

# Teach menstrual well-being in schools

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 7 Ionawr 2020  
Petitions Committee | 7 January 2020

**Reference:** RS19/11116

**Petition Number:** P-05-925

**Petition title:** Don't leave Wales behind - teach menstrual wellbeing in schools

**Text of petition:** My name's Jade, and for 15 years I was told the severe pain I was experiencing as part of my menstrual cycle was completely normal. I suffered from excruciating pain, fatigue, and bowel and bladder related problems – all whilst trying to get through school, navigate puberty, and pass my exams.

I wish I had known that what I was experiencing wasn't normal – but symptoms of a common condition called endometriosis which affects 1 in 10 women from puberty to menopause. Endometriosis is just one of many menstrual conditions affecting young people – others include PCOS, PMDD, and adenomyosis. I don't want anyone suffering with a menstrual health condition to do so alone like I did.

By working with Endometriosis UK, I hope we can do exactly that by persuading the Welsh Assembly to teach menstrual wellbeing in schools. Not only would this help break down the taboos around menstrual health and encourage people to talk openly about their periods, but also by teaching what is and isn't normal to experience.

Had I been taught at school what is and isn't normal when it comes to menstrual related pain, I could have sought help and saved myself years of confusion and heartbreak.



For many, school is a happy time to look back on. And whilst I definitely had some good times, it's the falling asleep at the back of the class and having to quit school gymnastics that I remember most. Teachers would treat me like I did not want to be there and never even asked why. In reality I was just too tired and in too much pain to function.

From 2020, children in England will learn about menstrual wellbeing as part of the school curriculum. A subject I can only wish was on the curriculum when I was at school. As teachers may not have ignored me, but empowered me to get the help I needed. Whilst it's a huge step forward that those in England will now learn about menstrual wellbeing, let's not leave those in Wales behind.

The Welsh Government are now reviewing the curriculum and we have the opportunity to make sure children in Wales get the education they need.

## 1. Menstrual education in England

In England, the [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education \(England\) Regulations 2019](#), make Relationships Education compulsory for all pupils receiving primary education and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) compulsory for all pupils receiving secondary education. They also make Health Education compulsory in all schools except independent schools. The Department for Education in England published its statutory guidance, [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education](#) in June 2019. In England, a new curriculum will be mandatory from September 2020, but schools are encouraged to adopt the new curriculum early from September 2019. In relation to menstruation, the guidance states:

Puberty including menstruation should be covered in Health Education and should, as far as possible, be addressed before onset.

It also states:

The onset of menstruation can be confusing or even alarming for girls if they are not prepared. Pupils should be taught key facts about the menstrual cycle including what is an average period, range of menstrual products and the implications for emotional and physical health.

## 2. Welsh Government action

### 2.1. Health and Well-being in the curriculum

In her letter to the Committee, the Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams outlines how menstrual education will be included within the Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience, specifically within the Developing Physical Health and Well-being What Matters statement in the new Curriculum for Wales 2022. While the [draft statutory guidance](#) does not include menstrual education, the Minister states that following feedback, the relevant What Matters Statement is being amended to ensure that women's health conditions can be identified. However, the Minister also notes that schools will be able to develop their own school curriculum supported by statutory guidance.

### 2.2. Relationships and sexuality education

Currently, a parent of a pupil at a school has the right to withdraw their child from sex education (either wholly or partly), unless it forms part of the National Curriculum programme of study. Only a parent can request that a child be withdrawn. Therefore, a pupil of any age, including those in the sixth form, cannot withdraw themselves at any point and must rely on the parent to do that for them.

Between 18 February 2019 and 1 April 2019, the Welsh Government consulted on [Draft guidance on relationships and sexuality education](#). The draft guidance suggests that schools use the [UNESCO technical guidance for sexuality education](#) to support the planning of their Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) curriculum. The technical guidance maps out progression for 5-18 year olds across eight thematic areas including the human body and development; and sexual and reproductive health. The UNESCO guidance includes examples of age appropriate teaching about menstruation.

The Welsh Government's consultation, [Our National Mission: A Transformational Curriculum - Proposals for a new legislative framework](#) (28 January 2019) set out the Welsh Government's proposals for sex education in the new curriculum. This included that the teaching of RSE within the context of the new curriculum for Wales be mandatory in all maintained schools and funded nursery settings for pupils of compulsory school age but optional for those pupils in the sixth form.

In a [Written Statement on 3 October 2019](#), the Minister for Education said that she was:

mindful to ensure all children and young people are required to study RE [religious education] and RSE in the new curriculum, rather than continue the

anomaly that parents can take the decision to prevent children from attending these specific and core lessons.

Between 3 October 2019 and 28 November 2019, the Welsh Government consulted on the impact of the proposal to change parents' ability to withdraw their children from these subjects.

### 2.3. Period poverty

On 15 April 2019, the First Minister announced a Period Dignity Grant for Schools of £2.3 million. The purpose of the grant is to provide girls in Welsh primary and secondary schools with a range of sanitary products. This followed a Welsh Government announcement on 23 March 2018 that local authorities would receive £440,000 for two years (up to 2020) to tackle period poverty in their communities where levels of deprivation are highest. In addition there would be £700,000 of capital funding to improve facilities and equipment in schools.

## 3. National Assembly for Wales action

On 2 May 2019, a Member's Debate in Plenary on period poverty and stigma called for, amongst other things, the Welsh Government to consider calls to improve education on the subject. In responding to the debate, the Leader of the House and Chief Whip Julie James said:

Looking forward, these issues are going to be covered under the new curriculum, which will consider how the school environment supports the social, emotional, spiritual and physical health and well-being of pupils, and will be instrumental in supporting one of the main aims of the new curriculum and assisting our children to become healthy, confident individuals.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.