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School offers morning-after pill to 11-year-olds

By Sarah Womack

(Filed: 28/09/2002)

Girls as young as 11 will be able to obtain the morning-after pill at a London school without their parents' consent.

If the scheme at Chestnut Grove School in Balham is successful, it could be extended to every secondary school in Wandsworth, a borough which has the fifth highest teenage pregnancy rate in inner London.

Margaret Peacock, the headmistress, said her school was trying to behave responsibly.

She said under-16s could already obtain the pill without their parents' consent from hospital accident and emergency units and pharmacies.

"The school governors thought it would be better for children to receive counselling from the school nurse at the same time. If the child is under age, loud bells will ring and the case will be treated as a child protection issue."

Social services could be involved, although under current law, parents do not need to be informed.

Government figures in July showed that four girls of 10 had become mothers. The figures covered three years - 1998, 1999 and 2000 - and showed that another 23 girls of 11 had become pregnant and about 400 under-14s had conceived.

Sheila Crouch, Chestnut Grove's nurse, said: "If a pupil comes to me for advice about emergency contraception I can only inform them of relevant clinics. This delays the process. The sooner the young person takes the first dose of the Levonelle-2 pill the more likely it is to prevent a pregnancy."

The mother of one 12-year-old pupil said: "I was horrified. They're trying to take away any control that parents have.

"If you're going to give children an easy option it's not teaching anybody how to be responsible or accountable for their actions.

"I don't believe it will be handed out regardless, but

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