

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). A primary school approach: Parkfield Community School

URN: 139162

Region: West Midlands

Remit: schools

Provider background

Parkfield Community School is a primary academy in an economically deprived area of inner city Birmingham. Children at the school speak 12 different languages and 99.5% identify as Muslim. Forty-five percent of the pupils are eligible for support through the pupil premium¹. It is the school's mission to ensure that there are 'no outsiders' and that everybody is valued equally.

Brief description

Safeguarding work related to FGM began in 2011 when the school realised that they had missed an opportunity to protect a child from FGM. Staff in the school were concerned that many other girls in the school may be vulnerable to FGM and that their own knowledge and understanding about FGM was limited. This compelled staff to gain more knowledge urgently, with the aim to raise awareness within the school and local community and safeguard their pupils more effectively.

¹ additional funding provided to support the education of students known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority

The good practice in detail

The key foundations already in place

Leaders at Parkfield aim to ensure that all initiatives and work within sensitive areas emanate from strong foundations. Therefore, in advance of any formal education and awareness raising with pupils and families, plans to tackle FGM was discussed with the Governing Body and written into three key school policy documents:

Safeguarding Children Protection Policy

<https://fluencycontent-schoolwebsite.netdna-ssl.com/FileCluster/ParkfieldPrimary/Mainfolder/about-the-school/policies/Sept-2015/Safeguarding--Child--Protection-Policy.pdf>

Attendance Policy

<https://fluencycontent-schoolwebsite.netdna-ssl.com/FileCluster/ParkfieldPrimary/Mainfolder/about-the-school/policies/December-2015/Attendance-Policy-September-2015.pdf>

Relationships & Growing Up Policy

<https://fluencycontent-schoolwebsite.netdna-ssl.com/FileCluster/ParkfieldPrimary/Mainfolder/about-the-school/policies/Relationships--Growing-up-Policy.pdf>

The strong relational trust the school has built with the community underpinned their whole approach to exploring issues around FGM. Tried and trusted processes such as those used in their previously successful parent/pupil workshops were adopted. This included offering information packs and free gifts, using appropriate language, visual aids and trusted facilitators.

A Rights Respecting School

Parkfield has achieved a Rights Respecting School level 1 award. In gaining this award the pupil voice was enhanced as was pupils' knowledge of their human rights. The school used four specific articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child with pupils and parents within the workshops, therefore creating a culture around FGM of safeguarding, vigilance and relevance. These are (written in pupil-friendly language):

Article 3 - All adults should do what is best for you. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children.

Article 12 - You have the right to give your opinion, and for adults to listen and take it seriously.

Article 19 - You have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, in body or mind.

Article 36 - You have the right to protection from any kind of exploitation (being taken advantage of).

The mother and daughter workshops

The headteacher invited, by letter, the mothers of girls in Years 3 to 6 to attend a Girls' Wellbeing Information workshop; it was to be held in the afternoon for one hour before the pupils went home. At the workshop parents spent half an hour with the headteacher, school community workers, the school nurse, and teaching assistants (who would translate for those who required it) and were later joined by their daughters, where they were provided with free gifts and cakes.

A sensitive, compassionate and non-judgemental atmosphere was purposely created. Whilst aiming to change adult mind-sets around the performing of FGM on children and safeguarding the girls who were also at the meeting, careful thought was given to the choice of words and to the physical environment to ensure everyone felt comfortable. Part of the adults' session included a PowerPoint presentation by the school nurse, the content of which was carefully considered to avoid any negative effects on those present.

In the following session where the girls joined their mothers, mirrors and teddy bears were used to emphasise to the girls the beauty of their body as it is and their human rights to keep it that way. The NSPCC's safeguarding materials for children <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/underwear-rule/> was used to emphasise that no one should touch their bodies against their wishes and importantly that no one should **change** their bodies, especially in the area between their legs.





During the workshop, the girls used the small teddy bears with the four Rights of the Child articles attached to discuss with their mothers, and then the table group, their favourite article, whilst munching away on cakes presented on pink tablecloths decorated with fresh pink roses. The school are firmly of the view that a welcoming atmosphere, a non-judgmental approach, and an unswerving commitment to pupil welfare are the key to their success in this venture. The girls enjoyed taking away the mirrors printed with the words 'You are beautiful just as you are,' and their mothers took time to discuss and reflect on their mirrors which stated 'I can help STOP FGM', with some mothers pledging to do so.

Some comments from mothers who attended the workshop:

- *'I thought it was very good, I had heard a little bit about it, but I didn't really know. You should do this workshop every year.'*
- *'I was shocked; I didn't know this could happen. I will never let anyone touch my girls.'*
- *'I didn't know that it caused so many problems. My mum thought she was doing the right thing. I will not let my daughters have it done.'*

Learning Moments

Being at the forefront of new initiatives and where there were few resources or experience from which to draw, it was inevitable that some mistakes would be made. Evaluations by the school and feedback from the mothers has led some changes such as:

- ensuring only line drawings of different types of FGM are shown, rather than photographs
- holding separate workshops with mothers and daughters from different ethnicities to better meet their needs

- planning workshops for fathers.

'To hear that our mothers are now thinking twice before seeking FGM for their daughters, fills us with hope and embraces our determination to carry on with this crucial safeguarding work'. Hazel Pulley Headteacher

The school's workshop approach, further guidance, and risk assessments are available on the Birmingham against FGM website www.bafgm.org.

The school's website is: <http://www.parkfield.bham.sch.uk/>

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