice, it's not easy."

Racism

3.17 The issue of racism and the specific topic of adultification was also a clear thread for children throughout my conversations with them. Some of the Black children I engaged (who attended a range of different schools in Hackney) echoed similar experiences.

“For hair, it’s hard for Black girls to maintain your hair. Want to wear it in an afro or wear a wraparound. We are not allowed to wear our hair out past our shoulders - but White girls are not told to tie their hair up.”

“My school is a bit racist and very strict. Late detentions until 6pm if you made one mistake. History teacher gave me detention and I felt it was racist. The school didn’t do anything about it.”

“If a young person feels there is a racist incident, you can only report it to the school - but they are the ones being racist. There should be an independent line to report these incidents.”

“Racism and adultification – it’s frustrating that this is only coming out now – I get adultified because of how tall I am (and my little sister) so it’s about time people start listening to what we say and as females it particularly hits hard.”

“The school is quick to adultify their students, they shout at the student like they are the same age...”

3.18 In the context of Hackney’s schools, Child Q undoubtedly shook the system and prompted many to rapidly evaluate what they were doing in respect of being actively anti-racist and whether what they were doing was enough.

3.19 Without doubt, there has been some exceptional work in this space, much of it being in place before the Child Q review was published. Some of this has been initiated (or continued) by schools themselves, other activity has been led and facilitated by the Council. What is clear, is that given the diversity of Hackney’s population, active anti-racism will always need to be a priority for our education system. It will also require routine reflection and consultation with children to establish whether their efforts are having a positive impact. If the depth of insight established through my conversations is anything to go by, then it is the youth of Hackney who are best placed to help inform solutions.

Searches of children by school staff

3.20 The application of searching, screening and confiscation in schools was one area that I didn't expect to attract as much attention as it did during my engagement with children. During one of my first sessions, I asked those present how many had been stopped and searched by the police in Hackney. Not one hand was raised. When I asked how many had been searched in school, everyone's hand went up. With a few exceptions, this trend continued.

3.21 Beyond the recommendations made in the Child Q report, local practice in this context was not explored in any detail at the time of the initial report. My subsequent conversations with children have shown this issue to be significant, and prior to talking with them, I had underestimated its relevance.

3.22 Whilst also linking with the overall narrative on discipline and welfare, some of the accounts shared with me chimed with Child Q's experiences. Overall, most children understood the need for searches to take place, but a number recounted stories of being embarrassed, and feeling unfairly targeted in a processes that they perceived as far from proportionate.

"I was pulled out of the room. I was searched and they didn't find anything. They didn't explain and when you ask what is going on they didn't want to explain."

"A teacher walks in and undertakes the bag search, then walks out as if nothing has happened."

"A girl on my table had a pack of sanitary pads and was ashamed. A teacher burst into the door and said stand away from your chair. The girl said can you not show anyone. They started laughing and ignored her. She was feeling very embarrassed, and they didn't apologise. Felt it was because she wasn't a well-behaved kid."

"We were going to do a test, and no one was aware we were going to get a bag search. We were so stressed. People were trying to move things around. A boy

brought a phone in and was trying to move it to his blazer. It smashed on the floor, and he walked off. A lot of people got into trouble that day.”

“Since introducing bag searches, it hasn’t affected school safety.”

3.23 In addition to better understanding the experiences of some children, it became quickly apparent that practice surrounding the searching, screening and confiscation of prohibited items was highly variable across Hackney.

3.24 This was not being caused by different approaches to articles such as knives, alcohol or drugs, but due to the variability in policies that exist across the education sector. Indeed, teachers not only retain a statutory power to search a student for items that might be seen as dangerous, but for whatever article their school has defined as forbidden.

3.25 During our conversations, children focused on why they had been searched and the different rules in place across Hackney’s schools. I was told how some had a zero-tolerance approach to mobile phones. Others allowed them, with the condition they were turned off during the school day. Whilst only one example and one that could be argued either way, this clearly illustrated the different opinions that exist about what a child should or shouldn’t be allowed to take into school, and the perceptions of schools in their approach to discipline.

“They are not so strict about phones and things, they let us have them as long as they are turned off as they recognise you might need to call your parents or something.”

“A student was calling their mum outside the school premises to let her know she was on her way home. A teacher saw and took her phone for two weeks.”

3.26 It was perhaps this lack of consistency that struck me most and something that remains somewhat vexing. Yes, Hackney is diverse, but I don’t believe the behaviour of our children can be so disparate that it requires each individual setting to determine

what is acceptable or not to bring into school. Surely Headteachers can reach a consensus on this? And whilst acknowledging this is ultimately a decision for them, it can't be insurmountable to reach an agreed, evidence-based position.

3.27 For me, such collective leadership in this context would help deliver consistency. I imagine it would also be seen as being 'fair' in its broadest sense, helping to standardise practice across the borough (regardless of which school a child attended), and helping to reduce the feeling of unfairness felt by some of the children I spoke to, whether perceived or real.

Additional Recommendation 2: On behalf of the CHSCP, Hackney Education should engage all local Headteachers with the aim of developing an agreed approach on searching and the list of items that should be considered as prohibited in Hackney's schools.

Engagement and Respect

3.28 Underpinning all the issues raised with me, the importance of being listened to and heard were clear priorities for children. Whilst accepting that most schools will have arrangements in place to support engagement, some of those I spoke to felt these were neither authentic nor worthwhile. Some described them as tokenistic, whilst others felt restricted in what they could say.

"...they ask me to do things and I feel like a puppet...they definitely tell me what to say and do."

"Student leaders are not given the opportunity to make change."

"They say we have a voice. When no change, there is no use of it. We talk about rules we want to see change, so if no movement, it is not useful."

"[The student council] is a waste of time. You learn quickly, your voice is not as loud."

“I wouldn't say the school is perfect, we don't hear much from the school council. There's no way to voice your opinions to them even via teachers. The school council is not representative and there are no elections, they are hand-picked by teachers.”

3.29 An equally strong message from some children related to their experiences of mutual respect. Children explained this as being essential in terms of building trust, positive relationships and instilling enthusiasm for learning. Most were able to describe good experiences in this context and spoke of teachers who were excellent role models for them. Some, however, recounted stories where the alleged behaviour and attitude of teachers were the exact opposite.

“You can tell when a teacher wants to build a relationship. In their personality, who wants a relationship with students and enjoys working with them versus the ones who don't want to do that.”

“Some see their role as a teacher is to also bond with students. Also, day to day, you can learn how to agree to disagree. Some will always see themselves as above you and abuse their authority.”

Views about the Police

3.30 When talking to me about their views of the police, there was a genuine feeling amongst many children that nothing much had changed over the last year. They were unable to point to any tangible impact, and given the ongoing media headlines about the MPS, there was scepticism about any progress being made.

“The relationship between young people and the police is really bad and this [Child Q] worsened it.”

“I protest for BLM, but nothing has changed so what can you do for the community?”

“The issue happened in a place where children are meant to feel safe but why would they bring in the police, a force that our people don’t recognise or trust – we wouldn’t even call them in our personal lives.”

3.31 I was struck in particular by the comments of a young boy when engaged by the Mayor of Hackney and its Chief Executive. He explained how children can often feel trapped between gangs and the police, with there being fear about being harmed by both. He provided an example of a young Black man being physically forced to the ground when being arrested and another relating to his fear of gang violence.

3.32 These feelings were echoed by other children when I asked whether they would consider joining the police. Some ruled it out due to a lack of trust, but others talked about how difficult and dangerous their job was. One young girl told me that she felt sorry for them. She said that she always smiled at officers, but they never smiled back.

3.33 Other children described how nervous some officers appeared to be when they stopped them. They felt this was because they were afraid. The conversations reflected a *‘them and us’* position, which is the ultimate barrier to overcome.

3.34 Many of the themes arising from the Child Q review are going to take time to improve. There are no quick fixes and trust and confidence in the police won’t be solved overnight. That said, we are more than a year since the publication of the review, and in my opinion, there is more that could be done by the MPS to engage our local children.

3.35 At the very least, this could be through routine messaging about what steps are being taken. There is an appetite for this, but not through the usual mechanisms that we ordinarily use, such as lengthy reports and briefings. Even for this report, I have been asked (and agreed) to produce a short video to make its contents more accessible. This is exactly the type of approach that the MPS could take, alongside some dedicated engagement with children (see section of Safer Schools Police Officers).

Next Steps

3.36 I cannot overstate how impressed I have been by all the children who gave up their time to talk with me. Their input has been invaluable, and they have provided our system with further ideas upon which to reflect and respond. They should be proud of not only their interest in what happened to Child Q (and their support for her), but their determination to effect positive change. They are a credit to themselves, their parents, carers and the wider Hackney community.

3.37 I am, however, mindful that my engagement only represents a small snapshot of school-age children in Hackney. There are undoubtedly many more voices that have yet to be heard. As such, to help our partnership better understand the scale and range of feeling, not least about discipline, welfare, respect and safety, I will bring the following recommendation to the Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Additional Recommendation 3: On behalf of safeguarding partners, the CHSCP should develop and launch a series of borough-wide, age-appropriate surveys to further focus on safeguarding children and the themes arising from the Child Q review, specifically feeling safe and respected in school and the response to discipline and welfare. These surveys should be constructed and informed by a young advisory group, undertaken on an annual basis and be defined within the CHSCP's written safeguarding arrangements.

3.38 To explain the rationale for defining this proposal within the CHSCP's written arrangements, (despite being aware of some outstanding work in this space), I would argue that the collective approach of agencies in seeking feedback about children's safety has been somewhat uncoordinated, as has the aggregation of feedback, the sharing of information, and the partnership's grip on who is talking to whom. Formalising this as suggested will create a defined duty on all relevant agencies to cooperate with the process to ensure it runs smoothly and effectively.

3.39 As another area to take forward, the children that I engaged expressed a clear interest in how they could become more involved in testing the sufficiency of practice across the range of organisations responsible for safeguarding children.

3.40 Whilst acknowledging that some agencies are already doing this (such as through the work of Young Hackney), there has been no previous model of children undertaking this work on behalf of the wider partnership. As part of the CHSCP's existing scrutiny, self-assessment and peer review processes, there is potential to engage the voices of children as part of defined challenge events and/or as young scrutineers. Whilst further planning will be necessary, I make the following recommendation.

Additional Recommendation 4: Engaging agencies with relevant experience, the CHSCP should develop and introduce a process that engages children as part of its defined scrutiny, self-assessment and peer review processes. This could manifest in the development of an independent group of young advisors to help inform the development of policy, procedure and practice.

The Voice of Parents, Carers and the Community

3.41 A series of events involving Hackney's parents, carers and community groups were also scheduled following the review's publication. Designed for reflection and to create opportunities for discussion, I used these sessions to help identify further learning for my report and to triangulate what I had been told by children.

3.42 The events were facilitated by a range of different individuals and organisations, with some of these engaging local professionals. Positively, I'm aware that many of these forums have since become established and continue to meet to consider the key themes arising from the review and to provide space to learn.

3.43 When considering the contributions of 'voices' more broadly, the sheer volume of this activity is almost impossible to quantify. The reach and impact of the Child Q

review was well beyond Hackney's borders, although for the purposes of this report it is the local voices upon which I have focused.

3.44 Helpfully, following the publication of the review, Hackney Council took a clear lead on coordinating and overseeing this engagement activity through a defined Community Engagement Steering Group. Alongside providing a clear structure to help reassure the community that they were being heard (and to help avert an escalation of tensions), its functions were two-fold:

- Ensuring there was regular information, updates, and a space to be heard - to help shape the local response to the review's recommendations.
- Gathering insight about the wider issues raised by Hackney's residents to inform the wider policy response to schools, policing, racism and trust and confidence in the state.

3.45 The insights from these events are summarised below. Many mirror the concerns raised by the children I spoke with, and most are reflected in the analysis and the additional recommendations I have made.

Policing

3.46 When discussing policing, participants focused on community engagement, issues related to trust and confidence, accountability and transparency, police training, justice and the traumatic impact of negative police interaction.

Community engagement

The main themes on improving community engagement focused on relationship building and the positive impact individual officers could have when they understood their role and were given the time to routinely engaged with the community in local settings. Consistency was a key theme and was reflected in the views of organisations and individuals who work with young people. They were clear that routinely engaging with the same named officer was an important element of relationship building.

Trust and Confidence

It was clear that local communities need to feel assured that the leadership within the police is committed to this process and the investment needed to rebuild and sustain trust. People felt that there needs to be a recognition of institutional racism within policing and an acknowledgement of the specific historical incidents that have eroded trust and people's confidence in Hackney.

Many of those engaged during the update had little or no trust in the police and whilst many in the borough might disagree, there is no doubt that a significant number of residents from the Black community feel alienated and isolated from their police service. In reality, a significant section of the community does not accept that the current model represents policing by consent. Whilst this can be challenged, if it is the way some people feel, and it is, it cannot be ignored and must be addressed.

Accountability and Transparency

The key theme from parents, carers and community representatives highlighted that officers not only needed to be accountable, but they also needed to be seen to be accountable for their actions. There was significant support for the idea of facilitating local resolutions for minor misconduct issues and working with experts in racial trauma, community engagement, youth engagement and co-production initiatives as a positive way forward.

Training

There was significant discussion about the importance of training, the need to ensure that it was fit for purpose, that it applied to all officers in Hackney – not just the new recruits. There was consensus that such a programme should include cultural awareness and anti-racism training, cover issues related to power balance / imbalance and critically that it should be practical experiential training, delivered whenever possible in local community settings involving local organisations.

Justice

It is clear from the discussion with parents, carers and other community representatives that they desire a 'justice-based approach.' If the community can't see

procedural justice, there will continue to be real difficulties in terms of getting the buy in needed to carry this work forward. They felt that a restorative justice model could be very impactful as it is about changing the power dynamic and giving communities space and authority.

Traumatic impact of negative police interaction

Those who engaged with the review process felt that more needs to be done to recognise and address the trauma young people experience when stopped unfairly. Beyond scrutinising the legality, there needs to be a firm focus on the wellbeing of the young person and the longer-term impact regarding perceptions of procedural justice and police legitimacy.

Education

3.47 When discussing schools and education, participants in the sessions focused on authoritarianism, the use of searches and how parent and student voices could be heard. They also highlighted how the voluntary and community sector (VCS) could be used as advocates, how campaigns and activism opportunities could be increased in schools and how the workforce could be developed.

Racism and Sexism

Parents said they have experienced differential treatment by schools based on ethnicity, gender and class background. For example, disciplinary procedures more often affecting children from certain backgrounds, mothers being dismissed as 'emotive' when raising legitimate concerns and parents from middle class or more privileged backgrounds being taken more seriously when raising significant concerns.

Authoritarianism / Rigidity of discipline

Many parents believe that schools adopt an authoritarian and rigid approach to discipline which undermines student wellbeing and safeguarding. They relayed that many young people feel that there is no one they can talk to at school when a significant safeguarding concern arises. Some parents also felt that communication can be transactional and cold, preventing effective partnership working between parents and schools.

Use of searches

Rather than searches being recognised as a significant imposition on students, only to be carried out in exceptional circumstances with substantial justification, it was felt that some schools saw it as ‘their duty or entitlement’ to subject students to frequent searches. Many parents felt there was little regard for the effect this had on a students’ wellbeing or sense of belonging within the school.

Parent and student voice

Some parents felt that there can be a culture of fear surrounding schools, undermining the ability of parents and students to raise concerns, to be heard, and to help improve a school’s culture or practice.

VCS Advocacy / Community Involvement

Some VCS partners raised concerns about schools not allowing community groups to provide advocacy for parents. There was significant support for community involvement in schools through ‘Grow Your Own’ programmes that recruit and retain diverse school staff.

Campaigns and Activism

Community partners promoted establishing a Schools Student Union where school aged children could organise and unite to advocate for their peers.

Developing the workforce

The recommendations drawn from the anti-racist PRAXIS conference⁴ are to develop the workforce by recruiting well-trained practitioners, leaders and teachers who reflect the racial and ethnic makeup of the community. They also cover embedding anti-racist training into induction programmes, adopting diverse curricula in all Hackney schools and developing and implementing training on the roots of the education system and how they manifest in current policies and practices that contribute to racialised trauma.

⁴ A conference facilitated by Hackney’s Children and Education Directorate in 2022

The impact of racism and racial trauma

3.48 When discussing racism, participants focused on community trauma, healing and unity, spaces to learn and reflect, as well as how to build knowledge and deliver empowerment.

Community trauma, healing and unity and safe spaces.

The community would value space for healing in the form of intergenerational conversations held in a community space. These spaces would be an opportunity for older and younger generations to share and learn from each other's experiences. The need for a community space for healing, to unpack racial trauma and hold such conversations was reflected in the synthesis of all engagement events. Many young people discussed the trauma caused by negative police interactions, something which is also reflected in the Young Futures Commissions⁵ 'Asks'. The 'Thinking Spaces' and 'Safe Spaces for Young Black Girls' initiatives were identified as good examples

***Thinking Spaces** is a therapeutic intervention developed and embedded in the London borough of Haringey in the wake of the 2011 England riots as a therapeutically led space for the community. Hackney Council has been scoping out a similar approach, to begin in schools, with the intention of expanding to engage a wider section of the community. This provides an opportunity to fill a need for an evidence-based, public health approach to communal trauma with a space for healing and collective activism. It is essential that this work is designed by and delivered with the community and the voluntary sector organisations that work closely with them.*

***Safe Spaces for Young Black Girls** helps facilitate conversations about the impact of Child Q and the themes arising from the review. The intention of the sessions has been to provide a safe space for girls to speak about their experiences of living and growing up in Hackney, and their experiences of the education system and the Police. The Child Q case has highlighted themes such as the 'adultification' of young*

⁵ <https://hackney.gov.uk/young-futures>

black girls, who are often treated as older than they are and thus not treated with the level of care and support that is afforded to others.

Knowledge and Empowerment

Many of those who engaged with the review process felt that young people should be educated and empowered about their rights in these situations (Child Q case). They highlighted that there are many organisations within the local community who can and should be engaged to deliver or assist in the delivery of this training.

Community representatives also reflected on a lack of places in Hackney that they own and manage and the value of creating a Black-owned archive to ensure that community history and knowledge is not lost.

Wellbeing, safeguarding and next steps

3.49 Finally, participants reflected on the overall wellbeing of Hackney's children, how capacity and capability could be reinforced within the community and the need to plan how actions will be driven forward and progress monitored once the update report is complete.

Safeguarding

Community partners identified a need to build capability in smaller, grassroots organisations that lack the capacity or infrastructure to engage with the existing or developing safeguarding training. Many believed that this is a key requirement if the community are to be empowered to build from within.

Next Steps

Community partners identified a need to agree a direction of travel for how we plan to take forward the strategic objectives and how continued engagement with children and young people on all aspects of our medium-term response will be facilitated.

4. Action Plan Progress

4.1 The responsibility for how a system learns the lessons from a review is set out in the statutory guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018*. At a national level, this lies with the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, and at local level with safeguarding partners.

4.2 Following the completion of the Child Q review, an action plan was developed by the CHSCP in response to the review's recommendations. Named leads were identified to take forward individual actions, with the coordination and monitoring of progress being discharged through a defined set of arrangements. The activity and progress in response to the review's 14 recommendations are set out below.

Recommendation 1

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel should engage the IOPC with a view to developing national guidance on the IOPC's interface with the Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review process. As a minimum, this should set out the arrangements for securing cooperation, accessing key staff for interview and the requirements for the timely sharing of information.

4.3 The intended aim of this recommendation has been to strengthen the arrangements for Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews when these are being undertaken alongside investigations led by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC). If implemented successfully, this should lead to an improvement in the overall quality and timeliness of reviews.

4.4 Activity to date has involved the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (the Panel) drafting a new protocol and information sharing template seeking to broker a national agreement on behalf of all safeguarding partners with the IOPC. The Panel initially wanted both documents to be available for all safeguarding partnerships to use and adapt in their local discussions with IOPC investigators (when carrying out joint investigations of a serious child safeguarding incident).

4.5 The Panel's view was that, taken together, the documents provided a good and firm basis for effective working relationships between safeguarding partners and the IOPC, making sure that safeguarding partners have timely access to information and interview arrangements with relevant police officers.

4.6 In addition to the above, the Panel also started to keep track of other serious child safeguarding incidents where joint investigations were taking place, so wider experiences of joint working with the IOPC could inform the work underway.

4.7 In late 2022, the Panel provided reassurance that the IOPC had fully recognised the need for the protocol and that it had been willing to work in partnership to develop and implement one. The Panel's intentions at this point were to publish these documents by late spring 2023.

4.8 By April 2023, discussions were ongoing about precisely what guidance and supporting documents were needed. At the end of May 2023, the Panel confirmed that agreement had been reached to move forward with the protocol with the aim of having it published later in the summer.

4.9 The proposed template information sharing agreement is not being taken forward at this time. Both the Panel and IOPC believe that the protocol by itself will provide an effective national framework, giving local areas flexibility as needed, depending on the nature of the circumstances. The Panel has confirmed it is keeping this under review should the protocol prove insufficient.

4.10 Whilst awaiting sight of the detail, it is positive that progress has been made. In very practical terms, when the IOPC designated the CHSCP as an '*interested party*' to its investigation, this rapidly facilitated the sharing of necessary information. In this respect, there is already an established model that is evidenced to work and I expect the protocol may very well reflect the same.

Recommendation 2

The MPS should review and revise its recording system for stop and search to ensure it clearly identifies and allows for retrieval of the full range of activity under stop and search powers (including the ability to differentiate between the different types of strip searches undertaken).

4.11 The aim of this recommendation has been to ensure greater transparency of the full range of MPS activity involving children under stop and search powers. Making this data more widely available will allow for improved scrutiny in respect of both the quality and impact of practice.

4.12 Having acknowledged that the need to publish this data should have been understood much earlier, significant efforts have been made by the MPS over the last year to improve the accuracy of data recording and how this is shared for wider consumption.

4.13 To begin, the MPS undertook a thorough review of records immediately after the publication of the Child Q report. This examined all the data for MTIP and Section 54 PACE searches (custody strip searches) consequently identified errors with data entry that were leading to duplication and skewed reporting. For example, some officers were recording custody strip searches simultaneously on both the police custody record system and the search record system. This in effect double-counted activity and was resulting in the inflation of recorded MTIPs.

4.14 As mitigation, briefings were subsequently provided to all officers, supervisors and the Senior Leadership Team to ensure that data was being captured correctly. Awareness raising, training and regular refreshers about the importance of correct recording continue for all officers, with a particular focus on new joiners and 'street duties' officers.

4.15 The MPS acknowledges that there is still scope for improvement. London-wide, there remain challenges in ensuring that all searches are being correctly recorded. Indeed, as part of the submission to my update report, one in three searches were

reported by the MPS as being incorrectly coded as MTIPs (where these should have been recorded as custody strip searches only). More recently, clarifying a response it had previously given to the London Assembly, the MPS confirmed it had shared incorrect data about the number of MTIPs undertaken on children in 2021⁶. This was initially reported as being 99, whereas the actual figure was clarified as 271. The accuracy of data requires ongoing and focused attention by the MPS.

4.16 With regards to data transparency, at the time of the initial Child Q report, available data was largely limited to that contained in the [MPS Stop and Search Dashboard](#). This dashboard had several limitations, including the inability to see historical MTIP data (and hence themes, patterns and trends). Furthermore, there was no way to establish the exact numbers of children being searched given the age parameters for 'children' extending to 19 - beyond the statutory definition of a child (under 18).

4.17 Improvements have since been implemented by both MOPAC and the MPS and publicly accessible data (on custody strip searches and MTIPs) are now more detailed and publicly accessible. Two new dashboards have been released that provide greater granularity, are more user friendly and contain relevant additional data, such as that involving Appropriate Adults. They are a significant improvement on what was available before and can be found here:

- [Custody Dashboard | Tableau Public](#) (includes custody strip searches)
- [Stops and Search - More Thorough Searches Dashboard | Tableau Public](#).

4.18 That said, gaps remain at both a local and national level and further work is necessary. For example, I am aware that the CE BCU Commander has committed to improving how local data is presented so this becomes much easier for everyone in the community to understand. Furthermore, echoing this recommendation, the Children's Commissioner has similarly called for improved data to drive transparency and accountability across all police forces nationally.

⁶ <https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2023/06/12/child-strip-searches-more-incidents-police-data-error/>

4.19 Whilst these dashboards are unlikely to impact on the individual experiences of children and their families, the ability to review data with greater confidence provides more opportunities to identify practice issues, including those that might be linked disproportionality. It is here that the potential exists for children and families to feel the difference in policing. I am optimistic that they will.

Recommendation 3

The Department for Education should review and revise its guidance on Searching, Screening and Confiscation (2018) to include more explicit reference to safeguarding and to amend its use of inappropriate language.

4.20 The key aim of this recommendation has been for improved guidance to lead to improved practice, with an emphasis on teachers and school staff taking a ‘Safeguarding First’ approach when concerns are identified about possible vulnerability.

4.21 In response to this recommendation, the Department for Education (DfE) worked at pace, recognising the critical importance of incorporating lessons from the Child Q report into its guidance as quickly as possible. An updated version of the DfE’s Searching, Screening and Confiscation guidance was published in July 2022 and implemented in September 2022.

4.22 In summary, the DfE’s guidance has been re-structured to provide a clear process for staff to follow through the various stages of searching and screening, while still enabling pupils to express any concerns that may arise. It includes new advice on the role of the designated safeguarding lead and clear expectations that any search for a prohibited item should be recorded and that parents should be informed as soon as is practicable.

4.23 The guidance also includes a much stronger narrative about safeguarding any pupil involved in a search, other pupils and staff.⁷ This is intended to create an

⁷ The 2018 guidance referred to safeguarding only twice. Illustrating the change in tone, the updated guidance now mentions safeguarding 30 times.

environment where pupils and staff feel protected, safe and able to thrive and succeed. There is also new advice on strip searches in schools, including guidance to empower and educate staff on what to expect and how to best protect a pupil.

4.24 Before updating the guidance, the DfE engaged with stakeholders, including other government departments such as the Home Office and asked them to outline what changes they deemed necessary. Stakeholders⁸ were reported as responding positively to the proposals, with feedback primarily focusing on stronger parental engagement, recording incidents of searches and the rights and voice of the child being more considered. These suggestions have been captured in the updated guidance.

4.25 Whilst there have been clear improvements, a new section on '*strip searches in schools*' remains an area of concern for me and one that I believe requires improvement. On 22 September 2022, I wrote to the then Secretary of State expressing my concern about this narrative, suggesting that additional context was added at the earliest opportunity.

4.26 In my letter, I explained that schools are not an appropriate environment for children to be strip searched, except in what would be rare, *life threatening* and the *most exceptional of circumstances*. Whilst the guidance sets out that schools should ensure other '*appropriate, less invasive approaches have been exhausted*' (before calling the police), I did not believe that the guidance sufficiently described the exceptional nature of these events as it should.

4.27 At the time, I believed the absence of such emphasis could potentially lead to practice being somehow 'normalised', as could the very inclusion of a section on strip searching itself. In this respect, I recommended to the DfE that it heavily reinforced this position in subsequent revisions and through a covering note to headteachers. On 22 November 2022, the new Secretary of State responded as follows:

⁸ Including teaching unions, the Office of the Children's Commissioner, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, other government departments, and a range of school leaders and third sector organisations.

'We agree that strip searching can be highly distressing for the pupil involved, as well as for staff and other pupils affected, especially if undertaken on school premises. We made the decision to include advice on strip searching in the guidance as once police are called on school premises, the decision on whether to conduct a strip search lies solely with them. We therefore wanted to include information that would empower and educate staff in what to expect and how to best protect the pupil if that eventuality does unfortunately come to pass.

To mitigate against unnecessary strip searches taking place in schools, we have advised that schools should very carefully assess the risk of a potential strip search on the pupil's mental and physical wellbeing and the risk of not recovering the suspected item before calling the police into school. We have also advised that staff should always ensure that other appropriate, less invasive options have been exhausted first.'

4.28 Whilst noting this explanation, my position in terms of the DfE strengthening its guidance has somewhat shifted. Whilst the following recommendation should be considered as an interim measure, longer-term, this will be insufficient in providing the necessary safeguards for children. To achieve this, police practice needs to change.

4.29 In my opinion, strip searches should never take place in schools, and this is what should be reflected in the guidance. On the rare occasion when a search is warranted, the child should be arrested and removed to a police station, where their parent or Appropriate Adult can be present and proper engagement, supervision and support be made available. I cover this in more detail later in my report.

Additional Recommendation 5: The Department for Education should reword its guidance on strip searching in schools (as set out in its Searching, Screening & Confiscation guidance) to better emphasise the very exceptional circumstances in which such action would ever be considered appropriate. Further revisions should also be undertaken in line with Additional Recommendation 7 (should this be accepted by the police).

4.30 In terms of the guidance more broadly, I also believe this could have a much higher profile in Keeping Children Safe in Education⁹. As it stands, this is limited to describing the application of searching, screening and confiscation as part of the approach to on-line safety. With its recent improvements, this could now be referenced under *Annexe B: Further Information*. Its inclusion would mean a much more explicit expectation on it being read by school and college leaders and those working directly with children. It should also become a more transparent factor for Ofsted to consider as part of its inspection framework (see Additional Recommendation 8).

Additional Recommendation 6: The Department for Education should include a reference to the guidance on searching, screening & confiscation under Annexe B of Keeping Children Safe in Education.

Recommendation 4

The MPS should update its guidance note and local policy to better emphasise the requirements for engaging an Appropriate Adult under the revised Code C, PACE,1984.

4.31 The aim of this recommendation has been to ensure that children’s rights are safeguarded, and that they are properly supported when being searched by the police. Furthermore, that the law, policy and procedures governing the engagement of an Appropriate Adult (and other requirements) are applied accurately, routinely and in full.

4.32 Update guidance was swiftly issued by the CE BCU prior to publication of the Child Q review. MPS-wide Operational Notices (including relevant practice resources for officers) were created and released on 25 May 2022. This included an immediate policy change requiring an Inspector to authorise any MTIP on a child under 18.

4.33 The MPS stop and search policy was also updated to better reflect PACE Code C, Annexe A, paragraph 11, emphasising the requirement for having an Appropriate

⁹ [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022](#)

Adult present, who would constitute an Appropriate Adult, their role and the recording requirements should one be refused by the child. Reminders continue to be sent locally within the CE BCU and guidance has been made available on the home page of the MPS Intranet.

4.34 Updating and improving the guidance needed to happen and is reported by the MPS as having been welcomed by officers. Previous guidance was insufficiently detailed to mitigate incorrect and poor practice.

4.35 By way of potential impact, it is important to emphasise that no MTIPS involving children have taken place in Hackney since March 2022. London-wide, there has been a 45% reduction from 2021 to 2022.

4.36 Furthermore, no MTIP has taken place on a child without the authority of an Inspector. Whilst this would have made no difference for Child Q (given no authorisation was sought), this has been a sensible response from the MPS in terms of strengthening senior management oversight and decision-making. This approach has since been adopted nationally and features as recommended guidance issued by the College of Policing. More recently, the CE BCU has further reinforced these arrangements. MTIPs involving children now require Superintendent authorisation and those undertaken 'out of hours', must be approved by the CE BCU Commander.

4.37 Part of the explicit orders given by Inspectors are that the age of the person being searched is verified and if required, an Appropriate Adult is present. The MPS report that this has resulted in more Appropriate Adults being part of the process and children receiving the protection they are entitled to. In 2020, 29% of MTIPs involving children across London did not have an Appropriate Adult present. In 2021, this had increased to 32%. From April 2022 to March 2023, this figure had reduced to 20%.

4.38 Whilst not an issue for Hackney, I believe it would be prudent for other Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships to establish reassurance about practice in those cases where an Appropriate Adult was not present. In this respect, I have written to

the Chair of the London Safeguarding Children Partnership suggesting that oversight of this reassurance is facilitated via this group.

4.39 Whilst positive to note this improved performance, I am alert to ongoing challenges about the availability and consistency of Appropriate Adults more generally across London. These issues were shared with me by the Deputy Mayor of London for Policing and are relevant to highlight as part of this report.

4.40 With regards to availability, I was told that the time it takes for an Appropriate Adult to attend and support children can vary greatly. Alongside a general shortage of Appropriate Adults, the way in which this service is delivered in local areas is also having an impact. For example, in some parts of London, there are commissioned services that include 'Service Level Agreements' (SLAs) to ensure timely attendance (e.g. within an hour). In others, there is a reliance on local volunteers, there may be no SLA in place and a child may have to wait several hours. This variability means that children are receiving an inconsistent response and sometimes, a very poor response.

4.41 Furthermore, there is no way to require a parent to attend in a timely fashion where they are acting as the Appropriate Adult and at times, and for various reasons such as childcare responsibilities and work, a child may have to wait several hours for a parent to attend.

4.42 With regards to consistency, the training and professional skills of Appropriate Adults can vary significantly. This can affect the advocacy and support that a child receives. For example, Appropriate Adults who come from a Local Authority background, such as social workers or YOT officers, are likely to be familiar with safeguarding and will have far greater awareness of children's rights and entitlements (beyond the criminal justice process). This, in turn, will make it more likely they can provide influence over the process (to the benefit of the child). This might not be the same with a volunteer or even a parent, who, whilst fully committed, might not be fully cognisant of all the processes, rights and entitlements and as such, would have less power and influence in that environment.

4.43 So, for example, a social worker could have the potential to more effectively advocate for the release of a child into their care rather than being held in police custody overnight, than might a parent in similar circumstances. The Deputy Mayor of London also highlighted an example where parents have unwittingly worked against the child's interests in terms of the legal process, berating their child in front of the police and exposing prejudicial information about previous behaviour.

4.44 In the context of the above, wider questions are posed about the sufficiency of the Appropriate Adult system across London. These should, in my view, be of interest to both Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships and Community Safety Partnerships in terms of establishing further reassurance.

Recommendation 5

The CHSCP should review and revise its awareness raising and training content to ensure the Child Q case is referenced, with a specific focus on reinforcing the responsibilities of practitioners to advocate for and on behalf of the children they are working with / who are in their care.

4.45 The aim of this recommendation has been to ensure that professionals are both competent and confident to robustly advocate for children; and where required, challenge and escalate the decisions of others.

4.46 In response to this recommendation, the CHSCP and its partner agencies have all been engaged in significant awareness raising and training activity post-publication. The core safeguarding training programme delivered by the CHSCP routinely reinforces the lessons from Child Q, there is ongoing communication through the CHSCP's monthly briefings and external trainers have been directly apprised of the Child Q findings for inclusion in any courses as necessary.

4.47 Since the publication of the review, 158 more professionals have been trained in Level One basic safeguarding awareness and 109 at Level Three (a more advanced course for Designated Safeguarding Leads, Deputies and Managers). Lessons

concerning the need for professionals to apply the principles of Safeguarding First, Context, Curiosity and Challenge continue to be routinely promoted¹⁰.

Recommendation 6

Relevant police guidance (both local and national) governing the policy on strip searching children should clearly define a need to focus on the safeguarding needs of children and follow up actions that need to be considered by way of helping and protecting children at potential risk.

4.48 The aim of this recommendation has been to ensure that when children are searched in any context, practice by the police should clearly demonstrate both consideration and action in response to their safeguarding needs – a trauma informed response.

4.49 As previously highlighted, MPS policy has been reviewed and updated to align with best practice and to ensure that the impact upon children is routinely considered whenever they are searched. As part of these revisions, the MPS has also introduced a mandatory process that involves the completion of a Merlin¹¹ and safeguarding referral for each child subject to an MTIP.

4.50 In practical terms, this means that Children’s Social Care will be made aware of any such case and that social workers (and other professionals) will be able to engage the child and family as part of any follow up support that might be required.

4.51 Extending the rationale for this change, a pilot has also been introduced to provide a similar trauma-based response to those children subject to custody strip searches. This recognises the full extent of potential safeguarding needs for children subject to both processes.

¹⁰ <https://chscp.org.uk/safeguarding-first-2/>

¹¹ The ‘Merlin’ IT application is used by the police to record the details of those vulnerable people aged 17 and under via a Pre-Assessment Check (PAC) and for details of vulnerable adults aged 18 or over via an Adult Come to Notice (ACN). MERLIN is also used for the recording and investigation of Sudden Deaths, Unidentified Persons/bodies and other found persons. Reports are recorded on Merlin to enable safeguarding teams to assess any risks or harm to individual children based on the report and any further relevant information. These reports are often shared with partner agencies to ensure a multi-agency approach can be taken to safeguarding.

4.52 Whilst these initiatives have been well received and supported by partner agencies, they have yet to be tested locally. For the response to MTIPs, this is simply because there haven't been any in Hackney. For custody searches, this is relatively recent, and its application is awaited.

4.53 I have been reassured that systems have been put in place to monitor and measure outcomes, so that the difference made to children and their families can be monitored and reported upon. The potential impact of this initiative is considered by involved agencies as positive, particularly in terms of the proactive support that can be offered to children – children who are likely to be both humiliated and traumatised whether they are strip searched in or outside of custody.

4.54 That said, there were strong feelings expressed by many of the children I spoke with. The majority did not support the idea that a referral should be made to Children's Social Care, they felt it was stigmatising and unnecessary, not least when they had been searched and nothing found. This is an area we will monitor moving forward.

Recommendation 7

The Central East BCU should engage the local stop and search monitoring group, ACCOUNT, and other representative bodies to consider the lessons from this review and how the effectiveness of safeguarding (as part of stop and search practice) can be overseen through their respective activities.

'The approach to Child Q has highlighted prejudice and institutional racism which can only be addressed systematically. I hope the MPS response will be to work with ACCOUNT in a more intimate capacity to receive the results wanted'. ACCOUNT member.

4.55 The primary aim of this recommendation has been to ensure oversight on stop and search activity is undertaken via structured, formal and collective monitoring that involves representative local groups. This provides reassurance about the quality of practice, supports transparency and allows for lessons to be learnt where appropriate.

4.56 Progress has been variable. In some areas, working relationships have been established between the local police and other organisations such as Hackney CVS and the Crib Youth Project. Both are part of the current Community Monitoring Group (CMG) (whilst awaiting a new pilot for this forum). The Wickers is another organisation that has engaged in dialogue with the police and has shown an active interest in joining the CMG.

4.57 In respect of this specific recommendation, working relationships between the police and ACCOUNT have been harder to establish. The reasons for this are both acknowledged and understood.

4.58 At my first meeting with ACCOUNT members (following the publication of the Child Q report), many expressed continuing distrust with the police, frustration that they were '*meeting but not engaging*' and that there was a general lack of transparency and respect given ACCOUNT's lack of access to senior leaders. Views were also expressed that different community groups were being '*played off*' against each other by the police.

4.59 In the context of Child Q's experiences, there was also understandable anger and a belief that the police simply didn't understand the issues, or the effects that the actions of its officers were having on communities in the long run. At a local level, it is this inherent lack of trust that the CE BCU need to prioritise if meaningful engagement is ever to be achieved. There are no quick fixes to this.

4.60 On a positive note, green shoots are emerging. With new leadership at the CE BCU, its Commander and senior staff are making efforts to connect with key stakeholders with an interest in how the police operate locally. I understand that dialogue with ACCOUNT has recently been established and whilst early days, the Commander has expressed his commitment in this context.

4.61 Recent feedback from members of ACCOUNT also indicates that progress is slow but that relationships are being developed. For their part, ACCOUNT remain committed to do what they can to support, monitor and encourage change.

Recommendation 8

Where any suspicion of harm arises by way of concerns for potential or actual substance misuse, a safeguarding response is paramount. Practitioners should always contact Children’s Social Care to make a referral or seek further advice in such circumstances.

4.62 The aim of this recommendation has been to improve how professionals respond to any concerns they might have about children and substance misuse; ensuring a Safeguarding First approach is maintained, that needs are routinely prioritised and that professionals know what to look for and what to do if they think they’ve seen it.

4.63 As a safeguarding theme, substance misuse continues to feature heavily within the Hackney Child Wellbeing Framework.¹² This document remains central in helping professionals understand what action they should take and when.

4.64 Hackney has some excellent help available, particularly through Young Hackney’s Substance Misuse Service. This service is open to anyone aged under 25. It continues to be routinely promoted via the communication channels of the CHSCP and partner agencies.

4.65 Children can be signposted directly to the Substance Misuse Service, or it can be engaged as part of targeted early help or a statutory social work plan. The support on offer includes treatment and therapeutic support, advice and guidance to those experiencing substance misuse themselves, or to anyone concerned about someone they know.

4.66 As of April 2023, 88 children were allocated to the Substance Misuse Service for support. 85% of those who were receiving personalised (1:1) support were aged between 13-19 (with the majority aged 15-17 years) and 23 were identified as having

¹² <https://chscp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Hackney-Child-Wellbeing-Framework-refresh-v6-.pdf>

special education needs. Most referrals included cannabis as either a primary or secondary drug.

4.67 For school and college staff, supplementary guidance issued by Hackney Education (shortly after the publication of the Child Q report) also helped reinforce advice on this issue as does the ongoing work of Young Hackney in this sector. Since January 2023, the service has been working in one Hackney school (providing specific PSHE for various year groups) reaching over 322 students.

4.68 Other activity in this space has included the development of a further pilot involving Hackney Children's Social Care and the police. The aim of this pilot is for all children who come to the notice of the police for substance misuse concerns (as part of a stop and search) to be referred to Hackney's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

4.69 This is intended to help determine what additional help and protection might be needed to safeguard those children and/or what support might be required following a stop and search where no drugs are found.

4.70 The rationale is similar to that described above for referrals to Children's Social Care following an MTIP, with professionals actively considering what support a child might need following their contact with the police. In terms of expected numbers, this could equate to around 500 children per year.

4.71 Delays in progressing the launch of this pilot have arisen because of professional concern about the criminalisation of children. There has also been significant dialogue to clarify the benefits of the pilot and to better understand how it might help children. As with the proposed changes covering MTIPs, children and community leaders have similarly expressed their concerns about privacy and stigmatisation. I share these concerns.

4.72 Firstly, there is a strong argument that for any details about a child to be escalated to Children's Social Care, concerns need to be sufficiently serious to justify

the sharing of information. In the absence of any consent or evidence of safeguarding concerns (beyond a child being stopped and searched), I do not believe this is proportionate.

4.73 Secondly, when considering the fact that more Black children are subject to stop and search locally, this pilot is likely to create ‘double disproportionality’ in the sense that more Black children will be coming to the notice of yet another statutory authority for potentially unfair and unjustifiable reasons.

4.74 The pilot has only recently been agreed across the relevant partner agencies. It has not been running for any sufficient degree of time to evaluate impact, although there are defined mechanisms in place to measure performance. I do not support the pilot, and this will be subject to further consideration by the CHSCP.

Recommendation 9

The MPS should engage The College of Policing to explore potential improvements to the guidance concerning reasonable grounds involving stop and search activity with children.

4.75 The aim of this specific recommendation was to improve the available guidance for police officers to help them make good and consistent judgements about what might constitute reasonable grounds to search a child. It was escalated to the National Police Chief’s Council (NPCC) lead for stop and search by the MPS.

4.76 With regards to the existing guidance on ‘reasonable grounds’, the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) guidance¹³ was published in 2016 and emphasises the following:

4.77 *‘The decision to stop and/or search a person must be fair. You must be sure that your decision to stop and search that particular person is made for the right reasons. You must have due regard to the [Code of Ethics](#) and the [National Decision Model](#) in reaching your decision.’* The APP covers the following headings:

¹³ <https://www.college.police.uk/app/stop-and-search/quick-reference-guides/quick-reference-guide-fair-decision-making>

- The decision to stop and/or search a person must never be based on protected characteristics.
- Biases in decision making should be recognised and challenged.
- The decision to stop and search a person must be based on objective factors.
- Reasonable grounds for suspicion must not be based on personal factors.
- For information or intelligence to provide reasonable grounds, it should be accurate and current, and should relate to articles being carried by a person or in a vehicle in the locality.
- Talking to the person to help decision making.
- Where reasonable suspicion is not required, the decision to stop and search a person should still be applied in an objective way.

4.78 As part of a wider response to the improvement of guidance, the NPCC and College of Policing have been actively working together to revise and strengthen the APP in relation to PACE Code A and its relationship to PACE Code C.

4.79 Having consulted with Forces on PACE Code A, the NPCC has asked the Home Office to consider the following changes. Whilst not including the guidance on 'reasonable grounds', these do include the minimum authority levels for MTIPs, clearer information in Code A (specifically relating to MTIPs) and ensuring that Code A reflects information and any subsequent changes made within Code C. The NPCC and College of Policing intend to update the APP with clearer guidance on these areas in advance of any potential changes to legislation.

4.80 Whilst determining what is reasonable or not will always attract a degree of subjectivity, mitigations by way of increasing the minimum authority levels for MTIPs should help improve the consistency of decision making. The overall reduction in MTIPs involving children across London illustrates that this may be happening, however we know that many factors can influence statistics.

MTIPs on under 18s (January - December)

2020	299
2021	271
2022	150

4.81 In addition to the activity above, the MPS Central Stop and Search Team has also engaged and continues to engage with peers responsible for stop and search at the College of Policing, several county forces and the Children's Commissioner. Locally, the MPS policy on MTIP searches is now more comprehensively aligned with the relevant parts of PACE Codes A and C, with all the information retained in a single place for officers to access.

Reasonable Grounds to Arrest

4.82 Whilst not considered at the time of the review's initial publication, I believe there is further merit for the police to consider its overall approach to MTIPs in the context of decision making and reasonable grounds. This was articulately raised in a question from one of Hackney Youth Parliament's Young Speakers at the most recent Joint Scrutiny Commission held in Hackney on 25 April 2023. The Young Speaker asked:

'Whilst it is encouraging that no MTIP searches on under 18s have been undertaken since Child Q [in Hackney], it raises questions as to what the justification for them was previously, whether any will be undertaken again, and why, if an officer has grounds for an MTIP search, they couldn't arrest/detain and bring the child to a station for questioning instead?'

4.83 The CE BCU Commander's response was broadly that the MPS retained its focus on not criminalising children and that it would be better to avoid children being taken into custody wherever possible. Whilst I wholeheartedly agree with this principle, I disagree with the rationale and application in this context. My reasons are threefold.

4.84 Firstly, if a police officer has reasonable grounds to initiate a search that exposes a child's intimate parts, then I can see no reason why those reasonable grounds cannot be extended to an arrest. In my opinion, they can and if they cannot it is hard to imagine that they would support grounds for such an intrusive search.

4.85 Secondly, and more importantly, by arresting a child, any subsequent search taking place will be in the controlled environment of a police station. Here, there will be additional layers of scrutiny and process to afford further protection to a child. To me, this seems to be a sensible approach and would provide further reassurance beyond increasing the rank of authorisation.

4.86 Lastly, I imagine that most children subject to a MTIP in the community will feel criminalised regardless. Certainly, Child Q and her family echoed these feelings when I first spoke with them. The difference, in my opinion, is also reinforced by the frequency with which trauma will be revisited and triggered in a child. For example, in the case of Child Q, the search took place in her school, an environment that she would routinely frequent. It is not hard to imagine how walking through the school (after such an experience) would be difficult, if not impossible, without her reflecting on what had happened.

Additional Recommendation 7: Where, in the exceptional circumstances that police officers have reasonable grounds to undertake an MTIP search of a child, they should consider arresting the child and conducting the search in a police station. This will ensure supervision takes place, authorisation is confirmed, an appropriate adult or parent / carer is present and monitoring of the process is stringently applied.

Recommendation 10

Alongside Recommendation 3, the Department for Education should review and revise its guidance on Searching, Screening and Confiscation (2018) to include much stronger reference to the importance of keeping records and engaging parents as part of best safeguarding practice.

4.87 The aim of this recommendation has been to improve practice in respect of searching, screening and confiscation at schools. Positively, the updated guidance provides a clear expectation that any search for a prohibited item is recorded and that parents are informed as soon as is practicable.

4.88 Specific guidance on record keeping is contained on page 14 of the updated guidance. This sets out a list of what a school should include in their records, such as the reason for the search, who conducted the search and the outcome. Importantly, the DfE has also emphasised the importance of analysing any data collected to help establish whether *'searching is falling disproportionately on any group or groups [and] they should consider whether any actions should be taken to prevent this'*.

4.89 Guidance on informing parents has also been enhanced and is set out on page 15 of the updated guidance. This was absent from the previous version. Positively, its inclusion is likely to support a focus on maintaining strong home-school relationships, transparency and the importance of partnership working with parents/carers.

'...Parents should always be informed of any search for a prohibited item...and the outcome of the search as soon as is practicable...A member of staff should inform the parents of what, if anything, has been confiscated and the resulting action the school has taken, including any sanctions applied.'

4.90 Of course, key to ensuring the successful implementation of this revised guidance will be how reassurance is sought about compliance and furthermore, how pupils are experiencing its application. In this respect, I believe there to be merit in this issue being routinely tested through Ofsted's inspection framework for schools. This should examine the proportionality, legality, recording and overall effectiveness of activity. I make the following recommendation in this regard.

Additional Recommendation 8: As part of its inspection framework for schools¹⁴ (and the associated guidance on inspectors talking to pupils¹⁵), Ofsted should ensure that the quality of practice involving the searching, screening and confiscation of prohibited items is routinely tested.

Recommendation 11

The Home Office and the National Police Chiefs Council should seek to strengthen the Revised Code C, PACE 1984 to better define the engagement of parents / carers / guardians when strip searches that involve the exposure of intimate parts of the body are undertaken on children.

4.91 The aim of this recommendation was simply to strengthen the safeguards available to children by way of their parents, carers or guardians being appropriately informed and engaged by the police. This did not happen with Child Q.

4.92 Disappointingly, I am not able to report any progress on this matter, with the government choosing to await the outcome of the IOPC's conduct investigation to consider its next steps. In a letter dated 3 November 2022, the Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire at the Home Office advised:

'You will be aware that the case of Child Q has been referred to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), who are investigating alleged gross misconduct by the Metropolitan Police officers involved. You will appreciate that for reasons of both public confidence and due process, it is right that the Government does not pre-empt the IOPC's decisions which are taken independently from the Government and the police. We expect the IOPC to publish an update shortly and will set out our plans once their investigation is complete.'

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif>

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspectors-talking-to-pupils-on-inspection/inspectors-talking-to-pupils-on-inspection#background>

We will consider any recommendations made for the Home Office as a result of these incidents very carefully. In addition to the City and Hackney Children’s Safeguarding Partnership, recommendations for amendments to PACE Codes were made by the Children’s Commissioner for England. I would like to reassure you that we are actively considering the possibility of such amendments.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to write and I trust that this reply is helpful.’

4.93 Whilst noting the contents of this letter, the government’s rationale for its delay in responding to this recommendation highlights the potential ambiguity of statutory guidance and an inconsistency in what is seen as ‘*due process*’.

4.94 For example, Working Together 2018 is clear that learning has a relevance for government and that ordinarily reviews should be undertaken swiftly (within six months). This is to ensure that improvements are implemented at the earliest possible opportunity. The statutory guidance also emphasises the distinct arrangements for investigating issues of conduct. These processes are not one and the same and should not be conflated.

4.95 As set out in the government’s response, its position (and hence its interpretation of due process) appears to indicate the prioritisation of the IOPC’s findings over those of the Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review. At the very least, it gives the impression that the judgments made about practice in the case of Child Q need qualifying and/or endorsing by the IOPC before any action is taken.

4.96 Whilst acknowledging the IOPC also identifies lessons as part of its work, such an approach by the government conflicts with the overall principles for undertaking reviews, namely the delivery of rapid learning that results in action to prevent or reduce the risk of recurrence of similar incidents. In my opinion, waiting for the IOPC has simply relegated the status of the findings of the Child Q review. Practically, this has meant a delay in action.

4.97 Although the government has stated it is actively considering the possibility of amendments, this seems far from acceptable one year after publication. That said, I sincerely hope the government seize this opportunity to re-visit the relevant legislation in its entirety. When the law is fundamentally wrong, as I believe it to be, the safety of children won't be reliably improved by tweaking policy.

Recommendation 12

The CHSCP should engage ACCOUNT, Safer Schools Police Officers and other community organisations to develop an awareness raising programme across schools and colleges about stop and search activity by the police.

4.98 The aim of this recommendation has been to help educate and empower children to better understand their rights in respect of stop and search activity by the police. It remains an issue upon which all secondary schools and colleges should maintain a focus going forward and one where I believe that Safer Schools Officers can play a significant role.

4.99 On behalf of the CHSCP, Hackney Education took the lead on this recommendation and immediately responded by way of ensuring circulation of MOPAC's Stop and Search '*Need to Know*' guidance to all schools and colleges after the Child Q report was published.

4.100 Given the public accessibility of this guidance,¹⁶ I would now expect all secondary schools and colleges (as a minimum) to take individual responsibility for regularly sharing this with their students. Beyond the circulation of the MOPAC guidance, many schools have also sought to embed awareness through their PHSE lessons. To me, this seems a sensible way forward and one that I hope all secondary schools will actively adopt as a way of mainstreaming how children are taught about their rights and responsibilities in this context.

¹⁶ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/kyr_inner_april_19_v5_new.pdf

'Alongside these actions, the school also continues to focus on teaching children their rights and responsibilities as part of their PSHE lessons, which supports them to think critically and make informed decisions.' Hackney school.

'The PHSCE curriculum was updated to include lessons specifically teaching students their rights around police searches as recommended in the report.' Hackney school.

4.101 The potential for further progress against this recommendation can also be seen in the piloting of a QR code that is being shared with children who are subject to stop and search. Developed in partnership between the CE BCU and Hackney Council, this code directs children to a range of non-police advice (collated by Young Hackney) that is focused on staying safe, rights awareness and signposting to support.

4.102 In addition to the above initiatives, the impact and influence of Hackney's community groups should not be underestimated. I am aware of the excellent work undertaken in this space immediately after the review's publication. There were active conversations and reflections with children about their experiences and the details surrounding stop and search activity. I get no sense that this is an issue they are willing to let drift and there continues to be active collaboration with children to learn more about this issue.

Recommendation 13

The CHSCP should continue with its rolling programme of multi-agency adultification training. Participation should be actively focused on practitioners from the police and schools, with the Training, Learning & Development Sub group developing a process to specifically evaluate impact across these sectors.

4.103 The aim of this recommendation has been to increase the participation of local professionals in targeted training, so that our multi-agency workforce can:

- understand notions of vulnerability and childhood and how these are applied to some children more than others.
- understand the broad concepts of intersectionality and adultification.
- identify ways to guard against adultification in practice.

4.104 Building on the sessions that had already commenced in 2021, the CHSCP commissioned twice the number of sessions over 2022/23. These continued to explore the concept of 'adultification' from both a research and practice perspective, using case studies, small group discussions and serious case review findings to explore how adultification manifests in practice and its potentially life-long impact.

4.105 Participants were also introduced to *Listen Up's Professional Inter-Adultification Model* which provides a framework for individuals and teams to reflect on practice and guard against the adultification of children.

4.106 The audience for this training has remained largely multi-agency in focus, although some organisations are known to have commissioned this separately or are in the process of doing so. At the end of March 2023, 28 sessions had been delivered through the CHSCP programme to 435 front-line professionals. This total includes individual sessions that were held for senior leaders, one targeted course for education staff and three sessions for the police (including one solely for Safer Schools' Police Officers).

4.107 By way of a snapshot, 95 Council staff have attended this training, 88 police officers, 118 health staff and 73 education staff. Whilst a proportionate spread, the education numbers only include 13 staff from academies, 10 from maintained schools and three from independent schools.

4.108 Courses continue to be analysed in line with the CHSCP's training evaluation framework. Overall feedback has been positive.

- 99% of delegates considered that adultification training would enable them to safeguard children more effectively.

- 86% of delegates rated their knowledge of adultification as being Good, Very Good or Excellent after attending a course.
- 97.4% of delegates rated the trainer's facilitation skills, teaching style and knowledge as Good, Very Good or Excellent.

4.109 Professionals attending the training have provided the following examples of how they thought they could apply what they had learnt in practice:

The most valuable learning aspect for me is to ensure Black young people and other disadvantaged groups are considered in their vulnerability and not the risks they may present to others (with suspicion and pre-conceptions).

To see children as children first and foremost and treat them as such, look at the bigger picture and undertake assessments holistically.

*A reminder that whatever age a young person may appear to be, we need to remember always that the young person is still a child.
Being better informed about how children can be perceived and to remember that all children are children and in need of protection.*

I will be more aware/curious about terminology used by professionals in case notes about children & young people.

More aware of risk factors and how my own perceptions/assumptions of children and young people and language colours my perceptions.

...to take care in language when writing in notes and to challenge others' misconceptions and the language they also use. Challenge others to think about their biases and misconceptions.

I will have more awareness during interactions with patients.

As part of our wider Anti-Racism work in the school, I will disseminate [information about adultification] to staff through staff training.

I will use supervision sessions with my supervisees to support them to explore cases further and to expand their thinking about young people on their caseload.

I will be able to think and look beyond the evidence provided about a young person and consider a trauma informed approach. I will challenge professionals who use negative connotations to describe a child.

4.110 Three months after attending this training, some professionals provided the following examples of how they had applied learning to practice:

I used this learning in dealing with referrals to Children's Social Care.

Challenging colleagues and professionals on the way they speak to and describe Black children.

[I used what I had learnt] in clinic with client of mine who has been adultified for most of her teenage years.

Opened up discussions with the adults I work with in my early year's settings.

It was really good to discuss Adultification with partner agencies particularly in light of what happened with Child Q and other young Black people.

This has helped when attending strategy discussion and all other areas of my practice in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub as the health rep.

I definitely think about adultification more, however at a wider level this work needs to be reinforced - particularly with CAFCASS Guardians.

I have begun challenging the language that social workers use in children's profiles keeping what we learned in the workshop in mind.

I am directly referencing Adulthood in Hackney Education's safeguarding training to education settings.

I learned about my own unconscious biases in this area given the narrative often applied to children - such as those that are gang affiliated - to reset my starting point that they are still children and to be viewed as such when either advocating on their behalf or during the assessment process to provide ongoing support.

4.111 In addition to the above, the Head of Safeguarding children in the Homerton University Hospital recently shared their observations of a case involving police stating: *"This demonstrates very good progress in the battle against adulthood and criminalisation against young black boys."*

4.112 Overall, adulthood training has been positively received within the partnership and remains of both interest and importance. There is evidence of impact and how learning from this course is being successfully applied in practice settings.

4.113 However, attendance at the CHSCP programme is not being sustained at the levels experienced immediately following publication of the review. This, in part, is expected and is likely due to the numbers already trained, the cascading of learning and individual agencies commissioning training for their own staff.

4.114 There are also cost implications for the CHSCP given the training is being delivered by an external provider who does not provide a train the trainer option and in this respect, sessions are likely to be reduced over the next year. That said, the CHSCP and its partners will actively seek to supplement any reduction by developing its own courses. These will have a wider focus on active anti-racist practice, will be rooted in our local context and delivered by local professionals / community groups within our geographic footprint.

4.115 As set out later in my report, this training will sit alongside that being planned by the Trust & Confidence in Police Working Group. Importantly, it will align with our

approach to humanise relationships and support grassroots organisations to work with statutory agencies, including the police.

4.116 As a partnership, there is substantial expertise and enthusiasm that allows us to do this. In my view, applying such focus locally will accrue benefits that shouldn't be underestimated. Such a model can help facilitate networking, break down barriers and help participants hear from those with first-hand experience of practice - whether good, bad or indifferent.

Recommendation 14

The CHSCP should expedite its work on developing an anti-racist charter and practical guides that support the eradicating of racism, discrimination and injustice across its local safeguarding arrangements.

4.117 Plans to develop a multi-agency Charter for active anti-racism were already in place prior to the publication of the Child Q review. Work in this regard has continued, with a draft Charter developed and awaiting formal ratification. The Charter itself reinforces the position of the CHSCP in supporting the eradication of racism, discrimination, and injustice. It is explicit in expressing a zero tolerance for racism, with the CHSCP stating its unequivocal commitment towards its multi-agency arrangements being actively anti-racist.

4.118 As described in the Charter, it intends to be more than just good words on a page. It sets out practical ways in which active anti-racist practice can be evidenced and how leaders and professionals can help children and families in this context. The Charter also recognises the demographics of our local workforce and how for many of them, the impact of racism resonates daily in both their personal and professional lives. Definitions of Structural Racial Inequality, Institutional and Systemic Racism and Active Anti-Racism are included. The focus is aligned to four defined areas. These are People, Policy, Practice and Scrutiny.

4.119 However, whilst we have the framework, it has yet to be formally agreed. This has not only been caused by some practical issues, but the significant challenges in trying to align a collective position for the numerous agencies for whom the Charter is intended. Many remain in different places in terms of their understanding of racism and acceptance of certain definitions.

4.120 This is no more evident than through the debate that has arisen following the publication of the Casey's review,¹⁷ and the MPS Commissioner's unwillingness to accept the use of the term 'institutional'. This was used by Baroness Casey to describe the MPS's problems with racism, homophobia and misogyny. It is also linked to feedback on the use of other terminology such as '*Black and Global Majority*'. Other agencies, their staff and some of the children we have spoken with do not agree with this as being either an accurate or appropriate definition. These issues require further dialogue to resolve.

4.121 Whilst this has not prevented the significant activity of many organisations in respect of anti-racist practice, the progress towards agreeing this Charter remains challenging.

¹⁷ <https://www.met.police.uk/police-forces/metropolitan-police/areas/about-us/about-the-met/bcr/baroness-casey-review/>

5. Trust & Confidence in the Police

5.1 Following a disjointed start and an exchange of letters between the leadership at Hackney Council and that of the MPS, it was agreed that both agencies would work together on a shared plan, co-produced with community partners, to help rebuild trust in the MPS locally.

5.2 A Police Action Board was subsequently established to oversee the development of this plan, with the CE BCU Commander and Council's Chief Executive agreeing it should be overseen and owned by Hackney's Community Safety Partnership (CSP). Under the governance of the CSP, the Community Resilience Partnership (which involves a wider range of partners) has taken the lead in developing and driving forward the specific areas for improvement.

5.3 Commencing this work, a series of workshops were held in April and May 2022. These gathered insight from local communities on current levels of trust and confidence and appraised opportunities for addressing community concerns. The workshops acknowledged the need to create better opportunities to engage with community partners and that initially, this should be without the police.

5.4 A key request from community partners was that a relevant and effective plan be co-produced in collaboration with the CE BCU, the Council and wider statutory partners – in effect starting from scratch. The clear message from communities was: *'please don't tell us what is needed to make things better - just come and ask us'*.

5.5 Steps to ask those questions were taken by the MPS in May 2022, with key police leads meeting with community partners to start an ongoing process of listening. This was reportedly well received. A community co-production session was subsequently held in June 2022. This involved asking community representatives what they would like to see *'stop, start and continue'* with regards to policing and partnership working in Hackney. The co-production workshop was also reported to have gone well and a long list of draft proposals were captured.

5.6 To put shape to the plan, a Trust and Confidence (T&C) working group was formed comprising community partners and representatives from the Council and the MPS. The full working group has met routinely and now has five subgroups reporting to it that cover each section of the plan.

5.7 Locally, arrangements of this type have not previously been set up to address trust and confidence in the police and whilst challenges remain, there is evidence of some positive dividends. For example, Hackney Foster Carers' Council established regular meetings with the CE BCU Youth Engagement Team, after first meeting in the community co-production session. Foster carers shared that they felt they had tried for several years to build a relationship with the CE BCU '*but just hadn't met the right people before*'. Whilst perhaps a small step, small steps can be good steps.

5.8 In terms of the plan itself, this is grouped under the following five key themes:

- Anti-Racism
- Police Leadership, Culture and Practice
- Community collaboration and engagement
- Community monitoring, focused on Stop and Search and S60s
- Police and partnership training

5.9 In September 2022 the T&C working group reported on progress, stating they felt there had already been a shift in ways of working and that local communities, the MPS and Council were beginning to better work in partnership to effect positive change. They commended the balanced approach to community listening and the practical action that had been taken thus far. Some examples of this change (shared with me for this update report) are set out below:

Progress has been made in updating police partnership lists for youth engagement and for weekly policing updates and emergency notifications, including notification of Section 60 authorisations. We have already seen positive outcomes from this work, with community partners now communicating Section 60 notifications on social media, empowering local young people and families to understand search powers in place.

Several community groups who previously felt they had a poor response from CE BCU on engagement opportunities now have the correct contacts in the BCU and have been very pleased by police engagement at their events and meetings. Stronger relationships have been developed between community groups and both the Youth Engagement Team and with Safer Neighbourhoods Teams and they have honoured their commitment to attend as many community events as they are invited to.

Hackney Council will be one of the first Local Authorities to trial the new MOPAC Local Scrutiny scheme, with police, council, community and MOPAC working together to build a more representative Community Monitoring Group in the borough.

The T&C working group is in the early stages of developing an innovative police and partnership training proposal bringing together best practice in Anti Racism, Adulthood, Cultural Awareness, Trauma Awareness and Unconscious Bias, underpinned by somatic and embodiment training approaches. This offers a different approach that has the potential to enable a systemic change of practice for police officers, council officers and local communities; enabling a more positive and sustainable response to situations of potential conflict and aggression.

5.10 The community's established and ongoing commitment to the work on trust and confidence was noted by the T&C working group as being exceptional, particularly within Hackney's Black communities. *'This should not be underestimated given the extremely challenging context of [the] Child Q [case], a significant history of allegations of police racism in Hackney and more recently, the shooting of Chris Kaba South London (which again impacted Black communities in Hackney and tested trust and confidence in policing).'*¹⁸

5.11 However, caution remains in recognition that this is only the beginning of a very long journey. Trust and confidence will not change overnight, particularly in the context of the current situation where the MPS is facing continued criticism on several fronts. Locally, an ongoing commitment to the action plan and maintaining strong partnerships are essential if there is to be any prospect of success.

¹⁸ Written update shared by Hackney Council on 'Actions & Evidence of Impact' on Trust and Confidence in the police.

5.12 Above all, this activity must be delivered as a package. The MPS can't cherry pick which aspects they are happy for the community to trust them about and which ones they can't. If progress isn't made in all areas, it will be made in none.

5.13 And this brings me to the need for the MPS to reconsider its position on racism. As I've said before, racism is a real problem. Denying it exists, simply incubates it. In the context of the recent debate following the Casey review, the MPS is running the risk of faltering at the first hurdle.

5.14 To deconstruct this further, when we talk about building trust and confidence in the police, this is fundamentally about building trust and confidence for those people who are disproportionately affected. Also, those who see themselves as over-policed and under-protected. In Hackney's context, these are primarily, but not uniquely, Black people.

5.15 Because of this, I don't believe it is helpful for the MPS Commissioner to kick-start his aspirations for change by introducing an argument about whether the term institutional racism is appropriate or not. Whilst I have no doubt about the Commissioner's leadership commitment and the significant effort that he is making, the blunt reality is that the facts speak for themselves, as do many of Hackney's communities who are in no doubt whatsoever that this definition is accurate. They believe it fits.

5.16 In his report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, the late Sir William Macpherson defined institutional racism as follows:

*'The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.'*¹⁹

¹⁹ [Para 6.34 THE STEPHEN LAWRENCE INQUIRY, SIR WILLIAM MACPHERSON OF CLUNY 1999](#)

5.17 Whilst noting the Commissioner's views that this definition is ambiguous and confusing, I don't believe it is. It transparently describes how racism manifests organisationally, with there being no better example than that of the processes governing stop and search.

5.18 Leadership sets the tone and defensive posturing is not a good place to start. Macpherson's definition does not mean that every officer is a racist and I know that some of the very best of policing can be found in the ranks of the MPS. However, the history, process and systems of the organisation are subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) combining to undermine best intent. It is for the MPS leadership to acknowledge this and to accept that its institutional framework needs to be rebuilt.

5.19 In this respect, I agree wholeheartedly with Baroness Casey's findings and the clear position expressed by Hackney's Mayor. Indeed, it would be far better for the Commissioner to simply accept what has been found. By not doing so, ambiguity and confusion have been introduced, not removed.

5.20 Indeed, despite the reassurance of firm action, there will be many in the community who will interpret the MPS stance as being a simple denial that there is problem and that this issue remains one of *a few bad apples*. This raises a very real concern about how meaningful change will ever be achieved. Until the MPS take full ownership of the problem, progress will remain a challenge.

5.21 As Sir William Macpherson also explained in paragraph 6.34 of his report, '*It [racism] persists because of the failure of the organisation openly and adequately to recognise and address its existence and causes by policy, example and leadership. Without recognition and action to eliminate such racism it can prevail as part of the ethos or culture of the organisation. It is a corrosive disease.*'

5.22 In this respect, I strongly urge the Commissioner to reflect on the detail of the Macpherson definition and align himself with the position recently set by the Chief

Constable of Police Scotland.²⁰ With the final version of the MPS Turnaround Plan²¹ due shortly, I strongly believe this will accrue significant benefits for the police in terms of its stated mission for ‘More Trust, Less Crime and High Standards.’

Additional Recommendation 9: The MPS should acknowledge institutional racism as set out in the Macpherson definition and consider how the steps to address the organisational issues facing the MPS can be better focused and driven within its refreshed Turnaround Plan.

The MPS – Size and Scale

5.23 Beyond the importance of strong leadership and the commitment of individual officers, reassurance about the integrity and competence of the police is also inherently linked to its structural arrangements and overarching governance.

5.24 In the context of the MPS, given its size, the range of specialist functions it hosts and the layering of a deep command structure, significant space exists between service delivery at a local level and ultimate accountability which sits in New Scotland Yard. This exposes weaknesses across a range of different issues, which in turn impacts upon trust and confidence. Key to this is the absence of any clear local accountability.

5.25 I acknowledge that the full debate as to the size and shape of the MPS is not for me, or indeed, this report. However, it is reasonable, in the terms of what I believe to be a need for greater local accountability, to consider how this might be done within the current framework, or at least begun.

5.26 Over recent years the MPS has been reconfigured to meet the needs of the organisation as it attempts to meet an increase in the demand for its services. This has resulted in wider geographic areas of responsibility, with multiple boroughs now covered by a single command unit. For example, in Hackney, the CE BCU is also

²⁰ <https://www.scotland.police.uk/what-s-happening/news/2023/may/chief-constable-statement-on-institutional-discrimination/>

²¹ <https://www.met.police.uk/notices/met/the-turnaround-plan-more-trust-less-crime-and-high-standards/>

responsible for Tower Hamlets. In Bromley, where I am the Independent Chair of its Safeguarding Children Partnership, the local BCU is responsible for three local authority areas – Bromley, Croydon, and Bexley.

5.27 Whilst this approach is designed to provide an agile framework within which the MPS can flex resources to meet demand, it is not co-terminus with individual boroughs and does not always facilitate frequent and meaningful community and local political engagement.

5.28 In the immediate aftermath of Child Q, local communities and their political representatives could vent their frustration with the person responsible for the delivery of local policing but could not immediately access the individual ultimately accountable for it.

5.29 In fact, the CE BCU Commander in post at the time had to wait for the MPS central leadership to agree what could or could not be said publicly about the incident. Decisions made by those far removed from the reality of day-to-day policing in Hackney are unlikely to be made on the most secure of grounds.

5.30 As said, the debate about the MPS structure is not for here, but one practical way in which local accountability could be strengthened is by ensuring that local people are engaged and have some agency in the process that appoints the most senior police Commander in their borough. To be clear, this is not about diluting operational independence. Such independence is the cornerstone upon which policing is built and operational decisions must always be free from political direction or control. This suggestion is about engaging the community in the local appointments process.

5.31 When looking at other local organisations, this is routine. For example, the most senior appointments in Councils are made only after robust and thorough engagement with a range of different stakeholders, many of whom are community representatives. In fact the CE BCU Commander is engaged in the process that

appoints Hackney's Chief Executive. I see no reason why a similar approach cannot be adopted by the MPS.

5.32 Indeed, the MPS could still operate a process whereby it shortlists suitably qualified candidates (Chief Superintendents) who have applied for the role of BCU Commander and in a final stage, seek to engage local representatives to allow them to help decide who is the best fit. At the very least, this would promote a degree of ownership from communities and would likely create a much stronger foundation upon which trust and confidence in local leadership could develop.

5.33 Another practical way of strengthening local accountability links to the existence of effective community scrutiny mechanisms. To date, these have been largely ineffective. To work, they must have the ability to look at the issues such as MTIPs or strip-searches and have the ability to 'call in' high-profile issues in order to enhance public confidence. As set out previously (see paragraph 4.51), I am aware that MOPAC and the MPS is supporting a new way of running such groups in Hackney and the ability to scrutinise these powers should be part of that work. It is also clear that these groups will need greater and continuing levels of support in order to be able to do this effectively.

Additional Recommendation 10: The MPS should develop and introduce mechanisms that facilitate the engagement of local representatives in the recruitment processes for BCU Commanders across London.

Additional Recommendation 11: The new London Policing Board (recently announced by the Mayor of London) should routinely scrutinise the actions taken by the MPS towards increasing meaningful accountability at a local level, including the impact of any revised recruitment processes for BCU Commanders.

Safer Schools Officers – Humanising Relationships

5.34 Following the publication of the Child Q review, the issue of police presence in schools became an issue of much debate. Some within the community felt that officers should never be able to enter schools, let alone occupy a position within one; others saw a logic to it. This debate continues and remains somewhat polarised. It has been amplified by outside actors and firm views remain on both sides. In my opinion, whilst perhaps understandable thinking in the immediate aftermath of Child Q, the removal of police from schools is neither appropriate nor what is needed.

5.35 Indeed, schools are fundamentally important to our local community and should be safe places where students can work together, learn together and thrive. At their best, schools will be integrated with the wider community and will develop meaningful relationships with local agencies whose role it is to help and protect the children who frequent their classrooms and halls. These agencies include health professionals, social care and the police.

5.36 The key is that such inter-agency relationships are built on trust and an understanding that they are there to support children with access to the services, advice, and support that they are best placed to deliver. Also, key is for such trust and understanding to extend to the children themselves, their parents / carers and the wider community.

5.37 Since the publication of the Child Q review, I have met many children across Hackney and listened to their concerns. When I heard them talk about Safer Schools Officers (SSOs), their views were shaped by the example that the individual officer set and how they engaged.

5.38 I heard stories of SSOs who appeared distant, authoritarian, and passively aggressive. For example, one student described their school's SSO as "*...a guy that randomly pops up*". I also heard about those who were referred to by name, who had gained the trust of students and who were genuinely seen as a valuable source of advice and support.

5.39 One officer (named by students from several schools) captured the essence of what SSOs can be. Someone whose first duty was to divert children from the criminal justice system, someone to support them and critically, someone who was able to humanise the role of the police – a person who could be trusted and who cared.

5.40 This is the type of SSO that creates greater potential. It is one where the power of building relationships is understood - not just within the school but in a way that can facilitate better relationships outside the school gates.

5.41 With this in mind, the role of the SSO must be to support, advise and mentor children - to ensure wherever and whenever possible that they are diverted from the criminal justice system and confrontation. The SSO should also have a key role in facilitating better engagement with local officers who operate outside of school.

5.42 New police officers, as part of their induction, could directly engage with schools in their area via their SSOs. In doing so, children could talk to them about their issues of concern - what works and what does not. Investing in building better relationships in the future is key. In my opinion, it is the way forward. When people can respond to one another as people, when officers build mutually respectful relationships, everyone wins.

“As you get older you realise that the police are there for a reason. It’s a necessity to have them. If they were normalised in schools (seen as frequently / casually as teachers) and you got to know them, it would be a nice thing to have.

“[I would want] police officers to engage with us more. So, we know and respect them.”

“The police should come to talk to us about their rights. What they are entitled to do. Without that you feel violated.”

“I don't want them to feel forced to come. I want officers to come who really do care about the community. You should make it voluntary to police, so we only get the genuine ones coming to see us.”

Additional Recommendation 12:

(i.) Safer Schools officers should be considered as specialists. They should operate to a set of objectives that includes mentoring, and supporting children, wherever possible diverting them from criminal justice pathways and facilitating better engagement between BCU officers and the school population. Setting an example that engages and influences young minds should be central to their role.

(ii.) As part of establishing their role and engagement in schools, a training needs analysis should be carried out on prospective appointments and only those officers with a proven ability to engage and work with children should be selected.

(iii.) Children from a range of schools should whenever possible be included in the recruitment process for such roles.

(iv.) Children should continue to be consulted regarding the design, function and focus of the role as it further develops.

Safer Schools Officer Protocol

5.43 In parallel to the wider debate about SSOs, the Council (via Hackney Education) has been leading a review of the Safer Schools Partnership Protocol Agreement that governs this role. The protocol itself is a generic MPS wide document that forms the framework for the deployment and operation of the 370²² SSOs across London. It is an agreement made between schools, the police and local authorities.

5.44 Given its pan-London focus, it was recognised locally that whilst the protocol might be broadly sufficient, it would be unable to fully reflect Hackney's local context -

²² As of June 2022

including how it factored in the issues, tensions and challenges arising from the Child Q review and how these could and should be managed by SSOs.

5.45 To address this, work was initiated to develop a local addendum to the protocol. Beginning in September 2022, Hackney Education organised a pupil engagement session so secondary school pupils could provide feedback on the protocol and raise any related concerns and queries (Some examples of the key messages delivered through this process are set out below and mirror the comments that have been made to me). Similar sessions with parents have also recently been held and insights are being collated.

5.46 Whilst I am aware that several headteachers have expressed their frustration that the protocol has yet to be finalised, I am optimistic that momentum will build over the coming weeks and I will continue to monitor progress closely

“The presence of police and timing should be regular. Their visibility should be frequent so that they are part of the school rather than seen to be in schools as enforcers.”

“It should be clear to pupils where they will be able to find/locate the SSO if pupils want to speak with them. It should be easy to speak to them in confidence.”

“Consistency for each school would help rather than having random officers.”

“SSOs to speak in assemblies including feedback on the types of work they have been doing and how they have helped children (while maintaining confidentiality)”

“SSOs to give input to students as part of PSHRE - maybe on rights and laws.”

“Would like some visibility outside school at [the] end of day.”

“SSO should be assimilated with the school, and they should interact with students by way of building trust and confidence.”

“School focussed induction for SSO to be implemented so they feel like they are part of the education community.”

“Young people could be involved in the recruitment process (as part of a pupil panel or selection process) of an SSO for their school.

“There should be more police officers of colour - this would make pupils feel more comfortable. They would feel that officers would empathise with them. Pupils would be able to trust them.”

“Social media could be used to engage parents - SSO could organise a short reel/video to share on social media and websites. Use school newsletters. A balance of all could work - social media, face to face, special dedicated assembly or evening meetings.”

6. Schools & Colleges – Culture and Practice

“The success of education in Hackney depends on the retention and recruitment of excellent Heads and brilliant teachers. Value what we have, celebrate our successes and re-build collectively without ever forgetting the trauma caused to Child Q and many members of our community.” Hackney Headteacher

6.1 Without doubt, Hackney has some exceptional schools. When looking at those that are maintained, academies and free schools, 29 are deemed *Outstanding* by Ofsted, 47 are *Good* and only four *Require Improvement*. Notwithstanding the poor performance in the Independent Sector (where 14 schools are *Inadequate*), there is recognised strength in our local system.

6.2 For most school age children in Hackney, they will be attending settings where they can learn together and thrive. They will be educated and cared for by committed teachers and other school staff who are good at their jobs and a credit to their profession. In the context of the lessons from Child Q, we need to acknowledge this.

6.3 What we also need to acknowledge is the variability that exists in how some schools operate. There can be a different emphasis placed upon school values, different approaches to discipline and a divergence in what is considered important or not. This is not unique to Hackney and is reflected in all sorts of schools across the country.

6.4 Furthermore, whilst I agree with the comments made by the Hackney Headteacher (see above), the inclusion of this statement in my report is not only because it represents leadership intent, but because it also highlights some key questions for us locally.

6.5 For example, what is it that we mean by success in education? And what makes a Headteacher ‘excellent’ and staff ‘brilliant’? I’m sure that there will be a range of different opinions on these points, but critically, clear views were expressed by the children, parents and carers that I engaged as part of this report.

6.6 For some with whom I spoke, they reflected a view that schools were only interested in academic results and that issues of wellbeing and fairness were afterthoughts, if thought of at all. They spoke about some schools needing to be better at engaging, listening and caring. These aspects were also seen as indicators of success and characteristics that would demonstrate ‘excellence’ or ‘brilliance’ in any teacher. I sensed this feedback was not about bringing unnecessary challenge but given by those with good intentions and by those who were keen to make a positive difference for children.

‘For teachers it shouldn’t be just talking to students about English or Maths’.

6.7 When reflecting upon the response by schools to the Child Q review, Headteachers in Hackney were quick to develop and agree a core statement covering their commitment to safeguarding and anti-racism. This is set out below:

‘As Hackney Headteachers, we jointly affirm our full commitment and continued action to the best possible safeguarding of every child in our care, ensuring a safeguarding first approach always applies. We know that we have already been doing work to eliminate racism in our schools, but recognise that there is much work to be done. We recognise that Black and Global Majority children face racism in Hackney and beyond: we are committed to and will act on taking forward anti-racist practice.

In Hackney we are ambitious, caring and inclusive in working for every child. As educationalists we will work jointly with our children, their families, our staff and with other professionals, particularly with our Black and Global Majority stakeholders, in building on the strong work already in our schools, towards being a beacon of excellence in inclusion and anti-racism.

We are committed to revisiting staff training and guidance to ensure that all staff: feel confident that their duty to safeguard the children in our care comes above any other need, understand, and are able to counteract, any assumptions or actions that may lead to children being treated unfairly or unjustly are able to act to protect children in

crisis as if they were our own, seeking senior leader support if needed. We are committed to supporting and challenging each other to ensure this happens.'

6.8 The launch of this statement was both an important commitment from school leaders and a platform from which much good work has followed. Some of this has been initiated by schools themselves, with other activity being facilitated or delivered by Hackney Council.

6.9 For example, through Hackney Education, the Council initially helped Child Q's school with additional leadership capacity to ensure its community was fully supported. It also began the process of developing '*Thinking Spaces*' and all schools received advice, guidance and materials on talking to and listening to staff and children.

6.10 Shortly after publication of the review, the Council also circulated interim guidance on searching, screening and confiscation (pre-empting the amended national guidance) and urged all secondary schools to work together to better protect students from harm and racism.

6.11 For schools themselves, the level of activity has been substantial. As part of my update report, I asked schools in both Hackney and the City of London to provide me with examples of how they had responded to the review, the work that they had undertaken with their students, and any evidence of impact. 100% of schools in the City of London and just over 90% of Hackney schools responded to my request. The specific areas that I asked to be covered were:

- A summary of the work / actions undertaken.
- A summary of the work / actions undertaken in relation to anti-racist practice.
- What schools thought had gone well and what good practice there had been.
- What impact schools could identify and what differences had been made for children and families.
- What schools could have done better and
- Any other relevant comments

6.12 Whilst recognising this information was ‘self-reported’ by schools, the detail set out in many of the submissions was highly impressive, as was much of the work shared with me during my follow up visits to several academies, not least the school that Child Q attended. Examples of this work (much of it focussing on anti-racism) and the impact it has delivered were structured around several key themes.

Leadership

6.13 It has been positive to see many school leaders reflect on the Child Q review and take responsibility for improvement within their own settings. This has included the introduction of new initiatives, the strengthening of governance and the taking of action to ensure those at the top fully understand the detail.

6.14 It is clear that most schools understand the scale of the challenge ahead and the need for clear and consistent leadership. As one Headteacher responded: *‘We recognise that we will need to always be doing this and the job will never be done’*.

6.15 Alongside the broad evidence that school leaders considered the Child Q report in detail, I have seen examples of senior leadership teams and governing bodies reflecting deeply on what could or should be done in their own schools and implementing action.

6.16 This has included some schools creating new teams or appointing named senior leads for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Others have used their existing equality forums to better understand the implications arising from the review.

6.17 From a governance viewpoint, good practice has also been identified within those Hackney schools that have ensured their governing body is representative of the community they serve. Other positive action has involved specific training for governors, named governors being identified for EDI and the routine monitoring of anti-racist practice, searches and police contacts in schools.

6.18 Encouragingly, some school leaders have taken the opportunity to reflect on the values they actively promote.

“We have had discussions at governor level regarding equality practice and have signed up to become a ‘rights respecting’ school, recognising that a school highly conversant in the rights of the child are more empowered to prevent an abuse of pupil rights.”

Workforce

6.19 Another key priority for many schools has been to ensure their staff are alive to issues of racism, that practice in this context is sufficient and that their respective workforces are representative of the communities they serve. I wholeheartedly agree with this focus, and it has been positive to see so many schools investing resource in this area.

6.20 Some innovative thinking and positive outreach has taken place in a significant number of schools. This has included updating job descriptions for teaching and support staff (to reflect a commitment to greater EDI), the creation of community liaison leads (tasked with promoting inclusion and developing relationships) and giving staff the space and time within meetings to reflect openly upon issues of race and belonging within the school community.

6.21 Other activity from a workforce perspective has included the following:

- Schools auditing the diversity of the staffing body.
- Schools reviewing workforce stability and planning new recruitment / retention strategies to increase the diversity of the workforce and to ensure anti-racist practice in this context.
- Schools harnessing the lived experience of staff who have the same cultural background and language skills to engage children from certain communities.

Training

6.22 Aligned with the commitment set out by Hackney Headteachers, there is evidence that many schools rapidly identified training opportunities for their staff, focusing on the Child Q review, safeguarding, adultification and racism. This has been extremely positive, although it will be important for schools to mainstream such training going forward – ensuring the lessons from the review do not get diluted with time.

6.23 Many schools evidenced that they had revised their training content to include a whole school training approach focused on raising awareness and increasing knowledge in the context of individual roles and responsibilities. This training was reported as being most effective when led by the DSL and clearly supported by school leaders. Good practice examples include:

- Schools that used the heightened awareness of the review to increase awareness: *“Anti-Racist Practice’ was not initiated by Child Q; rather, Child Q intensified the relevance and topicality of work already in train.”*
- Providing an overview of the Child Q review and recommendations to all staff.
- Adultification and so called ‘unconscious bias’ training being delivered.
- Revised training delivered on the application of searching, screening and confiscation.
- Maintaining and revisiting the training on key issues linked to anti-racism (rather than a one-off event).
- Raising awareness of inter-agency protocols and expectations, including engagement with the police.
- Facilitating staff sessions to reflect upon and listen to their experiences.
- The introduction of tutorial programs for staff and pupils.

Curriculum – Educate & Empower

6.24 Another key theme evident in the work of schools is how many have focused on adapting the curriculum to educate and empower their students about anti-racism. Embedding this in the DNA of learning is, without doubt, necessary and demonstrates

the vision that many schools have on this issue. Some of the actions undertaken by schools includes the following:

- Refreshing the curriculum to ensure that it represents the diverse community they engage.
- Covering rights and responsibilities as part of PSHE lessons encouraging critical thinking and informed decision making.
- Arranging school visits by role models from the Black community and ensuring such success is celebrated in the fixtures and fittings in the school.
- Researching, curating and archiving appropriate online, print and video resources.
- Ensuring that issues are not relegated to a once-a-year recognition of Black History Month, but that consideration is embedded throughout the school calendar.

Policies, Procedures and Practice

6.25 Good policies inform good practice, and many schools have taken the step of reviewing what they have in place, reflecting on the content and improving these based on the lessons from Child Q.

6.26 For many schools, they confirmed that their policy and procedures for searching, screening and confiscation had been updated in line with the new DFE guidance and ratified by their governing body.

6.27 Most schools had also undertaken work to ensure a clear focus on a Safeguarding First approach and had further developed their anti-racist and safeguarding procedures - which they had brought to the attention of staff.

6.28 Furthermore, there was evidence of reflection and sensible consideration of protocols regarding engagement with Safer Schools Officers. This covered issues such as respectful curiosity and challenge and was linked to authority levels providing a focus for key roles, including safeguarding leads and those engaged in pastoral care.

6.29 I saw good practice in the development of policies that focused on creating a positive culture and a sense of safety amongst students. A good example of this was seen in a ‘*School Together*’ policy designed to ensure that all students understood the importance of respecting diversity and combating racism. Sensitive approaches were also highlighted by those Hackney schools who provided children with a choice about who would be present during pastoral conversations.

6.30 Some good practice on consultation with pupils and their parents and carers was equally evident. I saw this first hand and was able to engage with a school’s ‘Black and Global Majority’ parents’ group. They felt there was more to do, but absolutely welcomed the initiative from the school and the input that they and their children were able to have in reviewing and developing policy. To date, this had covered (amongst other issues) searching, searching and confiscation, police in schools, exclusions and the application of reasonable force.

Engagement with Children

6.31 Many schools understood the need to engage their students in the immediate aftermath of the report’s publication, not only to provide a level of reassurance, but to allow children safe spaces to express their views and to reflect on how Child Q’s experiences might resonate with their own.

6.32 This was not an easy time for any school in Hackney, and whilst some schools could and should have done more, I have seen evidence that conversations are either beginning or continuing, that collaboration is being prioritised and that the voices of children are, in many instances, being heard.

6.33 I have also seen evidence of schools creating safe spaces for children to talk about racism, and share their personal experiences and concerns linked to the Child Q review. Other good practice has involved some schools creating student forums, holding anti-racist assemblies, engaging in work to unpack how others can be ‘anti-racist allies’ and the creation of school councils (where they didn’t already exist).

6.34 The active engagement of specialist organisations and programs (which offered bespoke support to children of an African and Caribbean heritage) was noted as a positive in some settings.

6.35 Lastly, in what was a practical example of supporting children to address some of the issues they face, some schools involved their pupils in providing feedback on the Safer Schools Officers protocol and the creation of a stop and search leaflet.

Engagement with Parents and Carers

6.36 On hearing about Child Q, many parents and carers were not only shocked, but were genuinely concerned about the safety of their own children at school. The importance of proactively engaging parents and carers was recognised by many school leaders, with subsequent activity ranging from written communication about the incident to the creation of specific forums in which parents/carers could routinely engage. Examples of the action undertaken in this context include the following:

- Engaging with and empowering parents by recruiting new trustees from ‘Black and Global Majority’ groups.
- Engaging in outreach by sending information home and facilitating meetings and listening forums. In one good practice example, nearly 30 parents attended a school workshop on building positive cultural identity with young people.
- A significant number of schools have engaged representative parents’ groups - they have been involved in policy construction and consulted on the how best to create lessons linked to stop and search.
- In another good practice example, one Hackney school carried out a deep dive survey / audit of 200 parents, pupils and staff on issues related to race.

The Interface with the Police and Safer Schools Officers

6.37 Given Child Q’s experiences, the interface between schools and the police (in particular, SSOs) was a key theme that was considered by many Headteachers following the review’s publication. There was heightened concern about the presence

of police in schools, with the dent in trust and confidence extending beyond the public and being felt by other professionals, particularly those in the education sector.

6.38 Whilst some schools retained a positive relationship with their SSOs (or held urgent meetings to clarify expectations), others took immediate action by suspending their SSO from being on-site. This was not a sustainable position, but in the circumstances was an understandable response. Whilst continuing, dialogue has since attempted to address the concerns of many schools, with reinforced policies and procedures providing for clearer expectations.

6.39 Indeed, many schools reviewed or adapted their policies to ensure clarity about how and when SSOs are engaged and the need for continuous professional curiosity and challenge when advocating for children. Some provided guidance concerning expectations to their own SSOs and many engaged at a school leadership level with senior police officers to seek reassurance. These meetings covered issues ranging from whether such officers would wear uniform or civilian clothing (whilst on site), the need to recognise and understand the different frameworks that exist within policing and schools and the need to adopt a Safeguarding First approach. This included discussions about how best to pause, plan and engage other agencies, such as Children's Social care.

Searching, Screening and Confiscation

6.40 Given both the findings of the review and the feedback that I received from children, it is positive to see the attention that some schools have given to this issue. Whilst I believe the contents of the national guidance still require strengthening, there is some evidence of active thinking about improving practice in this space.

6.41 Indeed, following the publication of the review, some schools paused to reflect, and for a short period placed searching on hold. This enabled them to evaluate the strength of policy and practice and whether these were sufficient in mitigating the likelihood of an incident (such as that involving Child Q) occurring in their school.

6.42 I have seen evidence that many schools have reinforced the importance of employing a Safeguarding First approach and have raised awareness of the DfE's new guidance on searching, screening and confiscation. Some have introduced new initiatives (such as Stop & Talk), with others providing focused training for staff – delivered by their Designated Safeguarding Leads.

Overall Impact

6.43 Whilst the impact of improvements can often be difficult to evidence, some schools have been able to quantify these by way of the feedback they have received from children and their parents/carers.

6.44 The consensus amongst the schools who engaged with my update report indicates that lines of communication are open, meeting and listening spaces available and progress is being made in a number of areas. It is clear that school engagement with their community is key, and I have seen evidence of good practice in this regard. Some examples include:

- Schools that have engaged with parents/carers regarding support for uniform and appearance policies have achieved some success, insofar as they can evidence that their consultation has led to a reduction in sanctions and/or parental meetings associated with them.
- In promising feedback, another school reported they have moved away from punitive procedures, and they believe this has helped reduce the rates of suspensions and led to improved relationships between pupils and staff.
- Increased levels of confidence were reported amongst some parents/carers as they have developed a deeper understanding of the safeguarding processes whilst working with the school.
- Many continue to use surveys to capture the voice and views of the school community. One school reported that their family survey responses indicated strong confidence in the school's ability to manage behaviour and incidents relating to race in a nurturing and restorative manner.

Child Q's School

6.45 As part of my evaluation of progress, I engaged on several occasions with Child Q's former school. This involved me talking to key leaders and a range of the school's current pupils. As a broad overview, I was told about a number of radical changes that have been made over the last year, some of which are set out below:

- The capacity of the school's safeguarding team was increased and its roles and responsibilities redefined.
- In partnership with a larger Academy Trust, dedicated safeguarding support was implemented, that saw the introduction of a rolling audit programme.
- The training programme for staff was expanded, including a focus on adultification.
- Relevant training was delivered to governors.
- The PHSE programme was refreshed to teach students about their rights.
- The school council was reintroduced to amplify the 'student voice'.
- Routine meetings have been scheduled with the Safer Schools Officer and:
- A range of positive activity was initiated to promote anti-racism within the school environment.

6.46 On speaking to school leaders, they advised me how they were now placing significant emphasis on order, structure and discipline. There is little doubt that this approach helped address the chaos and drop off in attendance that followed the publication of the review. However, it is clear from talking to the students that there is still work to be done. They agreed that such priorities are important, but in common with pupils from other schools, they added the need for more focus on 'fairness'.

6.47 Notwithstanding the fresh start, it will take time for relationships to be restored and for trust across the whole school to be rebuilt. My sense is that by listening to their student population and by engaging parents and carers (a process I know the school has begun), they have every opportunity to do just that, but they are not there yet. I look forward to maintaining my engagement with them as they continue their work.

7. The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel

7.1 As part of my follow up engagement sessions, many questions were asked about the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (the Panel) – what it does, the role it had in the case of Child Q and what actions it had taken in response to the review’s findings.

7.2 As a broad overview, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 provided for the Panel’s creation and subsequent launch in June 2018. It has its own powers, makes its own decisions, and comprises a range of members from different professional backgrounds.²³ Whilst the Panel is funded by the DfE and accountable to the Secretary of State for Education, it acts independently from government. Statutory guidance²⁴ defines how the Panel operates, and non-statutory guidance²⁵ sets out the Panel’s expectations for how reviews should be conducted.

7.3 The Panel meets regularly to decide whether to commission national reviews of child safeguarding cases that are notified to it. The panel’s decisions are based on the possibility of identifying improvements from cases which it views as complex or of national importance. When it meets, the Panel considers what are known as *rapid reviews*.

7.4 Undertaken in local areas, these are short, focused reviews of cases that have been notified to the Panel.²⁶ Rapid reviews are expected to:

- gather the facts about a case, as far as they can be readily established at the time.
- discuss whether there is any immediate action needed to ensure children’s safety and share any learning appropriately.

²³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/child-safeguarding-practice-review-panel/about#our-responsibilities>

²⁴ [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#)

²⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1108887/Child_Safeguarding_Practice_Review_panel_guidance_for_safeguarding_partners.pdf

²⁶ 16C(1) of the Children Act 2004 (as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017) states: Where a local authority in England knows or suspects that a child has been abused or neglected, the local authority must notify the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel if – (a) the child dies or is seriously harmed in the local authority’s area, or (b) while normally resident in the local authority’s area, the child dies or is seriously harmed outside England.

- consider the potential for identifying improvements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- decide what steps should be taken next, including whether or not to undertake a child safeguarding practice review.

7.5 After considering a rapid review, the Panel provides written feedback. This acts as a record that the Panel has met and sets out the Panel's views on local decision making, analysis and learning as reflected in the rapid review.

7.6 It was here that the initial Child Q report focused its critique. This was after the Panel's suggestion for the CHSCP to '*think carefully*' about whether a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review was necessary (given the Panel felt that the case of Child Q was not notifiable and did not meet the criteria for a review).

7.7 Whilst no specific recommendations were made about this advice, following publication, I met with the Chair of the Panel to discuss the rationale behind it. The Chair was open and upfront, acknowledging that the Panel should have responded differently and that lessons had been learnt.

7.8 In July 2022, the Panel also released a statement as part of its regular newsletter. This reflected my conversations with the Chair and expressed an apology for the feedback it had given. Whilst positive, it is perhaps doubtful that this statement will have been seen by many outside of the safeguarding sector. Given the interest expressed by many of those with whom I spoke, the Panel's acknowledgement and full statement is set out below:

'The Panel was very shocked and troubled by what happened to Child Q and the humiliation and deep distress she will have suffered when she was strip searched on her own in her school by the police. No child should be treated in this way. This was reflected in the shock expressed by so many people across the country.'

The Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) published by City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership provides important learning for the sector and

should be carefully considered to ensure that the very poor child safeguarding practice exhibited by the school and police is not repeated.

We agree with the review findings that Child Q's race was a factor in how the school and the police responded. The LCSPR shines a vital light on a range of safeguarding issues, including the impact of racism and 'adultification' on the practice of professionals. Our Panel Member, Jahnine Davis, explores 'adultification' in a paper about this form of bias within child protection and safeguarding. We would encourage safeguarding partners to read this ([link here](#)).

Our contact with City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership has established how lessons learned from this LCSPR are being applied through further work on safeguarding in schools in the borough. We believe that this has wider relevance, across London but also nationally, and have therefore written to senior officials in the Department for Education to draw their attention to the Partnership's work highlighting the impact of schools' cultures, of racism, and how behaviour and discipline policies are enacted in practice.

The LCSPR also recommended that the Panel should work with the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) with a view to developing national guidance on police engagement with the LCSPR process which includes timely sharing of information. We have accepted this recommendation and are in discussion with them about these issues.

The Panel has also reflected a great deal on our response to the rapid review submitted in January 2021, prior to the completion of the LCSPR. We recognise that this has been a cause for concern and wanted to explain that at the time there was a lengthy discussion about the very distressing circumstances outlined in the review as well as whether the incident met the criteria as set out in Working Together 2018.

We recognise that our feedback in response to the rapid review neither reflected the seriousness of the issues under consideration, the discussion at the Panel meeting or that Hackney could choose to undertake an LCSPR because what happened raised

issues of importance to the local area. We are sorry that this was not the case. We want to continue to improve our dialogue with safeguarding partners, including how we give feedback and have taken a number of steps recently to improve the quality of this. We welcome your continuing feedback on these issues.

Finally, a key priority for the Panel is making real our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in terms of how we undertake our work and in making sure that the needs of all children are understood and addressed. This is a priority area for us and our forthcoming Annual Report for 2021 will include further information about these critical issues.

7.9 This statement whilst late, was welcome and from a local perspective, no similar issues have since arisen. Feedback from the Panel on our more recent rapid reviews has been reflective, supportive, and constructive.

7.10 Furthermore, although the Panel decided not to instigate any immediate review, such as a national review, it is appropriate to note that other organisations (from the small to the large), did. Three examples include the research undertaken by the National Appropriate Adults Network on a review of PACE powers,²⁷ the focussed scrutiny and challenge undertaken by a local community group that I met in Hackney (*The African Community Taskforce*) and more recently, the work of the Children's Commissioner²⁸ analysing strip searches of children conducted by the police under their stop and search powers across England and Wales.

7.11 These are examples of organisations that invested energy and time in trying to find out more, seek reassurance and apply learning. Locally, I have also seen this in the substantial efforts of Hackney's Mayor, the wider cabinet and the Council's scrutiny functions.

7.12 I welcome the announcement by the Panel that their 2023-24 work plan includes a thematic project about race, culture and racism in child protection. This will

²⁷ <https://www.appropriateadult.org.uk/policy/searches>

²⁸ <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/strip-search-of-children-in-england-and-wales/>

explore a range of themes relating to both intra and extra familial harm, including adultification and how different types of bias may affect professional decision making. This will be a valuable piece of work.

The Dilution of Independence

7.13 Perhaps the most important point of reflection I have on this area, relates to the need for independence being maintained at the heart of any responsible system of reviewing. As it stands, I believe the current process for Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (and the Panel's guidance in this respect) is fundamentally flawed.

7.14 To explain further, in 2015, the government commissioned Sir Alan Wood to review the role and functions of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs). The Wood Report was published in March 2016, with the government formally responding in May 2016. The recommendations from the Wood Report were subsequently embedded into statute on 27 April 2017, with the granting of Royal Assent to the Children and Social Work Act 2017. As a result, the architecture governing multi-agency safeguarding arrangements underwent significant change. This included the process for reviews.

7.15 Beyond Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) being renamed as Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, new statutory requirements emerged that shifted the accountability for initiating reviews to the three statutory safeguarding partners (i.e. the Local Authority, Police and Health). This differed from the previous arrangements where final decisions for reviews rested with Independent Chairs of LSCBs.²⁹

7.16 Whilst acknowledging Sir Alan's concerns about the variability in the quality of Independent Chairs (and by default their decision making about reviews), placing this function in the hands of safeguarding partners has exacerbated the potential for bias, particularly for those cases that do not strictly meet the criteria for notification to the Panel. I believe this was the wrong thing to do.

²⁹ [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015](#)

7.17 Put simply, diluting independence and placing the responsibility for the initiation and quality of reviews with those most likely to be scrutinised, has increased the risk of those organisations not only ‘*marking their own homework*’, but worse, deciding not to do it at all.

7.18 Locally, we have been alive to this since 2019. Our written safeguarding arrangements provide a work-around that retains independence (through my delegated responsibility to instigate a review), whilst ensuring that safeguarding partners can also discharge their statutory duties (by ratifying my decision). Whilst this might appear clumsy, we have found it to be effective and indeed, this was the process followed for Child Q.

7.19 In terms of our local safeguarding system, it has been designed to facilitate more than just the ‘independent scrutiny’ expected on local arrangements. We have retained independent leadership and independent decision-making. To us, this is absolutely the right thing to do. However, I continue to hear a narrative that seeks to weaken independence in this context. This should not only be a concern for me, but for everyone who wants reviews to be as transparent as possible and for organisations to be held to account. For example, the Panel’s most recent practice guidance issued in September 2022 states the following:

‘It is important to remember that the responsibility for decision making rests with the safeguarding partners therefore it is important to document who participated in the rapid review to ensure that the executive leads ‘own’ the decision. Where that responsibility has been delegated it is important to be clear on the lines of accountability. While the views of the independent scrutineer are valuable, they do not replace the responsibility of the safeguarding partners.’

7.20 Other areas may wish to mirror what we have set up locally in the CHSCP, although given the mixed economy of independence that exists across different areas, the government should seek to resolve this through revised legislation and/or guidance.

7.21 It remains a valid question to ask whether the Child Q review would ever been undertaken had the responsibility for decision making been left solely with the Local Authority, Police and Health. I don't believe it would.

Additional Recommendation 13: The DfE should revise statutory guidance to place a much firmer emphasis on independent decision making in respect of triggering Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. Given the new safeguarding arrangements introduced in 2019 have created a mixed economy of independence across different areas, this amended guidance should be sufficiently flexible to allow for adoption by all areas.

8. Active Anti-Racism

“Racism is a safeguarding issue, it causes harm.”³⁰

8.1 The review’s finding that racism (whether deliberate or not) was likely to have played a part in the strip search of Child Q was by no means the beginning of action on this issue. It was, however, a major catalyst in accelerating focus both within and across many organisations.

8.2 Overall, this has undoubtedly been positive, although I am under no illusion that this is only the start of a very long journey. For example, despite the review being published over a year ago, very few organisations could point to any direct impact that their activity had achieved for children and families. For those who could, it would be impossible to describe this as substantial, with most change being seen in the perceptions and attitudes of staff. That is not to dismiss the importance of our workforce. They are, after all, our most important asset and if they don’t have the knowledge and skills to deliver active anti-racist practice, then it simply won’t happen.

8.3 However, it is right for me to pose a challenge to all organisations about the tangible difference they are making. Whilst easy for organisations to say they are anti-racist, being *actively anti racist* commands a higher threshold of evidence. In this respect, there is a need for organisations to transparently demonstrate what they are doing to promote their position alongside the practical steps they are taking.

8.4 Indeed, written commitments, training and raising awareness are all necessary, but impact won’t be measured on paper – it will be measured in the lived experience of Hackney’s residents. For many of the children and parents / carers that I spoke with, they aren’t seeing this yet.

8.5 To a large extent, this is perhaps not unexpected, and my comments shouldn’t be read as a criticism of the many organisations that are tackling this priority and applying significant energy and resource. Indeed, as the Head of Safeguarding at

³⁰ Statement by Principal Educational Psychologist, Hackney Education and member of the Child Q Reference Panel

Homerton Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust said, “*Change is evolutionary not revolutionary*”.

8.6 With those words in mind, I have included an insight into the work undertaken from across our partnership. This by no means includes everything, although it is a useful snapshot of the progress made to date. It is also worth acknowledging that going forward, there needs to be a much more cohesive approach to ‘*Thinking Family*’ and engaging colleagues working in adult services too.

Hackney Council

8.7 For many years, Hackney Council has afforded a clear priority towards tackling racial inequality. It has led a range of activity that has focused not only on the Council itself, but with the wider local systems and communities in which it has influence. The key steps in the Council’s anti-racism journey are set out in detail on its website³¹ and there is no need to restate the detail here.

8.8 Having said that, it is important to emphasise the strength of leadership and focus that I see in the Council. Whilst there are no easy answers, there is a clear commitment to do the right thing, however challenging that might be. Of relevance to more recent developments, the Council’s progress is described as follows:

‘We launched our Anti-Racism Action Plan in 2021. The plan saw us begin to lead from the inside out by investigating how inclusive we are and how we tackle all forms of racism in the community.

By March 2022, we adopted a working definition of racism and anti-racism: foundational to unmasking racism where it hides or is blatant, and seeking solutions at institutional, community and individual level. This meant that anti-racism was already reflected in how we were working with children and young people, particularly in schools.

³¹ <https://hackney.gov.uk/our-anti-racism-commitment/#key>

However, the Child Q review and the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Black and Global Majority people, raised the urgency of recognising institutional racism and of working across the system to bring about change. As a result, we developed a full whole system's anti-racism plan.

Since these events, we are redefining ourselves as an anti-racist organisation building on ours and the borough's proud history of campaigning on equality. It is no longer enough for us to tackle inequalities; we must be actively anti-racist. This means committing, or recommitting, to action at every level of our organisation to become a truly anti-racist council and borough.'

8.9 At a regional level, the Council has also led a range of activity resulting in the agreement and launch of the London Local Government Anti-Racism Statement.³² Defining what racism is and what anti-racism means, this statement has underpinned much of the local activity undertaken by the Council.

8.10 At a directorate level, good progress has also been seen within Hackney's Children & Education Directorate, where much of the groundwork was completed to help shape the CHSCP's Active Anti-Racist Charter. This has included:

- The hosting of a highly successful Anti-Racist PRAXIS Conference that took place in May 2022. This attracted over 500 multi-agency attendees on the opening day and over 1,500 participants at subsequent sessions.
- In May 2022, Hackney Children & Families Service launched its Anti-Racist Practice Standards and has been working hard to embed these into practice.
- Anti-Racist Practice Action Learning Sets for staff have been delivered since September 2021, with positive feedback received from staff around the impact on their learning.
- Good practice has also been seen in the development and embedding of an Inclusive Recruitment Protocol, peer support groups for staff and a series of events for Black History Season. Importantly, setting the direction of future

³² https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/sites/default/files/London%20local%20government_Anti-Racism%20Statement.pdf

travel, the Directorate is investing in a new practice model which will be Systemic, Anti-Racist and Trauma Informed.

- Hackney Education organised two Anti-Racist PRAXIS Symposiums for schools during October 2022. These were held over two twilight sessions at Mossbourne Community Academy and The City Academy. Titled, '*Anti-Racist Days in the Hackney Education System: The Introduction*', the aim was to start or continue the conversation (depending on where schools were on their journey around anti-racism) within the local education system. They provided an opportunity to discuss how the proposed Inclusion Charter will focus on anti-racism and SEND.

Homerton Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

8.11 From a health perspective, Homerton Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust has also been leading the way. I have seen evidence of a range of positive action by health colleagues that include:

- A clear and unequivocal statement being issued by the new Trust CEO and Chairman about its anti-racism stance - that racism will not be tolerated.
- An Achieving Equality and Inclusion Group being established with a representative group of staff across the Trust including members of the Trust Management Board.
- An EDI lead being appointed to a substantive post in November 2021.
- Leadership development pathways being developed for all staff. The EDI lead is taking part in the NHS Anti-racism programme and bootcamp.
- A dedicated Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) page being launched on the Trust's website and intranet.
- A Trust booklet 'Achieving Equality and Inclusion for Our People' being published and disseminated across the Trust.
- Reverse Mentoring and White Allies programmes directed at members of the Executive Teams and ongoing development of the staff network.
- HR processes being 'de-biased' to ensure they are fair e.g. training independent panellist to sit on interviews for senior posts.

NHS North East London Integrated Care Board

8.12 Some examples of how the NHS NEL ICB has taken forward work on anti-racism includes:

- The NHS NEL disseminating learning at the London Regional Designated Professionals Forum and across the ICB itself.
- Discussions being held about anti-racist practice and the learning from the Child Q review at forums with GPs and through the Level 3 training delivered by the NHS NEL.
- Work being initiated by the Health Inequalities Steering Group testing inequality health pathways, starting with Mental Health and Maternity Services.
- As part of work by the CAMHS Alliance, reflective practice sessions were held addressing anti-racism directly within CAMHS and in the schools workstream specifically.
- The Wellbeing and Mental Health in Schools (WAMHS) workstream continues to consider the impact of school culture, structural and systemic biases and equalities and how this influences support for children.

East London Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust- Safeguarding Team

8.13 Learning from the review was disseminated by ELFT's safeguarding team via a variety of forums, with staff also accessing and promoting the CHSCP's adultification training.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS)

8.14 CAFCASS has continued to strengthen its commitment to equality diversity and inclusion following the review's publication.

- A steering group was established, with the Director of Resources allocated the responsibility to lead implementation of a new strategy with the Chief Executive, Directors and the senior manager for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- Members of the group also include the Family Justice Young People's Board, Board member Lead for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and representatives of our staff diversity networks.

- There was dissemination of the learning from Child Q nationally. This was also incorporated into existing '*knowledge bites*' and off the shelf learning packages.
- There continues to be celebration of Black history month and a 'Positive Action' programme has been launched supporting the development and progression of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues into leadership positions.

City of London People's Services

8.15 As part of the CHSCP's ongoing commitment to learning across our dual footprint, the City of London Corporation has also been applying a robust focus on improvement activity. This can be seen in the following examples:

- The People Directorate developing practice standards on anti-racist practice.
- The Head of Children's Social Care chairing the People Equality Group (PEG). The PEG has devised a support group that will be facilitated externally for staff who experience racism.
- A City of London social worker has been designated as lead for anti-racist practice. She has added in ideas to the PEG for reading materials and is excellent at speaking with pride and passion about the strengths and excellence of Black people in team meetings and recently in systemic training.
- All staff in the People Directorate being offered adultification training via the CHSCP.
- The Early Help lead completed a week-long programme with the Race Equality Foundation and is now trained as a facilitator for the strengthening families strengthening communities programme.

Hackney Council for Voluntary Services

8.16 Hackney CVS remains at the heart of the local community infrastructure in Hackney and continues to be an active advocate of anti-racism. For example:

- Hackney CVS produced a Cultural Humility Directory,³³ signposting its members and the wider community to key training opportunities to learn more about anti-racism and cultural competency.

³³ <https://hcvs.org.uk/cultural-humility-training-directory/>

- In January 2023, Hackney CVS held an anti-racist commissioning assembly. From this, Hackney CVS has developed community principles for anti-racist commissioning.
- Coordinating the reducing exclusions consortium with 11 VCS organisations, the focus of this group has been to improve the experience of schooling and to reduce the disproportionate impact of school exclusions on the diverse communities in Hackney.
- In 2022, Hackney CVS facilitated the VCS assembly on racial equality. Youth Leaders facilitated sessions which led to learning on the impact of racial inequity in Hackney.

Probation

8.17 For London Probation, there has been a range of related initiatives supporting the focus on active anti-racism. These include:

- Staff attending diversity training alongside regional '*Let's talk*' sessions - which also address themes of diversity and inclusion.
- Towards the end of 2022, Probation launched its '*Bridging the Cultural Divide*' group within the region. This group continues to encourage staff to discuss and raise awareness not just amongst themselves but with the cases they manage.
- A Cultural Awareness Toolkit is also scheduled for release alongside the launch of Trauma Informed Practice sessions.

8.18 Whilst positive to see the range of initiatives that have either begun or gained further traction since the review's publication, I am under no illusion that this is only the start of a very long journey.

9. Conclusion

“Things need to change with all organisations involved. Even I can see that.” Child Q

9.1 This update report has focused on the implementation of the review’s recommendations and the range of activity that was generated as a consequence of Child Q’s experiences. It has provided a critique of progress, with a particular emphasis on those agencies directly involved in the incident. Importantly, it has also attempted to reflect the voices of children, parents, carers and our active grassroots community networks who shared with me their hopes, fears and aspirations.

9.2 With their invaluable and authentic input, I learnt early on that the issues identified in the review go well beyond policing and education. Concerns about safeguarding, racism and disproportionality extend to all statutory services and for some of Hackney’s residents, there remains a profound sense of distrust in the very organisations who should be there to help.

9.3 Acknowledging these voices, it is now essential that our partnership takes a whole systems approach to improvement. This needs to be coordinated and overseen in a way that drives and demands progress – in a way that practically addresses the alienation and isolation experienced by far too many people because of the colour of their skin. It also needs to engage all relevant partners, including colleagues in adult services and have an unapologetic focus on humanising relationships.

9.4 Our partnership must also reconsider how we frame this activity going forward. By this, I mean consciously moving away from using ‘Child Q’ as some sort of shorthand for describing society’s problems.

9.5 When I’ve asked people whether it is time to move away from Child Q’s individual case and to name and focus on root causes, many have said no and that her case is symbolic. When I’ve asked about what Child Q might think, some have replied that she’s anonymous. But of course, she’s not, she knows who

she is and what she has suffered. Having spoken to her recently, this remains a weight on her shoulders. Child Q is still asking herself, “*Why was it me?*”

9.6 This young person has shown remarkable courage and resilience. I believe we need to give her time and space to grow and build her own life. We owe this to her. Others now need to take up the challenge of delivering change.



**city & hackney
safeguarding
children
partnership**

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Date of Publication: 16/06/23

Address: 3rd Floor, Hackney Service Centre, 1 Hillman Street, Hackney, E8 1DY

Telephone: +44 (0) 208 3564183

E-mail: chscp@hackney.gov.uk

Website: www.chscp.org.uk