

Sex Education—the issues when working with boys

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ABSTRACT *Sex education is a contentious issue. Recently debates in the UK have tended to concentrate on the need to reduce teenage pregnancy rates and on the 'promotion of homosexuality'. This article examines the issues that need to be addressed if boys are to receive the sex education they require. These issues include the characteristics and gender of the teacher needed; methodologies to which boys will respond; the perception of boys as problems in school; the content of sex education programmes, the need for separate classes and the ongoing concern of boys' literacy standards. Added to these are issues such as homosexuality and pornography, areas which are avoided in many schools. The culture related to boys' attitudes to education in general and sex education in particular are examined. The author calls for a change in approach and attitude by government in order to achieve the desired lowering of teenage pregnancy rates and for the adoption of a more positive attitude to sex education by government, parents and teachers.*

Introduction

The issues surrounding the teaching of sex education in schools in England and Wales are varied and complex. There are debates over the aims of sex education and its place in the curriculum, and it is even argued by authors such as Whelan (1995) that schools have no place in working in such a sensitive area. Cultural and religious questions come into play, as displayed by the recent, highly charged debates in the year 2000 over Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act and the 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools in the UK. The existence of a moral framework for sex education is an issue for many, stressed in legislation such as the 1993 Education Act (Department for Education [DfE], 1994) and featured in the press, who believe that there is public backing for marriage being promoted in sex education classes (Travis, 2000). Questions arise over the 'correct' age to begin such education, methodologies to employ and the use of joint or single-sex approaches (Wood, 1998). Accompanying this debate is a further discussion over the needs of boys as opposed to girls and whether the two sexes need separate and distinct approaches in the curriculum area of sex education (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996).

This article examines the issues concerning sex education from the perspective of the

needs, in particular, of adolescent boys in the English and Welsh school system. That is not to say, however, that many issues are not of common importance to both sexes, though possibly in different magnitudes and proportions. The Social Exclusion Unit Teenage Pregnancy Report (1999, p. 93) advises that 'secondary schools should follow good practice in teaching about relationships and the responsibilities of sex, focusing on boys as much if not more than girls'. However, to do this it is essential that the issues which most affect boys' responses to sex education are discussed and that teachers know from what perspective they are working. Sex education has been defined by the Sex Education Forum (1997, p. 1) as 'a lifelong process of acquiring skills, beliefs, and values about sexual relationships, identity and intimacy'. This task for the teachers, many of whom are as yet untrained in this area of the curriculum, may appear insurmountable. This is acknowledged by the Social Exclusion Unit Report (1999) and the suggestion therein that the Teacher Training Agency is reviewing the training of teachers in this area, echoing the demands of the British Medical Association's Report (1997), *School Sex Education*, which called for sex education to become part of a total programme of personal and social education for which teachers were trained.

There appears to be growing pressure to consider the specific needs of boys in sex education, though in many cases it does not yet appear to have permeated down to schools. Previously, much of the content of sex education has been directed towards the interests of girls (Sex Education Forum, 1996; Forrest, 1998). The opinion of the Sex Education Forum (1996) appears to be that society is endangering the health of boys, both sexual and emotional, by failing to help them express their true feelings or aid them in asking for help and advice. The UK does indeed have a rising tide of suicide amongst young men and many boys' responses to education in general and to sex education especially are giving cause for concern to the Office for Standards in Education/Equal Opportunities Commission (OFSTED/EOC, 1996) and to the Chief Inspector of Schools (O'Leary & Charter, 1996). Indeed, the *Sex and Relationships Education Guidance* (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 2000, p. 11) points out that sex education in former years has been focused towards girls and that 'boys may have felt that sex education is not relevant to them'.

It would appear that boys' responses to sex education mirror their responses to education in general. *The Times Education Supplement* Editorial (*TES*, 16 October 1998) questioned the Secretary of State for Education's belief that the literacy and numeracy hours would solve the problems of underachievement in the UK, claiming that educational achievement is heavily influenced by cultural attitudes to education, which in many cases are negative. If this is true, it is attitudes that need changing, not the methodologies used in schools, and such cultural change would require a much longer timescale than that set by the Government for improvements in literacy and numeracy.

How do these concerns relate to the sex education classroom? For years, assumptions were made that the needs of males and females with regard to education were completely different (Carr & Hartnett, 1996). However, after the sex discrimination legislation of the 1970s, the concept of gender blindness became fashionable. This was the belief that no discrimination should occur with regard to the curriculum or its delivery and that teachers should not consider the sex of their pupils as important (Houston, 1996). Through the work of feminist teachers, however, the needs of girls in the classroom began to be highlighted. More recently, during the 1990s, the concern has changed to the 'problem' of boys. However, the concentration on girls' needs in relation to sex education has continued, the rising concern over the high rates of pregnancy amongst teenage girls in the UK (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999) producing a concentration on

reducing these figures and on convincing girls that unplanned pregnancies are unacceptable and that little help will be forthcoming to teenage mothers in the future. Boys, then, are to some extent being left out of the equation and their role in the 'pregnancy problem' not fully addressed.

Curriculum Content

Sex education in the curriculum in England and Wales is now divided between National Curriculum Science and Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE). The National Curriculum Science document gives details of the Programme of Study to be followed in this area, the main focus being on biological facts and procreation. The areas of sexual attitudes, feelings and behaviours and the important area of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) is left to the PSHE curriculum, which until September 2000 was not a designated National Curriculum subject. The 2000 PSHE curriculum is not statutory and the amount and content of sex education will be left to the discretion of the governing body and parents. However, the DfEE (2000, p. 3) describes the objective of the sex and relationships education programme as 'to help and support young people through their physical, emotional and moral development'. The *Guardian* (1999) criticised the government guidelines on sex education as 'being open to wide interpretation' and little appears to have changed in the 2000 curriculum. Many boys see contraception and pregnancy as having little to do with them and to be the responsibility of girls. Anderson (1997) points to the work of Davidson, who believes that the purpose of sex education has been to prevent girls becoming pregnant, which has resulted in boys' needs being marginalised. The consequences of early fatherhood are rarely mentioned and issues of men's health often ignored. Coward (2000) describes what she sees as 'the real issues of sex education' being left out. These include areas such as emotional literacy and self-awareness. There is a strong emphasis behind the new guidelines on the lowering of teenage pregnancy figures and teachers are guided towards the Social Exclusion Unit's report on teenage pregnancy and its suggestions for combating this problem. The curriculum for sex education is therefore to be left to the vagaries of each individual school governing body's interpretation of the 2000 guidelines and OFSTED inspections.

Haywood & Mac an Ghaill (1996) suggest that the curriculum in general provides males with an opportunity to assert their masculinity through their response to its content. This is particularly true with the sex education curriculum, where boys are reported as using aggressive 'masculine' responses to sexual material and using language designed to intimidate girls and women teachers. This enables them to assert their stereotypical masculinity and therefore their power and supposed superiority. Many boys do not in fact feel powerful, but this is the required image in school and Connell (1989) believes that low achieving boys use this alternative source of power, having been denied power through their lack of academic achievement. Sex education provides a setting where boys can assert themselves by shouting down girls and attempting to embarrass women teachers and those whose sexual orientation is different from their own. Discussing feelings and displaying caring attitudes can be perceived as feminine and not what Haywood & Mac an Ghaill (1996, p. 52) call 'normal masculinity', that is, masculinity that is produced in a particular context, in this case the sex education classroom within a sexist and heterosexist society.

There are specific instructions in the DfEE (2000) guidelines regarding the use of 'correct terms' for body parts—though the use of more 'streetwise' terminology has

proved very useful in breaking the barriers with boys—and pupils are to be taught the importance of marriage and stable relationships, which may prove very difficult in certain areas of the country, where these relationships are not the norm. Furthermore, schools with a particular ethos, religious or cultural, can still use this as a reason for slanting the material delivered in a manner to suit specific beliefs. One boy's response to this was: 'we want to hear all sides of the question, not just what God thinks' (author's own research, 1999). The lack of specific instruction on what exactly should be taught, and when, will not help boys in schools where the majority of the delivery has been in science classes and where, in the opinions of pupils, much of that delivery is too late for their needs (Ingham, 1997).

Socialisation

The socialisation of boys is of great importance to the sex education teacher, in that it is essential to work within the context of their lives and experiences. Much of society still expects and lauds the macho image, though, as Salisbury & Jackson (1996) point out, many boys do not fit this stereotype. However, the culture of many schools in the UK is one where boys, in particular working-class boys and those from some ethnic minority groups, are not expected to respond to education in a positive manner and are expected to have different educational aspirations from those held by girls (OFSTED/EOC, 1996). Research has shown that this phenomenon begins at an early age, with many parents colluding, in that they expect boys to settle down to schoolwork later and to be 'naturally' more boisterous and less interested in academic pursuits. Indeed, there have been calls to allow boys to start school a year later than girls (Webb, 1998). Kessler *et al.* (in Millard, 1997) point to the importance of peer culture in supporting these practices and establishing regimes of behaviour, whilst Giddens (1991) believes that if actions are repeated often enough they build up into unconscious patterns reinforcing gendered behaviour. This then produces unconscious patterns of behaviour that endure, despite efforts to change practice. Perceptions of male and female sexual roles fall into this category and little of this appears to be addressed in current sex education syllabi.

Much sex education received by boys emanates from areas other than school, such as the media, magazines, the Internet and videos. This material often portrays women as victims and men in a position of power. Schools are a reflection of society and thereby create and sustain concepts of masculinity (Connell, 1989). Haywood & Mac an Ghaill (1996) discuss the concept of multiple masculinities, which are set within relationships governed by 'class, sex and ethnic locations' (Thorne, 1993 in Mac an Ghaill, 1996, p. 51). This leads to a great variation in power relations amongst various males in a school setting. Not all boys who receive sex education or men who teach it have the same beliefs or outlooks. Many authors (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Forrest, 1998) point to the danger of treating all adolescent boys as a single group, noting the differences in maturity (physical, mental and emotional), sexual orientation and the social power bases which divide boys. Teachers of sex education must be aware of these differences and not assume that all boys have power over girls, lack emotional maturity or are not concerned about their bodies.

Mac an Ghaill & Haywood (1998, p. 218) raise the issue of schools pressurising the two genders to conform to 'particular sexual practices', which they believe, in some cases, encourages certain adolescents to adopt 'sophisticated and active heterosexuality'. This aspect appears to affect boys, causing them, the authors believe, to react with hostility to any reference to homosexuality. This area of the sex education curriculum

has long been avoided by schools in the UK because of worries about the controversy over Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988, preventing local authorities from 'promoting homosexuality'. This section of the 1988 Act has inhibited teachers from even discussing homosexuality as the culture of fear surrounding it, though possibly totally misguided, acted as a muzzle (Hattenstone, 2000). While there are questions over whether the 1988 Act actually relates to school, the reality is that it has had the effect of inhibiting teachers from addressing alternative sexualities and discussing openly the bullying of and misery caused to young gay men (and lesbian women) in schools. Peer pressure to conform to the macho image is intense, coupled with the fear about, and ridicule of, homosexuality. The issues surrounding alternative sexualities need to be urgently discussed in an open and non-judgemental manner. Douglas *et al.* (1999) point to the findings from their research, which highlight the fact that a large proportion of secondary teachers are well aware that homophobic bullying, both verbal and physical, takes place in schools. Teachers were also conscious of what they perceived as the barriers to prevention in that school policies ignored alternative sexualities and the specific nature of homophobic bullying. The authors point to the effects of this form of isolation on the health of those suffering from these attacks and make clear links to underachievement of both bullies and bullied in schools, where little is done to prevent it. They call, as does Chaudhary (1998), for clear guidelines and the need for, as suggested by Lord Tope (Ghouri, 1998), homosexuality to be discussed openly in the classroom.

Many researchers (Biddulph, 1997; Terry & Terry, 1998; Bleach, 1998) have pointed to the need to raise boys' self-esteem in all areas in order to improve their attitudes towards education and have argued that low self-esteem is one of the causes of disaffection with school and the retreat into macho attitudes towards girls and towards sexual relationships. Terms such as 'identity crisis' and 'purposelessness' abound and it is believed that these have a profound effect on the way certain boys react to sex education lessons. If the only pride they possess is in the laddish culture with which they identify, then mixed sex lessons, where girls perceive their behaviour as childish and stupid, will do little to help boys venture outside the stereotype. Indeed, Salisbury & Jackson (1996) believe that boys need 'time out' to allow a chance for teachers to work with them to examine this behaviour.

Breakwell & Millward (1997) argue that the structure of the self-concept in adolescents is significantly influenced by gender differences and relationships. Their research points to the different perceptions of sexuality between males and females, males having little belief that they have a responsibility for contraception whereas females do. This is coupled with the findings that males, whose self-concept includes the placing of importance on relationships, are less likely to see sex and sexual relationships as being very important to that self-concept. If this is true, and these findings on the lowering of risk-taking behaviour in these males are confirmed, then the importance of encouraging teaching on self-awareness, self-concept formation and self-esteem will be essential for many boys in sex education.

Boys; the problem

According to Forrest (1998) and Davidson (1996), boys often appear to be uninterested in sex education and many educators see them as hopeless cases and leave them out of the general picture. Teachers report that boys mess about and 'act up, do not ask questions and refuse to take it [sex education] seriously' (Forrest, 1998, p. 2). Coupled

with this, as pointed out by Hirst (1994), there appears to be a reluctance amongst parents, particularly fathers, to talk to their sons about sexual matters. Males therefore have to withstand, according to Davidson (1996) and Pyke (1996), the image of being a 'problem'. Forrest (1998) points to the perpetual concern of educators with the need for girls to protect themselves from the aggressive advances of men. Women are often, in the media and in sex education lessons, presented as victims and men as those whose feelings are out of control. The stereotypes of feminine responsibility and male irresponsibility are to be seen in much sex education material. It is girls and women who carry the burden of preventing pregnancy, whilst boys often use offensive language to girls who carry condoms, calling them 'easy' and 'slag'. Double standards appear to abound and boys are still expected to have different attitudes to sex from those held by girls. Popular girls' magazines refute this image, in that they are particularly sexually explicit and give advice on sexual positions and how to capture your man. The media in the main, however, continues to portray girls as vulnerable, liable to fall in love and be the cause of male aggression. Weale (1998) points to the double standards which blamed a girl's rejection of a boy for a high school shooting in the USA, although their relationship, it is purported, had lasted for only 4 days. The inference here is that had the girl behaved differently, the boy would not have killed his classmates.

Forrest (1998) further believes that boys are neglected in sex education because of their behaviour and the myths that surround this. Salisbury & Jackson (1996) to some extent support this idea and acknowledge that many of the stereotypes of boys' bad behaviour are apparently true and that teachers must be willing to delve behind the presented attitudes. This echoes the work of feminist writers in the 1970s, who pointed to the demands that boys make on teacher time and their expectations of attention, their main focus being on proving their masculinity. Authors (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996; Head, 1999) attempt to explain this phenomenon by pointing to the collapsed morale of boys and young men who are unclear about their roles and see little joy in the future. Pyke (1996) suggests that, to these young men, sex education is seen as establishment- and authority-led and that the only way to become a true man is to be anti-authority, an attitude often displayed in sex education classrooms.

Separate Lessons

The question therefore arises as to whether it is necessary to address the issue of separating girls and boys for sex education lessons. Separating sexes, whether for the whole of schooling or for specific subjects, has long been of interest to educationalists. According to Lepkowska (1998), league table results appear to show that girls in single-sex schools do better than those in co-education. However, care has to be taken to compare like situations, as many of the so-called 'successful' girls' schools are selective. Researchers such as Blumner (1998) believe that separation of the sexes is not the way forward for the twenty-first century and that it is boys who need support. Boys have always, it appears, responded to the socialising factor provided by girls in the classroom, but whether girls should be used as a classroom police force needs to be questioned. However, with much recent research pointing to the differing learning styles of girls and boys, possible separation for some of the time should be considered. Hanna (1996) suggests that girls are raised as 'talkers' and make the more natural students. Added to this is the desire of boys to show off to girls and the culture of maleness prevalent in schools where working hard is seen as 'sad' and something only done by girls. Many boys in a mixed classroom do not want to be perceived by their peers as

'boffins' or 'girlish'. Marshall (1996) highlights a present-day dilemma: schools generally reward conformity, whereas the high flyers in society use argument and problem-solving to reach their goals, something schools mostly fail to encourage. It could therefore be perceived that schools, not boys, are the problem here. Certainly, it appears that boys need specific support to discuss personal and difficult topics, and Wood (1998) believes that it may be necessary to work through the bad behaviour which boys use along with humour to hide their vulnerability. Above all, it appears that boys need time to break through this barrier, which may be easier initially without the presence of girls.

Methods and Material Used to Deliver the Sex Education Curriculum

Learning styles of boys and girls are often different and teachers in a wide variety of subjects have attempted to respond to boys' needs. The question in co-education is: can the needs of boys be met without damaging the education on offer to girls? Salisbury & Jackson (1996, p. 27) believe that boys see schoolwork as having a concrete end product as opposed to consisting of 'interactive collaborative activities'. This may be a problem, as much relationships education uses collaborative group work and discussion. Teachers must consider if this is the wrong approach for boys or if they, the teachers, need to work with boys to aid them in coping with this type of delivery. Most authors, including Wood (1998), reject didactic delivery of sex education material for boys, whilst suggesting that a more flamboyant and dynamic approach is required. This approach may be easy for some teachers to achieve but for others, who do not see themselves as actors or entertainers, more difficult.

It is therefore important to consider if the use of an outside expert from health or related backgrounds, as recommended by the British Medical Association (Barnard, 1997), is preferable to using the class teacher. The use of such professionals is fairly common but, as all teachers know, bringing in the 'expert' is not always the answer. Experts have particular knowledge but may not have the ability to control a class or to enthuse students. With such sensitive material, some students may feel intimidated with the non-teacher working in this area, though some may conversely feel more relaxed and at ease talking with an outsider. Measor *et al.* (1996), recounting observations of single gender sex lessons, describe the inability of a health worker to control boys who appeared to object to the subject matter being delivered and attempted to embarrass the female health worker taking the lesson, leading to what the authors describe as a 'virtual riot'. This is not behaviour specific to sex education lessons but common when outside agencies, perceived by pupils as 'fair game', are used. This could be linked to the sex of the deliverer rather than her being an outsider or not a teacher. Measor *et al.* (1996) raise the further question as to why it is so often women that deliver this material rather than men and note that there are serious implications for training teachers, in what is arguably becoming a feminised profession.

Sex education material needs, therefore, to be approached from the viewpoint of boys in order to capture their interests. A focus on pregnancy and the birth of a baby may be difficult subjects for boys to relate to and a more boy-oriented approach covering areas such as penis size, how to approach prospective partners and male health matters may have a more positive response. An insistence on a non-personal approach in the classroom is also advisable, as both Davidson (1996) and Baker (1998) agree that personal exposure approaches to sex education do not work with boys, though they are successful with girls. Baker also suggests that the use of video or theatre is more likely

to be successful with boys' groups. The content needs to be firmly located within a masculine sphere, such as how to prevent fatherhood and how to protect oneself against disease, and Blake (1997) advocates the use of demonstrations and practical exercises to keep boys interested.

Much support is available to teachers of sex education in secondary schools if they know where and how to obtain it and if schools have the requisite financial resources. The author's present research into this subject has shown that this area of the curriculum has low priority in terms of school budgets, so advice from local education authority advisers, where they still exist, is not used because of costs to opted-out schools while theatre groups and outside speakers are not accessed unless they offer their services free. Coupled as this is with a lack of teachers' professional development in the area, sex education is often fragmented and given minimum time in the overcrowded curriculum; two to three lessons a year is common (author's present research) and is delivered in large class groups.

A further problem with choosing sex education material is the differing literacy levels of girls and boys. Millard (1997), Moir & Moir (1998) and OFSTED/EOC (1996) all point to the problems boys can have with paper-based material, particularly if the subject is fictitious. Many sex education lessons have been designated as 'death by worksheet', a method used as a way of helping reluctant teachers to deal with sensitive material. Often stories or scenarios are used to stimulate discussion. However, all the research cited here points out that boys often find this approach boring and irrelevant because their generally lower concern with literacy and dislike of 'stories' encourages them to see reading as utilitarian, not something done for pleasure. Authors such as Hanna (1996), Judd (1998), Forrest (1997) and Moir & Moir (1998) advocate the use of a wide variety of teaching methods to keep boys interested, in particular factual approaches requiring short, quick answers and lessons which have short-term goals. Boys, Hanna (1996) believes, use trial and error styles of learning, enjoy competitions and tend to respond without reflection or careful thought. It is therefore the responsibility of teachers to aid boys in developing organisational and planning skills, which he believes they lack, and encouraging them to reflect on their responses and feelings.

A further issue of great importance to adolescent boys (author's current research) is that of pornography. The thought of discussing pornography in school classrooms would possibly produce adverse reactions from teachers but it is from this area, particularly now from sources on the Internet, that boys obtain much of their sexual education. By ignoring this fact, we are condoning the sexist stereotypes portrayed in this material. According to the Sex Education Forum (1996), boys receive little sex education at home, far less than do girls. Parents appear to have more concern for protecting their daughters and concentrate far less on boys' needs, and the rite of passage to maleness for many boys is the act of sexual intercourse. One 16 year-old, in the author's current research, expressed the belief that boys were expected to know about 'sex and stuff—like driving'. Myths abound and are fuelled by the lack of truthfulness about participation in sexual activity, a common phenomenon, caused by boys' desire to be seen as one of the group and a 'real' man. If these issues are not addressed, then educators are neglecting boys' real concerns and boys cannot be expected to take sex education seriously.

The Teacher

A further consideration in delivering sex education is the teacher. Should boys be taught by a man or is it empathy and understanding that are the important factors? This seems

to be a highly charged point for discussion. Much concern has been expressed over the dearth of male role models in UK schools, which it is believed may affect boys' responses to the educative process (OFSTED/EOC, 1996), many even going so far as to suggest that schools audit the numbers of male and female role models provided. Others dispute the need for separate sex approaches. Blake (1997) questions the policy of separating boys' and girls' groups when discussing sexual matters, whereas Wood (1998) describes the successful practice of separating girls and boys for lessons on contraception and sexually transmitted diseases, using teachers of the same sex as the group, followed by a bringing together of both sexes. In most classrooms, however, the idea of choosing the teacher according to the sex of the group is totally unrealistic. Perhaps more important is the time element for boys and the need for teachers to have the requisite knowledge and the ability to deliver it without embarrassment. It is essential that this subject is dealt with sensitively and that teachers not only have a secure knowledge base but also possess an understanding of pedagogy appropriate to that knowledge base. This is what Shulman (1987, in Bennet & Carré, 1993) describes as knowledge of content that is 'most germane to its teachability'; the way ideas in a subject may be made comprehensible to others. Grossman *et al.* (1989) insist that a teacher's beliefs about subject knowledge are equal in importance to their ideas about learning and teaching and that this influences choices of activities and lesson objectives. Teachers, they believe, need to be given the opportunity to examine their beliefs, as without this any training given will do little to change these ideas. Moreover, teachers who possess a good depth of subject knowledge and have been given the opportunity to examine their own beliefs will be more capable of developing flexible attitudes in their students. By these means, boys will be helped to challenge their often rigid and frequently homophobic attitudes. For practising teachers, however, there is also the practicality of considering all these concerns when planning sex education delivery for boys. Many teachers feel that sex education is a small and relatively unimportant area of the curriculum, their main concerns being the teaching of 'their subject', examination results and league table positions. This is not a criticism of teachers; this is the message being put forward by those in control of education.

The Way Ahead

To change what is happening to boys in UK schools, and possibly therefore to go some way towards achieving the Social Exclusion Unit's ambitions for the reduction in teenage pregnancy, it is possible that the whole emphasis of the curriculum needs to be examined and the needs of boys debated by agencies such as the DfEE and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. At present, we appear as sex educators to be 'speaking to the converted' but not to general or powerful opinion. The present emphasis on whole-class didactic teaching styles is of no particular help to the sex educator, when all research on the subject rejects this as a suitable approach (Davidson, 1996; Forrest, 1998). A culture change in sex education needs to become a high priority for the Government, parents, teacher educators, and more importantly, for boys themselves, who need to be helped to see that relationships education is an essential part of becoming a 'real' man. The culture of suspicion of teachers' actions and ambiguous legislation needs to be dealt with, as does the controversial 'right of withdrawal' from the parts of sex education not in National Curriculum Science. To most sex educators these are the important sections relating to attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. The sex educators are ready but need guidance from the top, a commitment to raising the status of sex

education for all, and for boys in particular, and a government education leadership that is not afraid of controversy.

However, this would mean a commitment to the reform of an already controversial area of education and possible confrontation with some parents, who do not see the need for government interference in what they perceive as a family, moral or religious matter. Some movement appears to have occurred with the publication of the new guidelines for schools (DfEE, 2000), but the Section 28 problem remains and the guidelines do not appear to address in detail the issues raised here. Schools, and boys in particular, remain, in many cases, unsure and unsupported. The future without radical change appears bleak both for the boys and those who try to work with them in the area of sex education.

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