

Written evidence submitted by Chella Quint OBE on behalf of Period Positive (CWSB259)

Executive summary

- Period Positive works with pupils, teachers, parents and health professionals to ensure that all school staff and pupils have access to high-quality menstrual literacy training and education.
- We have developed an award-winning, comprehensive curriculum model <https://periodpositive.com/period-positive-menstruation-education-programme-of-study/>, a Period Positive Pledge <https://periodpositive.com/the-period-positive-pledge-2/>, and evidence-based guidance for schools www.periodpositive.com
- Our approach includes co-designed research and case studies, with recommendations on school policy, curriculum content, product provision, toilet access, uniform policies, and the school environment.
- We support provisions within the Schools Bill that promote equitable access to education, including those on school food, uniform policies, independent educational institutions, and school admissions, and recommend considerations within these areas linked to menstrual literacy.
- We further recommend government action to integrate menstrual literacy training and teaching into national education policy, the school environment, provision for children not in education, and within school inspections.

Introduction

Period Positive is a leading initiative dedicated to improving menstrual literacy in schools and ensuring equitable access to menstrual education and facilities. Our evidence-based approach aims to remove stigma, promote inclusivity, and support students and staff of all genders in navigating menstrual health with confidence. We submit this evidence to advocate for systemic changes that will ensure all students receive consistent and high-quality menstrual education, from trained and trusted staff.

Our evidence is in response to Part two: Schools. We are firstly providing commentary on elements of the existing bill, and also making recommendations for a further amendment to the bill. This further amendment features additional ways of including menstrual literacy where, due to historical institutional stigmas, this topic may not have been considered previously in this context.

Recommendations for considering and incorporating menstrual literacy and wellbeing into existing elements of the bill:

Breakfast clubs and school food standards

- We support the provision of free breakfast clubs in state-funded primary schools, and note that this can support students experiencing period-related fatigue or nutritional deficiencies to receive adequate nutrition.
- School food standards should include considerations for students with menstrual-related dietary needs, such as iron-rich food options.
- This is an opportunity to provide food that is healthy for menstruating pupils and ensure that they receive not only good nutrition but messages about good nutrition at all stages of the menstrual cycle to support mental and physical wellbeing for learning.

School uniforms

- Schools should implement flexible uniform policies that accommodate menstrual comfort, such as allowing dark-coloured clothing and alternative uniform options.
- Environmental sustainability should be encouraged through access to reusable menstrual products such as period underwear, swimwear, and leggings.
- Clause 23's uniform policy changes should consider accommodations for students managing menstruation.
- Toilet access and facilities should be taken into consideration regarding uniform management:
 - Schools should ensure adequate and accessible toilet facilities with integrated, fit for purpose disposal options and washing facilities.
 - Policies should enable students to access toilets as needed without unnecessary restrictions.

Children not in school

- Some children with undiagnosed menstruation related illnesses cite period pain, heavy menstrual bleeding and symptoms of undiagnosed PMDD or endometriosis/adenomyosis/PCOS may become school refusers due to the stigma of reporting these issues, fatigue of managing chronic illnesses, and frustration of diagnostic delays. More links and training would facilitate pupils seeking diagnoses and provide attendance support for these pupils.
- The educational materials around menstrual literacy should be provided in a variety of formats that can be accessed by all young people regardless of ability, menstruating status, or school attendance.
- Children not in school policies should include specific provisions for students experiencing prolonged menstrual health challenges to ensure they are not unfairly penalised.
- Policies requiring schools and local authorities to cooperate on school admissions should ensure students with complex health needs—including those related to menstruation—have access to appropriate school environments.

Changes relating to academies

- Require academies to teach a revised national curriculum (clause 41) that includes updated menstrual literacy training and teaching content. We recommend the cross-curricular approach recommended in the *Period Positive National Curriculum*.
- Include academies in the free menstrual product provision that is currently only available to state schools.

Changes relating to independent educational institutions, Ofsted oversight, school admissions arrangements, and opening new schools

- We support expanded regulation of independent schools to ensure menstrual literacy is consistently included in education across all settings.
- Ofsted's strengthened role in investigating unregistered schools should also include assessments of whether students receive adequate menstrual health education and access to appropriate facilities. Inspections should include menstrual health provisions in their assessments of school facilities.

Additional ways to address menstrual literacy in schools to support this bill:

It is very helpful to see that some of the points in the bill share an ethos that aligns with the improvements we would like to recommend based on bettering the menstrual literacy of young people, teachers and communities. Some of the steps proposed in the bill take approaches which mirror the approaches we would recommend for actively improving knowledge of all stages of the menstrual span for both young people and adults via schools.

The Secretary of State has said in her message to the schools at the start of the term '*We all must recognise the shared responsibilities of schools, government and families. Places of learning should be centres of communities.*'

We therefore feel that these approaches in relation to teaching and learning about periods and menopause, even at an early age, can transform a taboo or stigmatised topic into something healthy. This can form the foundation of important learning and communication around menstrual health and reproductive health, with positive outcomes for future navigation of menstrual wellbeing and menopause awareness both for those who menstruate and those who support, serve or care for those who menstruate.

The well-being of young people in schools is paramount, yet one significant issue has long been overlooked and could be meaningfully incorporated into this bill: the need for comprehensive menstrual literacy. Traditionally, menstrual education in schools has been sporadic, offered too late, and frequently delivered using resources from external menstrual product companies rather than qualified teaching staff and dedicated resources developed by experts (Power, 1995). Typically, periods are briefly covered in upper primary school or in PSHE at a school's discretion. In the National Curriculum, the basic biology of menstruation is covered in a single science lesson in Year 7 and again in Year 10 (Quint, 2022). This approach persists not because of evidence of its effectiveness but simply because it is *what has always been done*. Provision of products does not

go far enough, and can sometimes be perceived as an indication that periods must be hidden (Wood, 2020).

Research into menstruation education has shown that when menstrual literacy and provision are not integrated across each age and stage of school life and embedded within the wider school environment, they can be undermined by untrained or uncomfortable staff, inadequate policies, and ineffective efforts to address menstrual taboos (Prendergast, 1994). Without a joined-up approach, a lack of knowledge among pupils, staff, parents, and the wider community remains unchallenged, reinforcing stigma and misinformation.

However, there is a positive alternative. Schools that incorporate menstrual education throughout the curriculum, where pupils and teachers co-create policy, and where training is provided for staff, see significant improvements. Pupils in focus groups report feeling more supported to ask advice, to manage menstruation in school, and to know whom they can approach with any questions about menstrual or reproductive health (Quint, 2024). When peer education is utilised—allowing older students to advise younger ones through questionnaires, outreach projects, and collaborative lesson activities—menstrual literacy becomes embedded in the school culture. This approach fosters an environment where all young people, including those who do not menstruate, develop a better understanding of the menstrual cycle. This, in turn, has the power to enhance their overall well-being, strengthening social and emotional development, and ensuring they feel supported both in their learning and in wider school life.

It is vital that menstrual literacy is recognised as a key factor in young people’s education and well-being and that it is meaningfully integrated into this bill to create long-term, positive change.

Recommendations for incorporating menstrual literacy improvements more broadly across schools:

- Menstrual literacy training for school staff and pupils
 - We recommend that menstrual health education be included in teacher training programs and ongoing professional development.
 - Schools should implement standardised menstrual literacy training to ensure all educators provide accurate, independent, stigma-free, and inclusive information.
 - The government should allocate funding to support menstrual education initiatives in schools using the National Curriculum.
- Curriculum model and implementation
 - A national framework for menstrual education should be embedded across all curriculum subjects, using the format of the Careers Education Gatsby Standards.
 - The curriculum should cover the full menstrual span from menarche to menopause, and address diverse experiences, including those of transgender and non-binary students, disabled students, and students with menstrual-related medical conditions.
- Period Positive Pledge, Period Positive Places and Schools Awards, and school policy recommendations

- Schools should be encouraged to adopt the Period Positive Pledge and Period Positive Places and Schools award schemes, ensuring commitment to open discussions and practical support for menstruating students. This could follow the Healthy Schools model.

Government action required to effectively address these issues, we urge the government to:

- Incorporate menstrual literacy into the national curriculum in a consistent, structured, and evidence-based manner.
- Provide funding for teacher training, curriculum development, and product provision in all schools.
- Mandate school inspections to assess menstrual health education and facility provisions.
- Ensure that all students, regardless of socioeconomic background or educational establishment type, have equal access to comprehensive, independent and evidence based high quality menstrual education, and a variety of ethically sourced and sustainable menstrual products.
- Put out a call through the government education portal for schools who would be willing to pilot an integrated menstrual literacy approach to inform curriculum and policy.
- Ensure that the 28th May, World Menstrual Day, is acknowledged in schools in the same way as other designated awareness days, such as Safer Internet Day.

Conclusion

Period Positive calls for immediate government action to create a standardised and inclusive menstrual literacy framework in schools. By embedding menstrual literacy into the current bill, wider school policy and into the curriculum, training educators, improving facilities, and implementing policy changes, we can foster a healthier and more equitable educational environment for all students.

We welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence and collaborate with policymakers to drive meaningful change.

Submitted by: Chella Quint OBE
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A brief recommended reading list

Quint, Chella, 'Menstrual Literacy in Action: Empowering Pupils to Adbust Their Way to Period Positive Schools', in Kay Standing, Sara Parker, and Stefanie Lotter (eds), *Experiences of Menstruation from the Global South and North: Towards a Visualised, Inclusive, and Applied Menstruation Studies* (London, 2024; online edn, British Academy Scholarship Online, 19 Oct. 2024), from Standing, Kay, Sara Parker, and Stefanie Lotter (eds), *Experiences of Menstruation*

from the Global South and North: Towards a Visualised, Inclusive, and Applied Menstruation Studies (London, 2024; online edn, British Academy Scholarship Online, 19 Oct. 2024).

Quint, C. (2022, July). *A period positive national curriculum for England*.

Quint, C. (2021). *Be Period Positive: Reframe Your Thinking and Reshape the Future of Menstruation*. Dorling Kindersley Ltd.

Quint, C. (2021). *Own Your Period: A Fact-Filled Guide to Period Positivity* (London, Quarto Books).

Wood, J.M. (2020). '(In)Visible Bleeding: The Menstrual Concealment Imperative'. *The Palgrave handbook of critical menstruation studies*, pp. 319-336.

Quint, C. (2019). From embodied shame to reclaiming the stain: Reflections on a career in menstrual activism. *The Sociological Review*, 67(4), 927-942.

Quint, C. (2017). The Period Positive Pledge: An International Standard for CoOperative, Non-Corporate Menstrual Literacy Policy CPPF Disrupted: The Reproductive Rights & Justice Issue (P106–111).

Power, P. (1995). Menstrual complexities. *Health Education*, 95(2), 17-21.

Prendergast, S. (1994). 'This is the Time to Grow Up': Girls' Experiences of Menstruation in School. Family Planning Association.

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