



# Sex education is crucial

**T**HE RECENT news that sex education is to be made compulsory in Manchester's schools has prompted a mixed reaction amongst parents.

But for those responsible for the sexual health of the city's schoolchildren, the news has not come soon enough.

Maria Oakley, a Senior Public Health Development Adviser with Manchester Primary Care Trust (PCT), says for too long sex education hasn't been a priority.

"There is not enough spent on it and it is pushed down the agenda," she says. "Most parents think that their children get too much sexual health education - but the reality is that it is not getting better, and it is probably getting worse."

Maria helps train teachers in 23 high schools and 150 primaries across inner Manchester on how to provide good sex education.

She explains that primary school sex education for five to 11-year-olds focuses on good health, relationships, friendships, and hygiene.

She adds: "It all contributes towards the bigger picture. Then from about the age of eight through to their teens, they are taught about what happens to their bodies and what changes take place."

"We talk to them about any worries they may have about growing up and changing. It is about normalising these changes and giving the children

confidence, so that they aren't embarrassed, and so that they feel it isn't a taboo.

"The image that a lot of children get is that it is wrong and it is dirty. But it is very important to talk about our body and how it changes."

"Children pick up lot of misinformation, and it is a problem. They may have issues around their body changing. But it is perfectly normal to have that anxiety."

From senior school level, children are then taught about the biology of these changes, alongside an exploration of the emotional issues around sexual health.

"The opportunity for young people to explore the attitudes that go alongside the biological changes and the emotional consequences of your body changing is obviously a good thing," Maria says. "It is a strength."

She adds that there is a particularly strong need for good sexual health education in Manchester. While the national teenage preg-

nancy rate fell by

13.3 per cent between 1998 and 2006, in Manchester the numbers increased by 9.3 per cent.

An estimated one in ten of the city's under-25s has chlamydia, a difficult to detect infection that, if left untreated, can cause infertility in women and even difficulties in pregnancy.

"STI rates are so high, and teenage pregnancy rates are some of the highest in the country," she says. "Sex education is normally lumped in with alcohol

and drugs education. Alcohol does have a huge impact on decision-making. But they need to be taught more closely."

"Manchester is one of the most deprived regions in the country, and issues like teenage pregnancy and poverty are all inter-related. You can't just pick out one issue and solve it on its own."

"I would like to see young people abstaining until they are able to make clearer decisions - compared to the reality, which is often drink-associated."

"And obviously, we need more emphasis on safer sex."

■ To contact the North Manchester Contraception & Sexual Health Service, please phone 0161 740 7786.

The Manchester Contraception and Sexual Health Service is based at the Hathersage Centre, Upper Brook Street. For general enquiries about clinics and opening times, please call 0161 901 1555.

For more information about sexual health infections, call 0161 276 5211 between 9am and 4pm Monday to Friday. For information about contraception, call 0161 901 1555 between 2.30 to 3.30pm, Monday to Friday.

For more information about sexual health services in North and East Manchester, go to [www.manchester.nhs.uk](http://www.manchester.nhs.uk)



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# Blind veteran fights off armed teen burglar

A 92-year-old partially blind war veteran bravely fought with a schoolboy who broke into his home in Gorton with a hammer and threatened to kill him.

Widower Joseph Packett, who is also disabled and partly deaf, tussled with the 15-year-old thug when he tried to grab his walking stick and told him to 'bugger off' when he demanded money.

"I put my hand on top of his because I wasn't going to let him take my stick," Mr Packett later told police.

The teenager eventually fled, taking with him Mr Packett's braille watch from the side of his bed.

Just two hours later the schoolboy smashed his way into another house while the owners were away on holiday and stole goods including a laptop computer and an engraved silver

hip flask.

Police quickly identified the youngster who lived in the area because he was known to have a string of burglary convictions on his record.

He was arrested and Mr Packett's watch was recovered said Martin Walsh, prosecuting at Manchester Crown Court.

Now the teenager, who is now 16, is starting a two year Detention and Training order after he admitted to the two burglaries.

Judge David Hernandez said he accepted there was no evidence the boy had targeted Mr Packett's home but he must have realised the victim was disabled because there was a stair lift in the house.

"This man was in bed when you threatened him. Burglaries cause considerable distress to the householders because the privacy

of their home has been violated," said the Judge.

Mr Walsh said the teenager used a hammer to smash his way into Mr Packett's home as he slept.

"He was visually impaired, he was partially deaf and suffers from mobility problems as a result of injuries suffered fighting for his country in the Second World War," he said.

He was in bed when the teenager broke through a back window, walked upstairs and said: "Right, tell me where your money is or I'll kill you."

But Mr Packett replied: "Well you had better get on with the killing, I have no money" before telling the burglar to 'bugger off'.

They then fought over the victim's walking stick before he ran off with his braille watch and shortly afterwards broke into the second house nearby.