

SUBMISSION FROM EDUCATION SCOTLAND

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28 February 2014

Dear Headteacher

Female Genital Mutilation

As you will know, keeping all children safe depends on the knowledge, skills and confidence of those who work with children and families. Staff must be able to manage risk and deal with the complex and highly uncertain environments that face our most vulnerable children and families. Professionalism, commitment and courage are needed to address the most challenging of circumstances. The child protection landscape in Scotland has developed considerably over the last few years. New legislation, new areas of practice and new approaches continue to shape activity at both national and local level putting the interests of the child at the centre of every process and decision, building up from universal services: the *Getting it right for every child* approach has been instrumental in this.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is illegal in Scotland and in the UK – it is considered a form child abuse and is a violation of the child's right to life, their bodily integrity as well as their right to health. It is illegal for anyone in the UK to circumcise or assist in the circumcision of a girl. It is also illegal for any UK national or any UK permanent resident to circumcise or assist in the circumcision of a girl outside of the UK.

In order to support the children and young women who are affected and to counteract the continued practice of FGM, the Scottish Government uses a multi-agency approach involving relevant agencies, professionals and communities and a variety of interventions based on the GIRFEC principles. As FGM is often carried out on minors, it is also a violation of the rights of children and is, therefore, a child protection issue.

We firmly believe that schools have a key role to play in collaboration with social work and health colleagues in eradicating the practice from Scotland entirely. Staff in schools share a responsibility for identifying and responding to the care and wellbeing needs of children and young people. Schools can help raise awareness by educating staff, parents and pupils about the practice to prevent it happening in the future. It is important that parents, teachers and other adults working with children know how to respond. If headteachers or other staff have any concerns they should follow their local authority's child protection procedures.

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The National Guidance for Child Protection, which is used by all children's services such as education, includes a section on FGM. If there are concerns that a school pupil may have been subject to, or may be at risk from, FGM, this becomes a child protection matter and the National Guidance provides advice at Part 4, paragraphs 469-474:

www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/protecting/child-protection. This section will be updated with the next edition, which will be published later in the spring. Schools may wish to highlight the revised guidance in their next round of child protection training in August.

There are a number of existing resources which schools may find helpful to raise awareness of and respond to potential cases of FGM. The UK Home Office has produced a leaflet 'Female Genital Mutilation – The Facts' which may provide a helpful introduction to the issue. It is available here:

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/261326/FGM_leaflet.pdf.

The Scottish Government funds the Women's Support Project to develop resources for use in training and education – these are available at

www.womenssupportproject.co.uk/vawtraining/content/femalegenitalmutilation/277,234.

Education Scotland will work with partner agencies to develop guidance for staff, which will be available for use at the annual safeguarding update in August for all staff in all schools.

Thank you very much for your co-operation and willingness to help in this very important matter.

Yours sincerely



MICHAEL RUSSELL



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ISBN: 978-1-78412-371-0 (web only)

APS Group Scotland
DPPAS26879 (03/14)