

15 March 2007 "Schools need more nurses to help pupils tackle health problems"  
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Every school should have its own school nurse, based on site, to help tackle child obesity, nutritional problems and teenage pregnancy, according to new research from the Fabian Society.

The Fabian Society argues that primary and secondary schools need increased numbers of specially trained nurses. Pupils should be able to turn to on-site nurses for medical advice and the nurse should be a recognised member of the school team.

The Fabian report, *Born Unequal*, to be published on March 28, argues that existing school nurses have too many schools to cover, and are not on site every week, and therefore are unable to build up a rapport with pupils.

It argues that school nurses are best placed to address health and sex education issues, and better equipped to teach sex education than teachers, who often spend as little as two hours in their PGCE training learning how to take a sex education class, a subject that is considered difficult to teach by many. As one lecturer in education told the report's authors: "There is rarely room in these extremely crowded PGCE programmes for more than one session." Another advantage for pupils would be nurses' background and medical training.

Teenagers interviewed for the report said that they would rather have the subject handled by someone other than a teacher, and they would feel more comfortable dealing with someone with a medical background.

Louise Bamfield, senior research fellow at the Fabian Society, said: "This is a long way from the days of nit nurses. We are calling for a taskforce of specially trained school nurses who would become a vital part of the education and health strategy to improve teenagers' health, and be on site in schools as soon as possible. Specially trained school nurses will be able to help improve the diet of teenagers, and particularly pregnant teenagers, who research shows have a worse diet than any other group of mothers-to-be."

Research shows that there is an urgent need to change UK teenagers' behaviour to address issues of smoking and poor diet, especially for teenage mothers. Teenagers interviewed for this report said although they were advised about not smoking during pregnancy, often they continued to do so. Smoking and poor nutrition are also two main factors leading to exceptionally low-birth weight babies.

- Currently there is one nurse to every ten schools in England.
- School nurses should be the first port of call for teenagers on health issues
- Finland has a teenage pregnancy rate of 10/1000 births to teenagers aged 15-19, compared to 26.9/1000 in the UK.
- Very young mothers have the highest risk of poor nutrition; 16 and 17 year olds receive income support of only £34.60 per week
- Teenage mums often have diets high in sugar, and fatty snack foods

In Finland where school nurses have a significant role in the education programme, with nurses based on site in all schools, teenage pregnancy levels are much lower than in the UK, and nurses been acclaimed by experts as having played a key part in Finland's health education success. School nurses

also encourage pupils to take more responsibility for their own health.