



Sex education in schools

On balance, I was pleased that education about sex and relationships (SRE, for those who like a good acronym) has been made compulsory in schools, as ministers announced last week.

No one wants their child to grow up too soon, but equally in a world where access to the internet, with potential misuse of Snapchat, being exposed to porn etc. is so much more likely, then it's more and more needed. When I was a child, the raunchiest thing on a screen that I ever saw was Barbara Windsor's bikini top flying off in Carry On Camping; things have changed.

My hesitation really lies in the fact that this is another expectation which is loaded on to schools and on to teachers who are already overloaded with initiatives. When I was a secondary school chaplain, sex education was something that, to my surprise, many of the staff dreaded.

But if you think about it, you can understand why. How exactly would *you* go about teaching children about sex? What would you say? What would you share from your own life?

One teacher angrily responded to the reminder that this had to happen:

"What am I supposed to do, give them tips?"

That said, of course there are ways into the subject in an age appropriate way, that should be reasonably achievable for staff. But crucially, just because

schools are doing it, that shouldn't take the responsibility away from the rest of us, parents especially. There's a tendency to spot a problem and then decide that the best way to fix it is through schools. In one way, it makes sense: every child goes to school; it's one of the only ways of impacting the entire country.

But that just means that everyone's hobby horse ends up with the final mantra: "it should be made compulsory in schools". Take the following:

- Learning to swim; learning to write a grammatically correct sentence; learning to be kind; learning to type; learning to cook a healthy lunch; learning to play a musical instrument; learning to spot a terrorist; learning about how to manage your money.

Which of these should fall under the remit of schools? They are all important; they all have their advocates; they are all one more thing alongside reading, writing and counting that schools are supposed to deliver. And schools can't do everything.

The danger is that in delegating to schools, the rest of us abrogate our duty to contribute to the development of our children. Pushing things on to the school curriculum is a subtle temptation towards feeling that we don't have to do it ourselves.

Yes, let's have SRE in schools, but let's make sure as parents and adults, we're doing our bit too.

March 2017 Thought for the Train is a short column written by the Reverend Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train, or elsewhere. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at www.surbitonchurch.org.uk.