

[« Return to article](#)[Print this](#)**The Straits Times**

www.straitstimes.com

Published on Jan 26, 2011

## Call to tweak sexuality education

Some Catholic schools seek modifications so that MOE programme better fits Church beliefs

By Leow Si Wan

SOME Catholic school principals have met Ministry of Education (MOE) officials to discuss how the ministry's sexuality education programme can be tweaked.

Among other things, they had asked for a segment on the use of condoms to be modified so that it better matches Catholic beliefs. The segment includes a video on the use of condoms.

Asked about this, the ministry said yesterday that it has received feedback on the Breaking Down Barriers programme, which features the condom segment.

A spokesman said the ministry conducts periodic reviews of its sexuality education programme, and consults parties such as parents, teachers, students, health professionals and religious leaders.

As part of this review process, it will work with the Health Promotion Board (HPB) to 'refresh' the Breaking Down Barriers programme.

'While the presentation of information could be refined, the core messages of the HPB remain relevant and will be retained,' the spokesman said.

She added: 'MOE recognises that issues of sexuality involve value judgments and that parents are ultimately responsible for the health and moral values of their children.' Thus, parents have the prerogative to opt their children out of the whole programme if they are uncomfortable with what is being taught.

Sexuality education programmes have made the news on and off over the years.

In 2009, MOE said the programme in some schools run by the Association of Women for Action and Research was inappropriate as it conveyed messages which could promote homosexuality or suggest approval of premarital sex.

Sexuality education is taught in both the formal curriculum and co-curricular programmes. In the former, values which mainstream society adheres to, such as encouraging heterosexual married couples to have healthy relationships, feature strongly in lessons.

The main co-curricular programme, Growing Years, is taught in upper primary to post-secondary levels. It promotes abstinence as the best option for teens and teaches teenagers how to say no to sexual advances.

Another programme, Breaking Down Barriers, is taught to Secondary 3 and first-year junior college and centralised institute students. Among other things, it gives students accurate information on the risks of contracting sexually transmitted infections and how to protect themselves from them.

Parents can opt their children out of both these programmes.

The issue of how sexuality should be taught in Catholic schools was also the subject of a letter which Archbishop Nicholas Chia wrote to Catholic school leaders on Jan 10. There are more than 30 Catholic schools here. He acknowledged that Singapore was 'a secular society where no specific religious group has the right to impose its beliefs on others'.

He went on to say that 'within the context of our Catholic schools, however, I would find it unacceptable if students were given a compromised message on premarital sex. This applies to all students in the school'.

He also said that the Church was very concerned with the increasing incidence of sexually transmitted infections among students caused by young people indulging in sexual activity with multiple partners, and would like to collaborate with the HPB to tackle this.

On the use of condoms, he cited Church literature and teachings.

He said that the Church's teaching 'concerns marital acts, since marital acts are the only ethical sexual acts in the eyes of the Church'.

He added: 'If we present to our young people how to use the condom outside marriage, just in case you need it, it would be as though the Church is teaching us how to sin less grievously which makes no sense.'

Elaborating on his note, Ms Wendy Louis, executive director of the Archdiocesan Commission for Catholic Schools, said teaching students how to use condoms was an instance of a 'compromised message'.

Catholic school principals said parents could opt out of the co-curricular programmes.

CHIJ Secondary (Toa Payoh) principal Regina Lee said about nine of her 360 Secondary 3 students opted out last year.

St Patrick's School last year told parents that it had tried unsuccessfully to get approval to remove the video on the use of condoms and to adapt Breaking Down Barriers to the school's needs.

The school urged parents to 'choose wisely' when given the option of opting out of the programme.

**siwan@sph.com.sg**

---

Copyright © 2010 Singapore Press Holdings. All rights reserved.