



Briefing on teaching about puberty

Teaching about puberty before children experience it is important to fulfil the requirements of the National Curriculum and other statutory responsibilities inspected by Ofsted.

The 2014 National Curriculum Year 5 Programme of Study for Science states that:

“Pupils should be taught to describe the changes as humans develop to old age”

This should include teaching about puberty as one of the most central changes which happen as humans develop. This is supported by the Department for Education’s non-statutory guidance on the Year 5 science curriculum which states that:

“[pupils] should learn about the changes experienced in puberty”

The national curriculum does not apply to academies, but all schools which teach any element of sex and relationships education (SRE) are statutorily obliged to have regard to the Department for Education’s 2000 guidance on SRE, which states:

“All children, including those who develop earlier than the average, need to know about puberty before they experience the onset of physical changes.”

Given NHS advice that children are experiencing puberty [as early as 8 for girls and 9 for boys](#) and the statutory guidance refers to teaching about puberty *before* it happens, Year 5 is in our view the latest time at which the subject should be addressed by schools.

Teaching about puberty is also a safeguarding issue. As [Janet Palmer HMI, Ofsted’s PSHE education lead, has stated](#):

“If pupils are kept ignorant of their human, physical and sexual rights; or how to protect themselves and others, or know where to go to for help, they are not being adequately safeguarded. When inspecting schools ... inspectors are guided to check that the sex education in national curriculum science at Key Stages 1-3 is being adequately taught; and that primary schools have regard to the Department for Education statutory guidance on teaching pupils about puberty before they experience the onset of physical changes.”

“Inspectors leading Section 5 inspections have been guided to grade behaviour and safety separately and to take whichever is the lowest grade as the overall grade for the Behaviour and Safety strand of the Section 5 inspection framework; and if Behaviour and Safety are judged to require improvement this is likely to affect the grade for overall effectiveness.”

It is clear, therefore, that schools are required to safeguard children by teaching them about puberty before it happens.