

UK Announces Mandatory Sex Education for Kindergarteners

By Kathleen Gilbert

LONDON, UK, October 24, 2008 (LifeSiteNews.com) - UK government officials announced yesterday that by the year 2010, 5-year-old children will enter the first stages of a comprehensive, explicit sex education program, mandatory for schools nationwide, including faith schools.

The compulsory Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) program will begin in kindergarten where Schools Minister Jim Knight says children will learn about "their differences, their friendships, and how to manage their feelings." Knight insisted that the earliest curriculum will not be "sexually explicit," saying "we are not talking about five-year olds having sex."

The earliest stage of the program, for ages five through seven, will focus on relationships but also include lessons on body part names and animal reproduction. In the 8 to 11 age bracket, more biological aspects of sex are to be introduced, and after age 12, children will learn about contraception and sexually transmitted diseases.

The program was designed to combat the teen pregnancy rate in the UK, currently the highest in Europe. A 2005 survey estimated that one in five British girls have sex by the age of 14. Sex education lobbyists, like the Sex Education Forum, blamed the problem on inadequate sex education, and have called upon the government to institute mandatory "sex and relationships education" for years.

Knight assured that teachers would be properly trained and that schools would "ensure there is flexibility for schools to tailor lessons to reflect the values and beliefs of the parents and communities they serve," according to the AP report.

Only the British mainland is subject to the mandate, set to be implemented by 2010, as Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales all have separate education departments. Of these, Scotland is the only country that offers voluntary sex education.

Parents and education leaders had mixed reactions to the legislation. Supporters expressed relief that the government was stepping in to help parents unwilling to broach the topic of sex with their children, a hang up frequently portrayed as common among British parents in the nation's media.

"When parents fail to educate their kids properly, the government has every right to step in," said Gayla Coil, a Londoner and mother to two kids ages 13 and 10. "Me, I welcome the help."

But Norman Wells, director of Family and Youth Concern, insisted that undermining the authority and primary teaching role of parents can only exacerbate the problem.

"You're removing discretion from schools. You're undermining parents," he said, according to ABC Australia.

"And effectively what you're doing is taking parents out of the driving seat and putting the state in their place."

Proponents of the new program argue that teaching the biology of sex at a young age will prevent children from falling victim to the "playground rumor or the mixed messages from the media about sex," in the words of Jim Knight.

"Talking about body parts is often easier for children when they are younger as they are less self-conscious and less sensitive about their bodies," said Julie Bentley, chief executive of the FPA, formerly the Family Planning Association, in a BBC article.

Wells answers that such efforts to tear aside the veil are "all part of an exercise to break down children's inhibitions and natural sense of modesty."

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"Most parents would be very concerned if they knew that their children were being given literature at school produced by an organisation that doesn't put sexual intimacy in a clear moral context and that fails to respect the role of parents."