

Introduction:

We are a group of young people who worked with Birmingham City Council Councillors to look at how effective Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) is. We came up with a report which contained a number of suggestions for the City Council and other people like teachers and school governors to make SRE better for all of us.

In this leaflet, we wanted to share the findings from the report and also talk about how we'd like to see things being done differently.

We also conducted two surveys, one of which was aimed at school governors to find out their understanding of SRE and the other was carried out by ourselves. We spoke to a number of young people from across the city to find out their views on this topic.



Our review has won the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CFPS) award for community engagement. Organisations from all across the UK entered these awards and we are very proud of everybody who was involved. National recognition for our hard work made winning the award even more special.



It has been rewarding and challenging to work with the Members of the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) on a review of this difficult area. The review has been very much a joint project between the UKYP and scrutiny members. That has been very important because the scrutiny has been able to take on board the varying concerns felt by young people and by parents, governors and school staff.

Cllr Jon Hunt



In the first year of joining the UKYP, at the top of my list was the issue of Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) and when I had the chance to put it forward as an issue to a board of people who I knew had the power to change the way it was taught I jumped to it. If things change for the better, then I know that the past two years were worth it.

Tyrone Fowles, UKYP

Young People:

Listed below are a number of thoughts and ideas we had to improve SRE. What do you think?

We think SRE is not just about reducing teenage pregnancy, but it's also about helping us make informed choices for the future.

We feel good SRE should improve your self esteem and confidence and help you make the right choices for yourself.

As part of the lessons we want to have more information on relationships.

We think there should be a minimum standard of high quality SRE that is provided to all pupils within our city.

We feel we should have some say in what goes into our SRE lessons because we

know what we want and we think involving the school student council would also be a great idea.

We think SRE should be renamed to 'Relationships and Sex Education' (RSE).

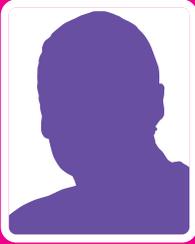
A group of teenage mums shared their thoughts and ideas with us. They suggested that mixed gender classes at school were not always a good idea and they were often too embarrassed to actively take part. They would have preferred to have some of the lessons separate from the boys.

They also suggested that it should not be delivered by a teacher (who could report back to the staff room) but by somebody who was 'anonymous'. They also felt that there was not enough positive debate about relationships, how to approach them and how to select a partner.



Sex and Relationships Education is vital in building our character and enables us to make decisions wisely. I learnt a lot from my experience on this review and look forward to seeing the changes implemented to give Young People the valuable SRE that I myself never received.

Richyal Rana, Member of UKYP



I never felt like I'd even had a proper sex education, we learnt some biology but nothing about relationships, maybe I would have known better and been able to make informed decisions for myself.

(Quote from a teenage father)

Key points from our survey:

We came up with a series of questions which looked at finding out the views of young people on Sex and Relationship Education including their own experiences within schools and their main sources of information and support. We went to a number of Youth Projects across the city to speak to young people. We hoped that by having young people asking the questions, other young people would be more willing to be open and honest about their experiences.

The key points coming out from the survey were:

- Young people wanted more information on the relationship aspects of SRE which they felt they didn't always get
- Friends and parents were identified as the people young people were most

likely to talk to about issues relating to relationships and sexual health. Teachers and health professionals weren't necessarily the people that young people would automatically go to if they had problems

- When asked about whom they wanted to teach SRE, young people were quite clear that they wanted someone they could trust to talk to about relationship and sexual health issues. They wanted someone who understood what it was like to be a teenager and who was non-judgemental. It was also important that the person had a clear grasp of the subject area in order to present facts and was not embarrassed easily
- The young people highlighted a number of topics such as sexuality, dealing with emotions, parenting, where to go to for help, which they would like to see covered more within their SRE lessons.

What Schools Can Do:

We strongly feel that schools should use 21st century teaching materials to teach SRE rather than the old out of date books and videos which are often used.

We feel SRE should be more flexible and that the lessons should take into account age/culture, ethnicity and maturity of the pupils.

Parents/carers should be told exactly what's being taught so that there are no misunderstandings.

We think involving the school student council in helping teachers come up with ideas on how/what to teach in SRE would also be a great idea.

We think SRE lessons would be better if we didn't know the person leading the sessions. We don't want embarrassing lessons with teachers we see everyday. We'd find it easier to talk to somebody we didn't know. Other people can help deliver lessons such as Youth Service, Theatre Groups, School Nurses etc.

Some pupils may need extra help and support outside of the classroom, so teachers should

know where we can get extra help and be able to point us in the right direction.

We all need to be 'working together', for example the council, schools, parents, health agencies, youth organisations and other voluntary and community groups have an important role to play

We think SRE should be renamed to 'Relationships and Sex Education' RSE.

All teachers teaching the subject should have the opportunity to make use of the training provided by the City Council.

We are a culturally diverse school and work with parents to support their understanding and gain their trust in our programme
(Primary School)

Governors:

Our School Governor Survey highlighted a number of interesting points:

- Schools that involved parents said it gave parents the chance to understand what is being taught to their children and in some ways has reassured parents about the benefits of good SRE. As a result a lot fewer children are withdrawn from lessons
- More training for both teachers and governors was also an area highlighted by a number of schools that they would like more support with. In terms of specific training for governors, very few of the schools responding had governors who had taken part in SRE training
- The use of external agencies to support schools in delivering SRE was also a positive theme recurring throughout the survey responses. This included amongst others Loudmouth Theatre Group, The Brook Advisory Clinic, SPACE Charity, The Life Bus and the support from staff at the Health Education Unit
- Some schools felt having access to statistics on teenage pregnancy rates and sexually transmitted infections for their relevant Wards would be a helpful tool for planning SRE lessons for the students
- Respondents felt having up to date materials and standardised work schemes was seen to be essential to delivering quality SRE lessons.

School governors play an important role in SRE policy development. Our research showed us that they could be given more support and training to help them in their role. “More training for Heads and Governors would be useful.”
(Primary School)

Birmingham City Council:



I very much welcome the work carried out by the Review group looking at 'Education on Relationships and Sexual Health.' The mature approach taken by the young people on this important topic has been truly commendable.
Cllr Les Lawrence

In our final report we have asked the City Council to take forward a number of our ideas and suggestions. The Council has agreed to do the following things:

- To ask schools to consider renaming the subject 'Relationships and Sexual Health' (RSE)
- To look at having a minimum standard of high quality SRE that is provided to all pupils within our city
- To create a Multi Faith Forum to look at SRE issues
- To look for additional funding to support schools in improving SRE
- To develop a guide and new material for Parents and Governors to explain

what is being taught to pupils and how it is going to be delivered

- To encourage all Schools to have qualified staff to teach SRE
- To make teenage pregnancy figures and other statistics available to schools
- To continue to work with UKYP Birmingham and Birmingham Children and Young Peoples Parliament (BCYPP)
- To encourage Schools to have a SRE champion within each school cluster.

The Council has agreed to implement these recommendations by May 2010.

