

Friday 18th March 2022



A statement from No More Exclusions on the case of Child Q:

Today, our hearts are heavy with news of the abuse suffered by Child Q at the hands of the racist Metropolitan Police. The findings of the LCPSR show deeply disturbing treatment of a vulnerable teenage girl, the violation of her safety, human rights and the total decimation of her trust in an institution supposed to protect her. Schools should be spaces of joy that allows curiosity and wonder to flourish. Schools should be psychologically and physically safe. We condemn in the strongest possible terms not just the individual actions of the police officers involved, but also the institutional frameworks built to hide them, the teachers who stood by in silence, and the carceral logic that facilitates a culture of violence, of surveillance, and of shattering dehumanization.

Keeping children safe in education describes the legal duties that govern all schools and colleges in England when carrying out their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under the age of 18. If this is statutory where in this document is this treatment seen as necessary, proportional and within our duty of keeping children safe. The adultification of this Black female child is appalling and indefensible. Sadly this traumatising experience is not surprising, it is an experience that many Black bodies must absorb as part of statutory powers within education and law enforcement.

Unlike the Met would have us believe, this is not a case of a 'few bad apples'. Black children are three times more likely to be excluded from schools than their white counterparts, and 19 times more likely to be stopped and searched. They are consistently referred to as "aggressive", often perceived as "less innocent" or "more responsible for their actions". The adultification and pathologization of Black children is as old as time itself and has consequently led to increased occurrences of marginalised treatment. It is painfully clear that the horrific treatment of Child Q is part of a wider pattern, one that saw 1606 other children strip searched in 2021. We are shocked, then, by the recent Government response to the Sewell Report which asserts that "communities flourish with the safety police provide". Where is this supposed safety for Black children? Instead, the Met wants police "embedded into the DNA of schools", expanding the racist ideologies of policing into the classroom, and leaving Black children anxious, distressed, and unable to excel. This is why NME cannot accept a solution based on 'more safeguarding'. Prevent is 'safeguarding'. Exclusions are 'safeguarding'. Policies that seek to safeguard are based on the logic of securitisation, which treats classrooms as fortresses and 'difficult' children as the enemy and Black children as potential criminals.

Moreover, NME is disgusted by the blatant disregard for Child Q's mental health demonstrated by the acting police officers, and notes with concern that proper psychological support following such an incident is not fully discussed in the LCPSR. School systems have a long history of disregarding the emotional wellbeing of Black children, turning to exclusion and police intervention rather than the provision of mental health services. Child Q's story reminds us that the impact of these policies on our young people's mental health and self-worth is far reaching, not only shaping their childhoods but limiting opportunities throughout their lives. If parents do pursue therapeutic routes, our crippling underfunded Children's Mental Health Services cannot provide the support needed. Impossibly long waiting times leave many children unsupported and distressed. Where support is available, a service that considers the impact of racism, racist institutional practice and racial trauma is not guaranteed.

From prisons to schools to playgrounds, the criminalisation of Black children is covert and relentless. NME demands nothing less than total abolition of the institutions that facilitate these practices. We want the abolition of 'Pupil Referral Units', 'Alternative Provision', 'special schools', 'secure schools' and all forms of segregated education that stitch carceral logics into places of joyful learning. The Met cannot reform and they cannot 'rebuild trust'. It is not just the abstract institution that is rotten, but every single police officer who believes in the integrity of a job that asks them to strip search vulnerable children in the name of 'protection'. We will be working closely with other grassroots organisations to ensure this never happens again.

We extend our full sympathy and solidarity to Child Q and her family at what must be a traumatising, exhausting and distressing time. We especially thank Child Q for her courage in coming forward with her story, which must have been unimaginably difficult. NME will fight tirelessly for a world in which abuse is an unfamiliar word, and in which Black children are given the love, tenderness, and care that racist institutions systematically work to withhold.

- No More Exclusions

Twitter: @NExclusions

Instagram: @no_more_exclusions_abolition

<https://nomoreexclusions.com/>

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