


**Interim Impact Report (2026)**

## Executive Summary

**Young people in England and Wales still face two big challenges at school: period education that does not always meet their needs, and difficulties getting access to toilets and period products when they need them.***

Period Confident Schools (PCS) is designed to tackle the barriers that periods can create for education, wellbeing and equality. The programme recognises that feeling confident about periods is not just about what is taught in lessons. It takes a **whole-school approach**, bringing together teacher training, classroom learning, pupil voice, toilet access reviews, period product provision and school policy shaped by pupils themselves. The aim is simple: to help every young person manage their period with dignity.

These findings come from schools participating in Period Confident Schools. PCS is an initiative developed in partnership with Irise International, an award-winning, global leader in menstrual justice programming, policy, and research, and Dr Maria Tomlinson, a researcher in health communication (University of Sheffield).

The programme has two main parts: a new **menstrual health curriculum** designed to better meet students' needs, and a **Toilet Policy Toolkit** to help schools develop toilet policies that improve access for young people. The curriculum was developed in response to the experiences of 77 teenagers who participated in Dr Maria Tomlinson's research. This led to a new four-lesson curriculum, created by Belszki (a primary school teacher in West Sussex). The curriculum was piloted in Northgate Primary School in 2023–25. The toilet access work builds on Irise's 'Every Period Counts' campaign in 2023, where hundreds of young people across the UK shared their experiences of being unable to access toilet facilities and period products at school. In 2024, Irise brought together young people and educators to create the Toilet Toolkit, which helps schools create a toilet policy that works for everyone.

Together, this work is helping schools improve both education and everyday experiences for all menstruating young people. So far, PCS has been introduced across nine schools: Bryn Deva Primary School, Ysgol Ty Ffynnon, Connah's Quay High School, Elfed High School, Godwin Primary School, Hillsborough Primary School, Wisewood Primary School, Wales High School for Girls, and Birkenhead High School for Girls, covering Sheffield, Liverpool, Wales and Essex. Three more schools are due to join the programme in the Autumn term (September to December 2026). **To date, the programme has reached 114 teachers through professional development, 113 pupils through interactive toilet access workshops, and an estimated 1,500 pupils through curriculum delivery.**

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* See Tomlinson, M. (2025) The Menstrual Movement in the Media: Reducing Stigma and Tackling Social Inequalities. Palgrave (Open Access)

The evaluation shows clear signs that PCS is improving menstrual literacy for young people in schools. After the lessons, 65.5% of pupils said they felt quite or very confident in their knowledge about periods, 57.5% said they had learned something new about menstruation and where to find support, and 73.5% said they enjoyed the lessons. Teacher feedback was also positive, with all teachers saying they found the training to be of a high quality and felt more confident delivering menstrual health education.

Most importantly, the programme shows that when schools combine good education with meaningful pupil involvement, they can make practical changes that support menstrual dignity. This includes better access to products, more compassionate toilet policies and less stigma around periods as part of a cultural change within a whole-school approach.

## Baseline Findings

Before starting the programme, schools completed a baseline questionnaire. They shared information about their current menstrual health curriculum, period product provision, toilet access during lessons and breaks, existing challenges and areas where things could be improved.

### Menstrual Health Curriculum

Period lessons are currently delivered through Form Time, PE, Science and Wellbeing mornings. In some primary schools, Year 5 and 6 teachers deliver the lessons, with additional support from the Learning Mentor and SENDCo. Not all schools deliver lessons for year 4 pupils. In some primary schools, there are no dedicated Year 4 menstrual health lessons, and in some secondary schools, there are no dedicated Year 7 menstrual health lessons. In one setting, menstrual health is delivered by staff during Wellbeing mornings once every half term. Most of the delivery seems to take place in year 5, ranging from one to three lessons. These are often left till the end of the summer term. At one school attended, year 6 pupils were on a school trip so missed their lesson, and the year 5 pupils hadn't received their lessons yet, so they had received no menstrual health education up to that point.

### Period Product Provision

All schools reported that free period products are available, but access arrangements vary. In some schools, products are placed directly in staff toilets, libraries, Learning Mentors' room (not ideal for students who don't normally use the Learning Mentor area) the PE department or the school office, while in other schools, pupils need to ask trusted staff, the pastoral team or a Learning Mentor. Most schools do not limit how many products pupils can take and some schools replenish products weekly by the pastoral team, where others don't access the free period product scheme and rely on teachers giving out their own products. One school has an additional spares cupboard available, with pupils informed through assemblies about where products can be accessed and which staff hold keys. Another school makes good use of the School Council to make effective change. However, the baseline also shows that visibility and ease of access could be improved in some settings, particularly where products are stored away from pupils, or put in intimidating spaces such as staff toilets or public areas like the school office in reception. A designated Period Champion would make accessing products easier, especially in secondary schools (in primary schools, each classroom teacher from year 3 onwards needs to be trained and have resources available). Staff also noted that even when products are available, pupils do not always feel able to access them due to embarrassment or lack of understanding.



### Level Of Toilet Access During Lessons And Breaks

Toilet access remains an issue across all schools. Whilst some toilets remain open during lessons, there are rules about access and use. Some are supervised, staffed or only accessible with permission, a pass, lanyard or escort. And when toilets are freely available at break and lunchtime, pupils report long queues (breaks are only 15 minutes and lunch anything from 35 minutes), intimidating behaviour and lack of products. Schools have major concerns about behaviour, truancy and vaping. Pupils with medical needs are generally supported to access toilets when required but feel embarrassed to wear a 'Medical Pass' lanyard. These passes are staff-issued and enable access to accessible toilets which conflates periods with disabilities. This is due to lack of facilities but needs addressing. Gender-specific facilities seemed more welcome than unisex toilets which tend to be less clean and make girls who have periods feel more vulnerable. One school issues authorised toilet visits with a recorded 'A' code on the register. Staff supervise toilets during breaks to ensure safe and appropriate provision. Teachers may occasionally delay requests if they believe pupils are avoiding learning or if break time is imminent. Overall, the baseline suggests that schools are trying to balance safeguarding and behaviour management with pupils' need for timely, comfortable toilet access.

### Key Challenges

The main challenges raised by schools centred on toilet access, comfort and behaviour. Some schools are managing concerns about vaping, truancy, pupils gathering in toilets during social times and general inappropriate behaviour, which can lead to tighter restrictions during lessons. Others highlighted practical issues, such as long queues at break and lunchtime or pupils who menstruate having to use facilities that are not comfortable or appropriate. One school also noted that gender-neutral toilets may leave some girls feeling vulnerable, although the building layout makes separate facilities difficult. These challenges show how important it is for schools to find solutions that protect pupils' safety while still supporting dignity, privacy and timely access.

### Opportunities For Improvement

Schools identified several clear opportunities to improve menstrual dignity and toilet access. These include using available student or improvement budgets, involving pupils in future toilet design and access arrangements, and co-designing practical solutions that work within existing building constraints. There is also scope to review lesson-time toilet access for students who menstruate, introduce a designated Period Champion, make period products more visible and easier to access, and develop clearer toilet access policies. Building on the existing curriculum could also help increase confidence, inclusivity and normalise conversations about menstrual health across the school community.

## Evidence of Impact




### Pupil knowledge

More than half of pupils said they learned something new about periods (57.5%), learned where to get help and support (57.5%), and developed a better understanding of what happens during a period (56.6%). Around half (50.4%) said they learned more about how periods can be managed, while 39.8% said they learned more about period symptoms.

Pupils seemed to take away a mix of practical and reassuring messages, rather than just facts. The strongest themes were:

- Learning about the variety of period products, particularly menstrual cups, reusable products and the fact that there are alternatives to pads.
- Understanding how to support others, including helping someone experiencing cramps, a leak or embarrassment.
- Developing knowledge about how periods work, including why they happen and what to expect.
- Recognising period symptoms, such as cramps, pain and mood changes.
- Reducing stigma, with several pupils commenting that periods are nothing to be embarrassed about and that people should be kind and supportive.

**Pupil Confidence & Feeling Prepared**

Overall, around **80%** of 1,500 participating children reported **increased confidence** following the lessons. This includes confidence in their knowledge about periods and confidence to manage menstruation.

After the lessons, pupils reported strong levels of confidence in their knowledge about periods. Around two-thirds (65.5%) said they felt quite confident or very confident, suggesting that the lesson helped most pupils build their understanding. A further 24.8% felt a bit confident, showing that they had gained some knowledge but may benefit from more lessons. Only 9.7% said they did not feel confident, meaning relatively few pupils were still unsure after taking part. Working with the schools over the longer term (year 1, 2, and 3) will ensure almost all pupils feel more confident in their knowledge about periods and lead to a stronger whole-school culture around periods.

Among pupils who might get a period, more than half (54.3%) said they felt quite confident or very confident, suggesting that the lessons helped them feel prepared. 27.1% felt a bit confident, while 18.6% still did not feel confident. This shows that pupils need more opportunities to build confidence and talk through any worries about menstruation.

The lessons also encouraged conversations about periods beyond the classroom. More than one-third of pupils (35.4%) said they had already spoken to someone at home about what they had learned, and a further 21.2% said they might do so. Around one quarter (26.5%) had not yet talked to anyone, while 16.8% said they were not ready to have those conversations. This suggests the programme is helping to make periods easier to talk about, while recognising that pupils build confidence at different speeds.

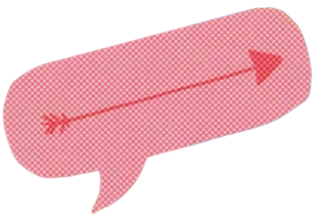
Among pupils who identified someone they had spoken to after the lesson, mothers were by far the most frequently mentioned trusted adult (40.7%), highlighting the important role families play in reinforcing menstrual health education and underpinning suggestions to do more family/parent support programmes with schools around menstruation. A further 8.0% had spoken with both parents, while 6.2% identified teachers as someone they had talked to, demonstrating that both home and school environments can provide valuable opportunities for discussion. Smaller numbers spoke with sisters, grandparents, wider family members or friends, reflecting a diverse network of trusted adults and peers supporting pupils' learning about periods.

The average enjoyment score was 1.86 out of 3 (62% of the maximum possible score), suggesting that the lessons were engaging even though the topic may feel uncomfortable or embarrassing for some young people at first. This also points to giving teachers more support about how to deliver lessons more confidently.

Overall, 62.8% of pupils were either interested in or open to learning more about periods in future lessons, and the findings suggest that the programme helped many pupils feel more confident, prepared and engaged about menstrual health.

We asked the students: "Is there anything else you'd like to say?". There were some encouraging messages from pupils...

- "I know much more now and the lessons were really clear and educational."
- "It really helped me understand how to use different products."
- "I feel very confident about having my period and talking about it."
- "I think I could help someone else when they're on their period."
- "I feel more confident."
- "I feel more comfortable about periods."
- "The sessions were interesting to learn."
- "I would like to talk to someone when I get my period."
- "I feel more confident than I was and it is good to talk about it."
- "Thank you for helping girls because some may not be able to afford such products, so thanks for supporting girls along the way of puberty."



They also commented....

- "Be yourself."
- "It's OK to ask questions."
- "Never give up."
- "To never ever be scared about it."
- "Period is normal."
- "It's OK, every girl gets it."
- "I am here to help and don't worry."



**Teacher outcomes**
Teacher feedback was very positive. Staff particularly valued the practical discussion of period products and menstrual cycle terminology, and said this helped them feel more confident delivering menstrual health education. Teachers also found the discussion about boys learning about periods especially useful.

Teachers commented...

- “This made our RSE lesson really easy. Attitudes towards periods for boys and girls have improved and conversations have become open."
- "The children enjoyed the conversations from the lessons which helped make periods feel less scary for some of the children”

## Conclusion

The findings show that the PCS lessons **had a positive impact on pupils’ knowledge, confidence and sense of preparedness**. More than half of pupils said they learned something new about periods, understood more about how periods work, and knew where to go for help and support. Almost 66% felt confident in their knowledge after the lessons, and over 50% felt more confident about managing periods in the future. PCS also encouraged conversations beyond the classroom, with pupils talking about what they learned with their families. Pupils particularly valued learning about different period products, understanding how to support others, and reducing stigma around menstruation. Nearly 75% enjoyed the lessons, and almost two-thirds said they would be open to more menstrual health education in the future. Overall, the survey provides strong evidence that the programme is increasing knowledge, building confidence and helping to make conversations about periods feel more normal for young people.






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