

Teachers censor sex education

Christine Kellett | September 12, 2008

Teachers are censoring sex education in Queensland schools amid fears of a parental backlash, experts say.

Worried educators are so concerned about causing controversy, topics such as homosexuality and even condoms are off limits in some classrooms.

The news comes despite the results of a new [survey](#) which shows more than 70 per cent of mums and dads in the Sunshine State want their children to be told about the birds and the bees before they start secondary school.

One-third believe it is important to start before kindergarten to prevent their offspring falling prey to pedophiles.

Family Planning Queensland (FPQ), which visits 300 schools a year to provide sexual health advice to young people, said sex education was an important part of the Queensland school curriculum, but evidence showed teachers in the public and private sector were minimising, sanitising and in some cases simply skipping the subject altogether.

"There's a fear that parents just won't like it," FPQ's director of education services, Cecelia Gore, told [brisbanetimes.com.au](#).

"Yes it's in the curriculum, but teachers aren't doing it because they just don't feel supported.

"There is lots of evidence that some schools are doing nothing at all when it comes to teaching children about sex and relationships."

The FPQ estimates less than 5 per cent of Queensland children are receiving adequate sex education, despite proven links between sexuality awareness and child sexual abuse.

Queensland is currently second only to the Northern Territory for sex abuse and teen pregnancy rates.

Ms Gore said the impact of poor sex education was felt across the organisation's network of family planning clinics, where sexually transmitted infections such as chlamydia were becoming increasingly common among teens aged 15-19.

She said it was not unheard of for pregnant girls to show up with "no idea where babies come from".

"The school health nurse might do a half-hour talk before Schoolies Week and say, 'That's it, we've done it'," Ms Gore said.

"We hear many people say to us the sex education is too late, too biological and there's just not enough of it."

A focus on relationships, feelings and how to say no were critical - but often overlooked - aspects of proper sex education, she said.

"The actual mechanics of sex and reproduction is probably enough to fill a pamphlet; it is the relationships and the complicated stuff that is much more important to healthy sexual development."

Queensland Teacher's Union president Steve Ryan admitted sex education was "probably neglected" in an already crowded school curriculum.

However, he said the education department needed to shield teachers from increasing parental interference which was affecting the way they did their jobs.

"Lots of schools, because of the threat of litigation, have had to put a stop to things that in my day were considered perfectly normal," Mr Ryan said, citing the recent case of a Townville school which banned cartwheels for fear students would get hurt.

"Schools treat sex education very seriously, no doubt about it, but teachers need to feel supported and confident about delivering these programs.

"The increasing presence of parental pressure is causing them to be reluctant to do anything that might be seen as problematic."

Education Minister Rod Welford would not be drawn on whether he was concerned by the self-censorship of sex education by teachers and said parents would continue to have a say in what happened in the classroom.

"Sexual and reproductive health education is important for all students," Mr Welford said in a brief statement.

"Parents/guardians and other individuals and groups in the community are consulted on the development of these programs."

The FPQ has called for sex education outcomes to be measured by the department, similar to literacy and numeracy