

'Sex and Relationships' is an evidence-based report about Sex and Relationships Education and is also a good practice guide.

The OFSTED report *Sex and Relationships* will be sent to all maintained schools in England and will be on the OFSTED website - www.ofsted.gov.uk. It is also available free from the OFSTED Publication Centre, Tel: 07002 637833.

Bare Facts of Life are not enough

A new OFSTED report shows that most schools are conscientious in their teaching about sex and relationships but teaching about parenthood, relationships and the prevention of infection was too often poor.

OFSTED published, 'Sex and Relationships' at the end of April, 2002 and reported that while schools adequately cover the factual aspects of human reproduction, teaching about parenthood, relationships and the prevention of infection was too often poor.

The survey was a response to a recommendation in the government's Social Exclusion Unit's 1999 report 'Teenage Pregnancy' that said OFSTED should carry out a survey of sex and relationships education (SRE) and produce a good practice guide.

Teenage pregnancy

Information from the OFSTED press release places the report in the context of the high incidence of teenage pregnancy. Although more than seven out of ten under-16s do not have sex and the great majority of girls reach their twenties without becoming pregnant, the United Kingdom has the highest teenage birth rate in western Europe. Each year, in England, 90,000 teenage girls conceive (Teenage Pregnancy 1999). Of these, around 7,700 are under 16 and 2,200 are aged 14 or under. Half of the under-16s who are sexually active do not use contraception the first time they have sex. They have a nine in ten chance of conceiving in one year and are exposed to sexually transmitted infections. Of the under-16s who become pregnant, half choose abortion. In the longer term, daughters of teenage mothers have a high chance of becoming teenage mothers themselves.

The rate of teenage pregnancy is highest in the economically most disadvantaged

communities and among the most vulnerable young people, including those in care, those with irregular patterns of school attendance and those who have been excluded from school.

SRE quality

While reducing the incidence of teenage pregnancy through education is very important, it is not the only purpose of SRE. Her Majesty's Inspectors say that to improve the quality of SRE it is important that:

- ✓ Schools should broaden their definition of achievement in SRE to include the development of pupils' values, attitudes and personal skills, and set out clearly what pupils should learn by the end of each key stage
- ✓ Teachers should be given further advice on content and methods for teaching about parenthood and sexuality and schools should establish expert teachers
- ✓ More attention should be given by secondary schools to health education to better cover the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV / AIDS and chlamydia
- ✓ More advice, such as useful books, should be provided for parents - especially fathers - to enable them to talk constructively to their children about sex and relationships
- ✓ Local education and health authorities should consider how more pupils can have better access to individual advice from specialists at school.

Evidence

The recommendations in the report come from evidence gathered from a range of

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sources:

- Inspection by HMI of 140 primary, secondary and special schools
- Discussions with 650 young people during these inspections
- Analysis of OFSTED inspections of primary, secondary and special schools carried out during 2000/02
- Meetings with education and health professionals
- A postal survey of 1,000 primary, secondary and special schools in 20 LEAs
- Research carried out for OFSTED by the Schools Health Education Unit, Exeter

The evidence gathered showed that most schools are conscientious in their teaching about sex and relationships. In all primary school lessons pupils (7-11 year-olds) gained appropriate knowledge about the factual aspects. In relation to the expectations for the secondary school age groups, knowledge was better at KS4 (15-16 year-olds), than KS3 (12-14 year-olds).

Guidance

The DfES guidance issued in 2000 has had a positive effect, but still too many schools have not reviewed their policies, monitoring and evaluation of SRE. SRE policies are poor in one in ten schools. In secondary schools teaching about sexual health and the law in relation to sex was poor in one in five lessons, although teaching about contraception was good, particularly at KS4. However, education about parenthood does not feature in all secondary schools' programmes, even though most schools recognise its importance. Boys feel that not much in the SRE lessons is relevant to them and that they do not receive support if they become school-age fathers. The survey found that parents, particularly fathers, feel that they lack the knowledge and skills to discuss sex and relationships with their children. Only about four in every 10,000 pupils are currently withdrawn by their parents from the non-statutory aspects of SRE.

Magazines

Meanwhile, teenage magazines - for girls and boys - are an increasingly important source of information and have a significant impact on their attitudes. The report says there is a strong case for teachers to include these magazines in their lessons for critical study of the information and messages that they carry. This would give teachers a chance to challenge, among other things, misleading messages about the extent of sexual activity among the young.

HIV/AIDS

Education about HIV/AIDS is receiving less attention than in the past. Even though it remains a significant health problem, young people perceive it as less of a concern and this is contributing to the lack of use of condoms by those who are sexually active. This has implications for the transmission of other sexually transmitted diseases. The report also says that school programmes need to do more to develop pupils' values, attitudes and personal skills to enable them to make sensible choices. Schools also need to make sure that values and codes of behaviour are consistently adhered to, for example homophobic attitudes are challenged along with derogatory comments and unacceptable language.

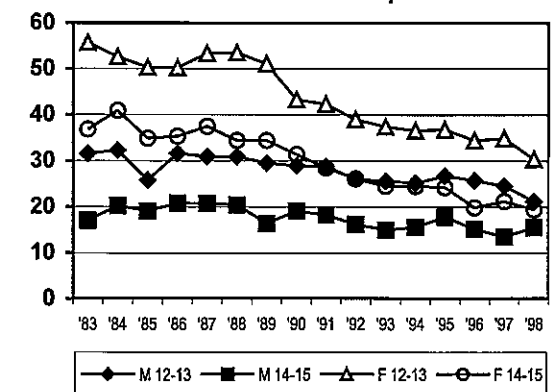
Relevant

HM Chief Inspector of Schools, Mike Tomlinson, said, "Sex and relationships education is relevant to all pupils. It is not just about academic learning, it is potentially about our pupils' health and well being for the rest of their lives."

Dr David Regis, SHEU Research Manager, said, "The main findings that we offered to OFSTED showed that there is a shift, as young people move up the school from year 8 to year 10, from parents and school towards friends and magazines as their main sources of information about sex."

There has been a similar shift, over the last ten years among pupils in Year 10, from parents and school towards friends and magazines as their main sources of information about sex.

Percentage answering their main source of sex information was parents



The findings also showed that, over the last ten years, we have seen a decline in young people's concern about HIV/AIDS. It is quite appropriate to re-balance teaching about sexually transmitted diseases to cover a range of less dangerous but more common infections, such as *Chlamydia*."

...teachers cannot offer or guarantee absolute confidentiality... However... health professionals can give individual advice about contraception and maintain confidentiality.