

Children do matter...



A report based on feedback from consultation undertaken by Council for Mosques (Bradford) with Masajid and Madaaris representatives, Imams, Faith teachers, parents and other stakeholders.

The consultation was supported by Bradford Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB), The National Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), Bradford Council's Children's Services, West Yorkshire Police, Farnham Primary School, West Bowling Advice Centre and Bradford City Project.

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Acknowledgement

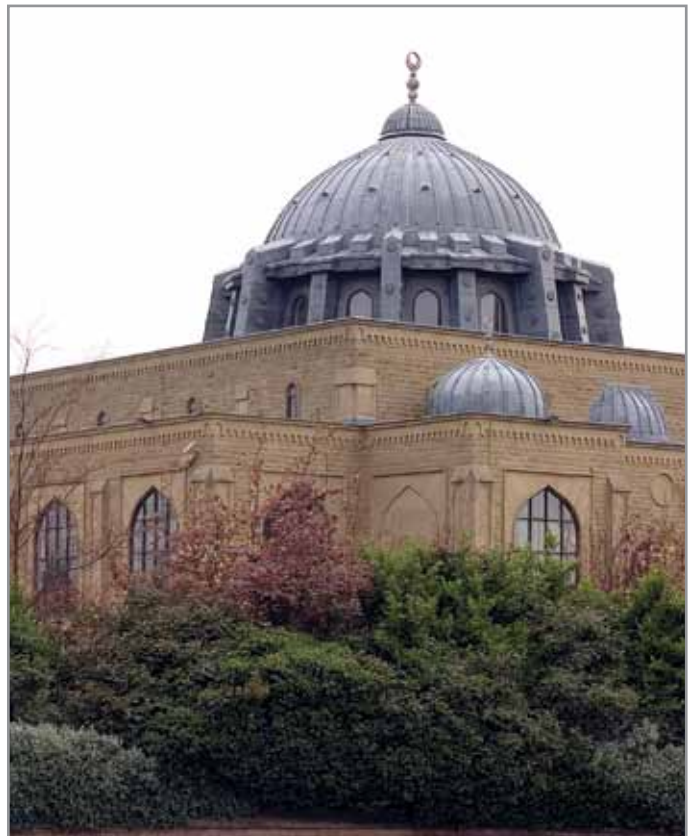
Our special thanks go to Javed Ashraf, the former vice president of Council for Mosques and the former chairperson of the Council for Mosques Working Group on Safeguarding Children.

The Children do matter... report was produced by Ishtiaq Ahmed and Azra Riasat for the Council for Mosques Bradford.

The wording in this publication can be made available in other formats such as large print and Braille. Please call 01274 433582.

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Mohammed Saleem Khan

Chief Executive, Council for Mosques
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Masjid and Madaaris are an essential part of the educational landscape of Bradford. As providers of spiritual and social education, often in difficult and trying situations, these valuable community institutions take their role very seriously and are totally committed to the welfare of children. Our experience goes to suggest that they want to do more and we are keen to support their efforts.

This report pulls together feedback from managers, Imams, teachers, parents, volunteers and professionals, recording their concerns and suggestions regarding what needs to be done by Masjid and Madaaris to improve the safety and wellbeing of children in their care. Towards this end, we believe that the 'Children do matter...' report will prove to be an excellent resource for Masjid and Madaaris in their effort to improve policy and practice in this important area.

We are very appreciative of the support received from the partner agencies for taking this very worthwhile initiative forward.



Kath Tunstall

Strategic Director of Children's Services,
City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council

Safeguarding the welfare of children and young people is everyone's responsibility. This is particularly the case for those who provide services for children and young people.

I welcome this initiative by the Council for Mosques (Bradford) and its partners, represented by Bradford Safeguarding Children Board, which aims to ensure that children and young people who attend Masjid and Madaaris in the Bradford District can enjoy the highest standards of safeguarding.

Masajid and Madaaris play a significant role in promoting the spiritual and social development of children, enhancing their self-esteem and positive identity. I hope that this report and the on-going partnership work will contribute to the achievement of our common goal in helping children and young people to develop values and skills which will allow them to be confident and active members of their faith community and of the wider community of Bradford District.

Background

The safety and wellbeing of children is a central consideration for all agencies and organisations that are trusted with their care. Accordingly, Masajid and Madaaris are not an exception to this requirement. A conservative estimate suggests that there are over 9000 children that attend Masajid and Madaaris regularly for their faith education. The current demography of the Muslim community also indicates that this number will considerably increase over the coming years, thus adding to the responsibility of the Masajid and Madaaris to ensure that well being and safety of children entrusted in their care is robustly protected.

Masajid and Madaaris generally take their responsibility for the wellbeing of children very seriously and overall have an excellent track record of care with limited resources and facilities at their disposal. However, there is no room for complacency. A number of high profile cases of child abuse and neglect have added to the scrutiny of institutions with responsibility for children. Legislation and statutory guidance in this area is continually evolving and the awareness of the issues and responsibility that goes with it is also growing. Equally, there is a growing expectation of parents for Masajid and Madaaris to demonstrate a high level of care for their children. This is certainly a good thing and something that needs to be encouraged and strengthened. Council for Mosques (Bradford) in consultation with the, Bradford Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB), NSPCC (Bradford office), and the Diversity and Cohesion Service from Bradford Council established a working group of key stakeholders to inform and support the work of Masajid and Madaaris in the district regarding the safeguarding of children.

The aims of the consultation

1. To raise awareness of the safeguarding framework and its relevance to the work of Masajid and Madaaris with children.
2. To explain the broader context of the work with Masajid and Madaaris.
3. To hear from Masajid and Madaaris committee members, imams, teachers and parents about their experiences, concerns, and expectations and their suggestions and recommendations for bettering the safety and well being of children.
4. To identify gaps in policy and practice and identify scope for positive intervention and development.

Over the two events 132 people attended which included: Masajid and Madaaris committee members, Imams, teachers, parents, carers and professionals from other walks of life, all with direct experience of Masajid and Madaaris. The reports also include the feedback from the five Masajid that were involved in the pilot projects and anecdotal information from CFM member organisations and individual parents.

From the outset, the Council for Mosques Working Group' agreed on a three strand strategy:

1. To undertake an initial audit of the work already being undertaken by different stakeholders with Masajid and Madaaris. This was to avoid repeat, duplication and also to identify good practice, and to undertake two consultation meetings with the key community stakeholders- Masajid/ Madaaris committee members, Imams and teachers, parents, community professionals.
2. To develop a 'toolkit' for Masajid and initially pilot it with five Masajid to assess its usefulness and appropriateness prior to rolling it out to other Masajid and Madaaris in the district.
3. NSPCC kindly allocated one of its workers for two days per week to support the work around 1 and 2 above. Initially, this piece of work was envisaged for six months but as it turned out it almost lasted for a year. Council for Mosques was appropriately asked to lead on the two consultation meetings. BSCB kindly agreed to look into the long term resourcing of the project. Bradford Council's Diversity and Cohesion Service agreed to continue to provide more immediate practical support to Masajid and Madaaris regarding training and CRB checks. All other partners contributed to supporting specific pieces of work best suited to their areas of interest and expertise. This way the work of the working group was divided between different partners and contributed enormously to the success of the project.

The BSCB has kindly agreed to fund a full time post for a year to in order to support the work of the working group and take forward the recommendation of the consultations with the main stakeholders. This report pulls together the main issues and recommendations from the two consultation meetings with the key stakeholders in Bradford and Keighley.

A brief résumé of work facilitated by NSPOC

Safeguarding in Madrassahs Toolkit

A Self-Assessment Safeguarding 'Toolkit' was developed and piloted with the five Madrassahs. This was to assess its usefulness and appropriateness prior to rolling it to other Madrassahs in the district. The toolkit serves as a useful aid and guide for Madrassahs on the importance of child protection and safeguarding and demonstrates how policies and procedures can be developed. It is broken down in key easy to follow sections and contains a number of templates that Madrassahs can be applied to suit different settings.

Safeguarding workshops for staff/volunteers of each of the 5 Madrassahs

Basic Child Protection training was delivered to all five Madrassahs. The aim of these workshops was to ensure that staff and volunteers teaching at the Madrassahs understood their roles and had the clarity about what needed to be done when concerned about a child's safety and wellbeing.

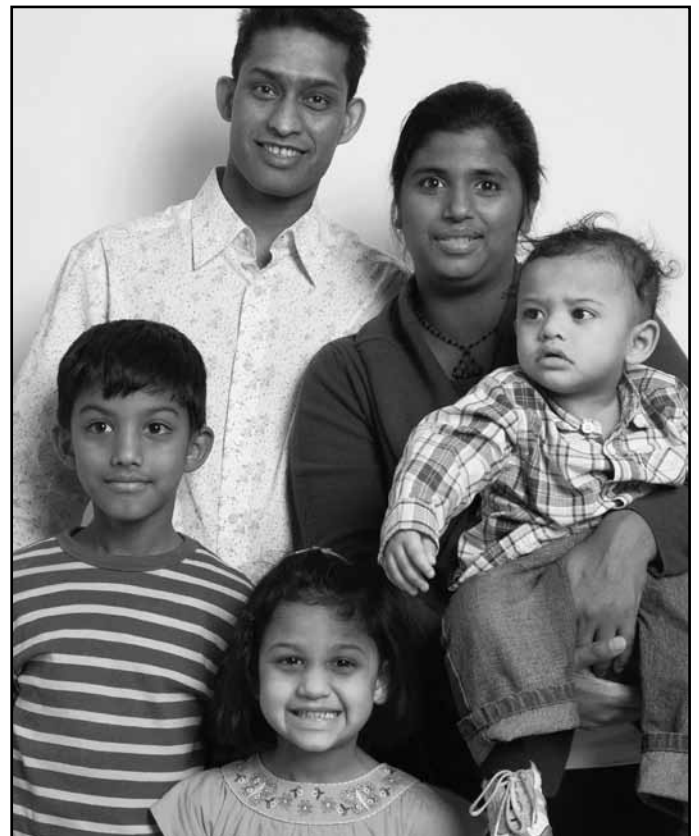
The safeguarding workshops, amongst other things, covered the following areas:

- What is safeguarding? What is child protection?
- What is child abuse? Types of abuse and myths relating to child abuse
- Legislation and legal responsibilities
- The role of the Named Person
- Child protection scenario – step-by-step breakdown of how to respond to a disclosure of concerns about a child

The training was designed to encourage interaction and discussion from the participants to make the learning interesting and enjoyable. Towards the end, all participants felt that they had a clear understanding of what needed to be done about the welfare of a child or if a child makes a disclosure. For some of the participants this was all very new learning and the first time they had accessed any child protection training. The significance of the Named Person for the Madrassah was discussed in detail and participants were asked to discuss who would be the right people for this role within their setting.

Delivery of parent workshops on safeguarding in faith settings

Three safeguarding Workshops for parents were also delivered. These workshops had a strong focus on children in faith settings. Parents welcomed the information and the guidance and felt more confident to approach the Madrassahs regarding the safety and wellbeing of their children and more aware what questions to ask.



Consultation structure

The consultations had three key elements

1. Presentation by Council for Mosques, BSCB, and Children's Services (Diversity and Cohesion) and the NSPCC giving participants background to the safeguarding work in Bradford and explaining the broader context and the purpose of the work being undertaken to support Masajid and Madaaris. This was done to allay fears that the Masajid and Madaaris were being un-necessarily targeted.
2. Participants were divided into small groups, facilitated by members of the Safeguarding Working Group, to share their experiences, expectations and to make recommendations for bettering safeguarding and well being of children in Masajid and Madaaris. The small group approach encouraged openness and participants were able to speak frankly and candidly. The issues about confidentiality were dealt with at the outset to allay any fears of participants being individually identified for their views. This helped as participants spoke frankly about their concerns without having the fear of being identified.
3. The facilitators were asked to report back to the plenary three salient points as agreed by the group. All group discussions were summarised and put on flipchart with participant's agreement. These have become the basis for this report.
4. After the plenary, the participants were given the information regarding the next steps in the process.



Broader context to the delivery of faith education by Madaaris

Parents' expectations of Madaaris

Parents send their children to Madaaris based on trust, expecting that their faith and educational needs will be catered for and that their moral and spiritual needs, character and personality will be positively enhanced and shaped. Parents' expectations can be summarised as follows:

- Madaaris to provide teaching in faith and help to shape the moral and spiritual character of children.
- To support physical and educational wellbeing.
- Have trained teachers able to understand and satisfy the curiosity of young minds.
- To provide an enjoyable and rewarding learning environment for children to reflect on and see Masajid and Madaaris with fondness.
- Structured learning – syllabus, examinations and rewards.
- Regular feedback to parents on the progress of their children.

Some Madaaris may score high on some of the above aspects but may be weak on others. There are so many in Bradford that vary tremendously in their set-up with little consistency of standards across Madaaris.

Parental choice

Parental choice amongst other things is based on two key considerations:

- a. The travelling distance - most parents prefer for their child to go to the nearest Madrassah.
- b. Denominational affiliations - parents have a preference for Madaaris of their denominational affiliation.

However, there are increasing numbers of parents, particularly from young upwardly mobile families that attach greater importance to the quality of education than the distance or denominational affiliation. They are prepared to travel to access the best educational provision.

Expectations of parents from Madaaris

- For parents not to see Madaaris as places for 'dumping' their children to give them some respite from the hustle and bustle of children being at home.
- For parents to explain to children the importance and the purpose of 'Madrassah' education.
- To embed in children a sense of respect for Madaaris and their teachers.
- To work with teachers at Madaaris to support/ shape the moral character of children. This should be seen as a joint responsibility but unfortunately some parents do not see it this way with an over-reliance on Madaaris to manage issues of discipline.
- Parents should ask for more accountability regarding standards, teaching arrangements and progress. They should not just be content to leave their children at the 'door step'.

An increasing numbers of parents are showing interest in the working of their respective Madrassah and this needs to be encouraged more widely.

Majority of parents operate from a position of trust expecting Madaaris to do whatever necessary to educate their children. They operate from a very low expectation base - as long as they come out being able to read the Quran, perform five daily prayers and know some other basics they are quite content. Parents need to raise their expectations.

Key findings

Note: These findings are based on feedback from the two consultation meetings and anecdotal information volunteered by individuals. We are careful not to suggest that these findings apply to each and every Masjid and Madrassah in the District as there are a growing number of Madaaris which have established very high standards in many of these areas. However, these issues do apply to a varying degree to many.

- Masajid and Madaaris enormously vary in size and resources, ranging from the large multi-million pound complexes to small entities operating from converted or adapted terraced houses. No two entities are the same.
- A significant number of children receive their faith education outside the recognised centres in private homes and other venues which are run by private individuals, frequently by women.
- In many cases, particularly in small setups, teaching staff and volunteers are taken on personal recommendations. This works well in many cases but the practice can vary and is open to abuse.
- The quality of education significantly varies from one Madrassah to another, even in large well established Madaaris. There is no uniformity or consistency. This situation is complicated by lack of a standard syllabus across the board. The syllabuses that do exist are customised to reflect the preferences of individual Madaaris and Sects.
- More and more Madaaris are seeing parental involvement and support as being crucial to their performance. This is a healthy trend that needs to be encouraged. However, general practice across the Masajid and Madaaris fraternity does not appear to be too common.
- Masajid and Madaaris vary considerably in their understanding, approach and practice to employment, Health and Safety and safeguarding requirements. Some are on par but others tend to be satisfied by a minimalist approach to ensuring proper policies, procedures and practice are in place.
- Many Madaaris have a very narrow understanding of 'faith education' for example, limited to assisting children to identify and read the Quranic text, to memorise the five pillars of Islam and to be able to offer five prayers. This is very basic, essential and highly commendable but parents desire their children to be given more fuller understanding of their faith, for instance family, work, friendship, neighbours, crime, or respect for elders to help with their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- There is an apparent level of secrecy surrounding the running of Masajid and Madaaris due to negative representations of Muslims and Islam in the media. This is not to suggest that there is anything wrong or sinister about them but this level of 'closeness' does give rise to suspicion and hinders wider community engagement.



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- Many parents are quite content with their child attending the Madrassah. They feel that by sending their child to Madrassah their religious duty is fulfilled and the rest is the responsibility of the Madrassah. This is not a healthy and productive approach. Parents need to be more involved and more discerning regarding the education of their children.
 - While in some of the larger Madaaris English has become the principle medium of education alongside one of the community languages, such as Arabic, in many other Madaaris teaching is delivered in one of the community languages often by teachers with little or no command of English. This poses considerable difficulty for children who access mainstream education in English and with very basic or no command of their mother tongue or that of the teacher.
 - Teachers who have no or very little command of English also tend to have least understanding of safeguarding issues, legal requirements or of the responsibilities that impact on their role. They also tend to practice the traditional methods of teaching/ discipline.
 - More than often, Faith teachers in Madaaris are employed for their knowledge of the faith and not for their teaching skills.
 - By and large, there is little provision for teachers to learn and upgrade their teaching, behaviour and class management skills. This is partly due to lack of understanding of the need for such training partly due to lack of knowledge of resources available.
 - Bradford Council, through its Diversity and Cohesion Service, has been supporting supplementary schools and Madaaris for many years. Provision of training on child protection, behaviour and classroom management are all free of charge, however many do not take advantage of this.
 - Most Madaaris do not have any framework for parental involvement. There is a marked absence of written information for parents, 'parent's evenings', 'parent's open days' and annual awards ceremony etc. The contact between Madaaris and the parents is ad hoc and relies on parental motivation or is seen as 'problem' linked and therefore negative.



Recommendations

Faith teaching should be aimed at shaping the moral character of children, giving them understanding and appreciation of their place in society. It should also be broad to include their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

- ✓ Madaaris should be places for enjoyable and creative learning, something that children can reflect back on with affection.
- ✓ Masajid and Madaaris must proactively stipulate the requirement for CRB checks for all teachers, teaching assistants, volunteers and other personnel with responsibility for care and wellbeing of children.
- ✓ Masajid and Madaaris should appoint a designated person with responsibility for safeguarding issues. The designated person should be someone with seniority within the organisation, who is trusted and able to act quickly, judiciously and independently. The safeguarding officer should also be someone with empathy, understanding and knowhow of what is involved and what needs to be done when he/she is approached.
- ✓ The Safeguarding Officer should be required to undergo related training and be supported to establish effective work links with the appropriate statutory and non- statutory agencies.
- ✓ Masajid to keep a register of all teachers, assistants and volunteers who have responsibility for teaching and support children.
- ✓ Parents should be encouraged to be more involved in the work of Madaaris, demanding greater accountability, higher standards, and a learning environment conducive to their education and wellbeing. They should not just be content to leave their children at the door step of a Madrassah.
- ✓ Masajid and Madaaris should provide written information about the organisational structure, how decisions are made, the relevant policies and procedures and how parents may get involved in supporting the work of these worthy institutions
- ✓ Masajid and Madaaris should have trained teachers who are able to understand and satisfy the curiosity of young minds.
- ✓ Learning should be structured and standardised and not left to the whims and wishes of the teacher – syllabus, examination and rewards
- ✓ Regular and structured feedback should be given to parents on the progress of their child.
- ✓ Madaaris should develop and maintain a data base comprising, amongst other things, a register of children, contact details for parents, consent forms, and information on special needs of children, study trails, and progress.
- ✓ Madaaris should have regular parents meetings, open days, awards evenings, etc.
- ✓ There should be a standard syllabus for Madaaris. This may be difficult to achieve given the denominational variations. The starting point could be for each denomination to achieve and apply an agreed teaching framework amongst its affiliates. Council for Mosques should facilitate this.
- ✓ Training for teachers- teaching is a special skill with clear standards and requirements. A good speaker or an orator may be good for Friday sermons and public gatherings but not necessarily a good teacher. Teaching requires specialised skills and training which should not be taken for granted.
- ✓ Masajid and Madaaris to open up opportunities for women to be more involved and play a fuller role on the affairs of Masajid and Madaaris. Within a family life, women play a more dominant role and are the major influence over their children. They are ideally placed to be a link between Madaaris and home.

Parents

- ✓ Parents need to show more active interest in the work of Masajid and Madaaris particularly in the educational arrangements for their children.
- ✓ Parents not to see Madaaris as places for 'dumping' their children for respite from the hustle and bustle of children being at home.

- ✓ Parents need to broaden their expectations of the role of Masajid and Madaaris. These are places of learning and character building. Parents should be more involved and more demanding of Masajid and Madaaris regarding quality of education, and arrangements for safety and well being of their children. Provision of quality education in a safe and secure environment is a shared responsibility.
- ✓ Parents should be demanding regular feedback on the progress of their children, for example, by way of regular parents' evenings, celebratory events, regular contact with teaching staff etc.

Council for Mosques

- ✓ Council for Mosques should develop and provide a quality mark for Madaaris to aim for. The quality standard should embrace clarity and appropriateness of syllabus, teacher methods, teacher training, parental involvement, health and safety, governance, and a framework for safeguarding.
- ✓ Council for Mosques should advise and commend a proper system of examinations, assessment and awards.
- ✓ There should be an appropriate accredited training for Imams and teachers which recognises and enhances their existing knowledge and skills.
- ✓ Council for Mosques should develop a standard syllabus for Madaaris. This may be difficult to achieve given the denominational variations. However, the starting point could be for each denomination to achieve and apply an agreed teaching framework amongst its affiliates. Council for Mosques could take lead on this.
- ✓ There should be a proper system of examinations, assessments and awards would be greatly helpful. Some Madaaris already have systems in place but this need to be across the board.
- ✓ The Council for Mosques should act as a regulatory body to ensure that Masajid and Madaaris are compliant with safeguarding children and young people.
- ✓ CFM has added responsibility for achieving consensus regarding a baseline for syllabuses, teaching standards, recruitment and training of tutors, training of Madaaris committee members and supporting recruitment of women and young people on committees.

Other support agencies

- ✓ There is a need for statutory and non-statutory partner agencies to be more proactive and consistent in the engagement and support for Masajid and Madaaris.
- ✓ Information, advice and training should be available to Madaaris on a consistent basis. To work with Council for Mosques to make this happen and ensure that the message reaches out to all Madaaris in the district.
- ✓ There is a need for support agencies to interact with Madaaris through working with the Council for Mosques to develop practical ways of engaging with them.
- ✓ To give clearer information about the role of different agencies and how their roles are linked
- ✓ Agencies should assist and resource the work of Council for Mosques so that it is able to be more proactive and consistent in its support to Madaaris. Council for Mosques is ideally placed and is trusted to lead on this work.

Complementary strands of work:

- **Behaviour issues:**
This applies to both staff and students. Schools have developed good frameworks to manage behaviour issues and classroom management. Madaaris would benefit considerably by working with mainstream schools and learning from the structure and approach that schools have in place.
- **Cultural not religious:**
Many of the issues and concerns that have been identified are cultural and not religious and they are specific to the South Asian communities, for example, language mismatch, imams from South Asia, teaching styles, the role of teachers and expectations linked to their role.
- **Madaaris to broaden their scope:**
by incorporating sports and recreational activities; as well as social education to make their delivery more enjoyable and rewarding.

