

Response of the Accord Coalition to the draft Primary Science Curriculum



The Accord Coalition is a campaign coalition, launched in 2008, which brings together a wide range of organisations, both religious and non-religious, who want to ensure that all state funded schools adequately prepare children for adult life in our increasingly diverse and complex society.

Accord takes a keen interest in how sex education is provided in the National Curriculum for Science, as it is the only compulsory element of sex education that schools have to offer. However, we are very concerned that the teaching of sex education in the new draft primary Science Curriculum (contained in the programme of study for animals and humans) remains at a very superficial level.

For example, there is no reference for pupils in Year 1 to know the external or internal body parts with reference to reproduction as belonging to the basic parts of the body. Furthermore, Section 46 of the draft science curriculum states that pupils in year 2 should not be expected to understand how reproduction occurs – we find it unusual that the National Curriculum should state what *should not* be taught. Section 201 mentions the teaching of reproduction in year 5, but the corresponding notes suggest that teaching should focus on the ‘process involved in growth and development’. There is no explicit reference to reproduction. The draft primary science curriculum goes on to state that ‘In Year 6, pupils will be taught more about reproduction’. However, the curriculum for year 6 only then goes onto suggest that pupils could be taught to classify animals by how species’ egg cells are fertilised and how their young develop. There is no specific reference to human reproduction. Taken together, the provision of sex education in the draft curriculum is cursory.

Children should have a right to know how their body works; puberty is starting earlier for both boys and girls, and the average age of girl’s first period in the UK is now 12, but can occur as early as 8 years. Accord supports all schools at the primary and secondary levels teaching age appropriate Sex and Relationships Education (SRE), and we are buoyed by the widespread support for SRE being taught in schools among parents, school leaders and governors. The Report ‘[Sex and Relationship Education: Views from teachers, parents and governors](#)’¹ (2010) found that 90% of parents and 93% of Governors thought schools should be involved in providing SRE.

Sadly however the report also found that 80% of teachers did not feel sufficiently well trained and confident to talk about SRE; only 9% of school leaders rated the teaching materials available to them as ‘very useful’; while more than one in four school leaders and a fifth of governors believed that the provision of SRE in schools was failing children by

¹ *Sex and Relationship Education: Views from teachers, parents and governors* can be found at <http://www.durexhcp.co.uk/downloads/SRE-report.pdf>. Last accessed July 17th, 2012.

preparing them for the future ‘not well’ or ‘not at all well’. The report suggests that SRE should be made compulsory and that more teacher training and resources should be provided to aid in its provision, with which Accord firmly agrees.

In contrast, the draft curriculum does not appear to be designed to give teachers the tools to approach sex education with confidence and in an age-appropriate way, but seems to wish to protect the innocence of children by avoiding or minimising any teaching and learning around human reproduction. This approach is not based on firm evidence, nor indeed on what is wanted by most parents or recommended by the broad consensus of educationalists. To propose that pupils should not be expected to understand in anyway how reproduction occurs until year 5, and then to have a more detailed, but potentially still cursory teaching about reproduction in year 6, is much too little too late, and it would undermine the teaching of SRE at the secondary stage.

We continue to believe that the statutory provision of SRE within a PSHE framework would be most appropriate, with positive benefits for the development of pupils’ personal and social skills. In the absence of this, the requirements surrounding sex education in science are made all the more important. Accord urges that teaching and learning of human reproduction in the primary science curriculum be at least made much more thorough. This should include examining the mechanisms by which human fertilisation takes place in an age-appropriate way; giving children the tools to talk appropriately about those parts of the human body involved in human reproduction, and starting sex education gradually and in an age-appropriate way from early on in a child’s education. Accord believes that the long term health and wellbeing of children will otherwise be put at greater risk.

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About the Accord Coalition

The Accord Coalition also campaigns to ensure that all state funded schools are made open and suitable to all children of every background, no matter what their parents’ or their own beliefs, and who are concerned that restrictive legislation around admissions, employment and the curriculum in state funded faith schools can serve to undermine community cohesion and not adequately prepare children for life in society.

Accord’s growing list of members and supporters includes the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, the British Humanist Association, the Christian think tank Ekklesia, the British Muslims for Secular Democracy, The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches and the race equality think tank The Runnymede Trust.