

Period products in schools may be restricted on religious grounds

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The National Secular Society has warned that religious objections could be restricting the use of period products in schools.

New Department for Education (DfE) [guidance](#) for the period product scheme for schools urges schools to consider the "religious and cultural beliefs" concerning periods that "can restrict access to certain types of period products."

The guidance says schools should "be aware of religious and cultural beliefs around tampons when considering which products to buy" and "consider the views of parents and carers before distributing tampons to learners."

The NSS wrote to the DfE previously to raise concerns that earlier guidance suggested parental religious objections may take precedence over learners' own preferences and needs in influencing the provision of particular period products.

The DfE said it would "look for ways" suggested amendments from the NSS could feed into updated guidance. However, the minor changes within the new guidelines do nothing to address the concerns raised.

The DfE's equality impact assessment notes that "conservative attitudes among some groups that practice a variety of religions (e.g. Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism) can make it difficult for these learners to access period products, wider information on their use and menstruation", though this was not addressed in the guideline on reducing stigma.

In 2018 the NSS [Unsafe Sex Education report](#) revealed that some faith schools are promoting shame and stigmatism around menstruation and some period products. The report found that Islamic faith school Al-Hijrah (since closed) stated in the 'Personal hygiene' section of its policy, "...among the various types of pads, tampons may not be appropriate due to insertion."

Jewish faith schools Hasmonean High School and The King David High School refer to Leviticus in their teachings about relationships, which refers to a woman as "impure" during menstruation.

Comments

An NSS spokesperson said: "We welcome the Department's efforts to tackle stigma around menstruation through RSE and provision of period products in schools. But for the programme to fulfil its full potential, it should be pupil centred, and not hindered by religious beliefs."

"Pupils from conservative religious backgrounds are more likely to experience barriers to access period products and information. Such stigma shouldn't be reinforced, however unintentionally, by government guidance."

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