

## **TRANSCRIPT: Coping with puberty**

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We have key stage 3 and key stage 4 in our secondary department. And coming up into key stage 3, at age eleven, they're either going through puberty, already gone through it or approaching it. So puberty looms very large in our secondary department. And it's something that with mainstream young people they often manage it reasonably well, but our youngsters really need a lot more help.

They, perhaps, do not know what's happening to their own bodies. Obviously, their bodies and their emotions move at the same rate as a mainstream person but their intellectual development is behind. So they might be functioning intellectually, say, at the age of, maybe, a seven year old but have a perfectly normal fourteen, sixteen year old body and they need guidance.

Particularly, girls need guidance with menstruation. And we have a nurse in our school who takes two or three girls at a time and works with them, teaching them how to physically manage menstruation, going to the toilet. She takes them to supermarket, shows them where you can buy sanitary pads and works through with them. And I'm really very proud that all our girls do manage their menstruation.

For those who have profound and multiple learning difficulties, they're not able to manage that on their own. They need care from the adults who work with them. It's mainly the teaching assistants who do the personal care with our young people, and what is really important is maintaining the dignity of those young people. Because if they're not able to care for themselves in terms of personal hygiene, going to the toilet, managing menstruation etc., they need this to be done with care. And also, they need putting at their ease and they need teaching assistants who are familiar with them, who they know, who they can trust and who they feel safe with, because you're very vulnerable if you're there, stripped half naked and you're having your pad changed, or whatever it is.

The issues with the boys tends to be problems of managing masturbation. And our boys haven't necessarily got a natural awareness that this isn't something that you do anywhere, when the feeling takes you. Mainstream boys know that it's inappropriate to do it in the middle of their art lesson or sitting at lunch with their friends whereas with our pupils, this really needs teaching. We have a magazine in school which helps us when we're teaching about how to manage this. It's done with symbols and it's got graphics in it. And the message we give to boys is, 'This is a perfectly OK thing to do but you need to do this in private'. We tend to discourage it from during the school day when they're meant to be in lessons but what they do in their own time, that's up to them.

This tends to be more with our slightly more able young men. However, that isn't to say those who have profound and multiple learning difficulties don't have the same need, they do, but often I think they find it really difficult to manage this themselves

because they might have something like cerebral palsy. So that's, again, a problem we haven't properly solved yet and it's a fair need because for some of our young people, it may be the only sex that they will have in their lives is using masturbation. They may not end up in a sexual relationship with somebody else.

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