



Forced/Early Marriage and FGM Policy 2015

Marden Bridge Middle School

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Introduction

This policy covers our school's approach to Forced/Early Marriage and FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) for all year groups, and has been produced by the Life Studies Co-Ordinator in consultation with the Safeguarding team/CPO, the Headteacher and the Governing Body. It will be reviewed in July 2016 or sooner if there are significant changes made.

About Forced/Early Marriage

Forced marriage can be an issue for pupils in the middle school age range, and occasionally even younger, particularly from backgrounds such as Indian, Bangladeshi, Turkish, Iranian, Somali, Pakistani and from Romany families. 14% of affected British children are under 16.

Forced marriage was made illegal in the UK in June 2014, and usually involves additional criminal activity e.g. false imprisonment, rape, assault.

No major religion condones forced marriage. But religion may be used as a tool to oppress individuals, and such coercion may be very subtle. Multicultural sensitivity is no excuse for moral blindness.

About Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

The statutory guidance 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' published in April 2014, asks schools to ensure that they raise awareness of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Staff should be aware of FGM and it should be included in your policy where the different types of abuse and neglect are set out.

FGM occurs mainly in Africa and to a lesser extent, in the Middle East and Asia. Although it is believed by many to be a religious issue, it is a cultural practice. There are no health benefits.

Communities particularly affected by FGM in the UK include girls from Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Egypt, Nigeria, Eritrea, Yemen, Indonesia and Afghanistan.

In the UK, FGM tends to occur in areas with larger populations of communities who practise FGM, such as first-generation immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in areas such as London, Cardiff, Manchester, Sheffield, Northampton, Birmingham, Oxford, Crawley, Reading, Slough and Milton Keynes.

Although Marden Bridge is outside these high-risk areas geographically, all staff should be just as alert to the possibility of this type of abuse.

FGM: Key Points

- Not a religious practice
- Occurs mostly to girls aged from 5 – 8 years old; but up to around 15
- Criminal offence in UK since 1985
- Offence since 2003 to take girls abroad
- Criminal penalties include up to 14 years in prison

Reasons for FGM cultural practice include:

- Cultural identity – An initiation into womanhood
- Gender Identity – Moving from girl to woman – enhancing femininity
- Sexual control – reduce the woman's desire for sex
- Hygiene/cleanliness – un-mutilated women are regarded as unclean

Risk Factors for FGM include:

- low level of integration into UK society
- mother or sister who has undergone FGM
- girls who are withdrawn from PSHCE
- a visiting female elder from the country of origin
- being taken on a long holiday to the family's country of origin
- talk about a 'special' event or procedure to 'become a woman'

FGM High Risk Time

This procedure often takes place in the summer, as the recovery period after FGM can be 6 to 9 weeks. Schools should be alert to the possibility of FGM as a reason why a girl in a high risk group is absent from school or where the family request an 'authorised absence' for just before or just after the summer school holidays.

Although, it is difficult to identify girls before FGM takes place, where girls from these high risk groups return from a long period of absence with symptoms of FGM, advice should be sought from the police or social services.

Post-FGM Symptoms may include:

- difficulty walking, sitting or standing
- spend longer than normal in the bathroom or toilet
- unusual behaviour after a lengthy absence
- reluctance to undergo normal medical examinations
- asking for help, but may not be explicit about the problem due to embarrassment or fear

Longer Term FGM problems may include:

- difficulties urinating or incontinence
- frequent or chronic vaginal, pelvic or urinary infections
- menstrual problems
- kidney damage and possible failure
- cysts and abscesses

- complications during sex, pregnancy and childbirth
- emotional and mental health problems

Forced/Early Marriage/FGM issues:

What we provide

An open environment is crucial, where pupils feel comfortable and safe enough to discuss any problems they are facing and where forced marriage and FGM are discussed openly as part of the Life Studies curriculum, with relevant information displayed, eg posters, helplines and leaflets. Forced/Early Marriage is currently taught in the summer term of Year 6, within the 'Growing Up' module. FGM is taught specifically in the summer term of Year 8, although Year 6 pupils are also alerted obliquely to FGM in Year 6 and taught to report any concerns.

What to look out for

Only rarely will a pupil actually disclose fear of forced/early marriage or FGM, and so pupils will often come to our attention for a variety of behaviours consistent with distress. These general signs and behaviours are detailed in our Safeguarding Policy, with specific post-FGM behaviours detailed above.

Another situation which should elicit immediate school referral is a family request for a longer absence to go back to the country of origin.

What to do if you are alerted to the possibility of Forced or Early marriage

- Take any concerns seriously. Establish the pupil's confidence.
- However remote the possibility, the situation requires immediate referral to the school Child Protection Officer.
- The teacher must NOT under any circumstances contact the parents about the issue. The pupil may be under surveillance from siblings or other persons in their own community. So ensure that if you speak to the pupil, you are alone in a place where the conversation cannot be overheard. Prepare a safety plan first, and agree this with the pupil, ie. another reason why you may be meeting.
- Some pupils may be uncomfortable even talking to pupils of the opposite gender and from another background because of this surveillance aspect, and it's important to note this when asking pupils to work in pairs and groups.
- It is important to note that approaches such as mediation and family counselling can prove extremely dangerous. Educational professionals undertaking such approaches may unwittingly increase the pupil's vulnerability and place them in danger.
- Log all conversations related to the issue, and discreetly gather any family information together for the CPO. Information on attendance, performance, etc will also be used.

Child Protection procedures

In addition to child protection procedures covered under our Safeguarding Policy, the following specific points apply:

- It is vital that this information is passed on when the pupil transfers classes and schools, and that the situation is continuously monitored by the school.
- Remind the pupil that they have rights and choices, and that they can confidentially access external support as well as internal procedures. Pupils should be allowed to make a private telephone call to a suitable helpline such as Childline, or in Forced/Early Marriage situations ideally to the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) if they choose. These numbers are displayed on resources in the Life Studies classroom.
- The CPO will contact specialist agencies (such as the FMU in the case of Forced/Early Marriage) for advice, and will liaise with the appropriate agencies with specialist training (this may include police, educational welfare officers, social services, etc). A multi-agency safe-guarding assessment of the risk to that pupil will be conducted.
- A plan will be put into place to safeguard that individual, depending on their circumstances. This will usually involve ongoing active monitoring by the school, ensuring that there is continuing 1:1 contact with the pupil, in cases of Forced/Early Marriage, without family present.

Monitoring and Evaluation

This will be done by the Safeguarding/ Child Protection Officers under the direction of the Headteacher.