

Education and Support for Pregnant Students and School Age Parents



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Introduction

Like all parents, teenage parents want the best for their children and some manage very well. The demands of caring for a baby at a time when young people themselves are going through the transition from adolescence to adulthood are significant. As a consequence, teenage parents need additional support if they and their children are to avoid the poor outcomes many of them currently experience (Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) and Department of Health (DH), 2007).

Not only do their children have higher rates of infant mortality, almost 60% of children involved in serious case reviews were born to mothers under 21, as well as higher rates of admission to the Emergency Department; in the longer term, children of teenage parents experience lower educational attainment and are at a higher risk of economic inactivity and social disadvantage as adults. Evidence and lessons from local areas show that poor outcomes are not inevitable if early, coordinated and sustained support is put in place.

The pressures of early parenthood result in teenage parents experiencing high rates of poor emotional health and well-being and they do not often achieve the qualifications they need to progress into further education. It also means that in some cases, they have difficulties finding childcare and the support they need to participate in Education, Employment and Training (EET).

This document has been produced to help educational establishments support pregnant students and school age parents to continue their education and, in doing so, enabling them to reach their full potential. It provides information on the support available from partner agencies in the City of Birmingham and reflects current Government guidance on the education of school age parents.

The Responsibility of Schools

Most cases of teenage pregnancy occur in Year 11, which is a crucial time for taking GCSEs, therefore it is important to ensure the young parents and parents-to-be are able to complete their compulsory education and are supported to go on to further education and training when they are ready.(DfES 2001)

Under section 7 of the Education Act 1996, parents of the teenage parents are responsible for making sure their children of compulsory school age receive a fulltime education that is suitable to the child's age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs the child may have. This can be by regular attendance at school, alternative provision, or by education otherwise (DCSF, 2008). Section 436A of the Education Act 1996 (inserted by section 4 of the Education and Inspections Act, 2006) requires all local authorities to make

arrangements to enable them to establish (so far as it is possible to do so) the identities of children residing in their area who are not receiving a suitable education. Monitoring and maintaining the attendance of individual pregnant pupils and school age parents remains at all times the responsibility of the educational establishment at which the pupil is on roll. The headteacher is responsible for ensuring that the school makes all reasonable attempts to support the student in continuing to access on site education in line with the schools attendance/inclusion policy.

Schools can access support and guidance by contacting the School Aged Parent Team who will be able to give advice on which local service would be able to offer the most effective support. The team will also ensure Post 16 support is offered by making referrals to the Birmingham Careers Service.

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 removed the exemption that previously applied to schools about bringing discrimination cases on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity. This means that for the first time it will be unlawful for schools to treat a student less favourably because she becomes pregnant or has recently had a baby. Schools will also have to factor in pregnancy and maternity leave when considering their obligations under the new Equality Duty.

The following paragraphs have been extracted from Equality Act 2010: Advice for School Leaders, School Staff, Governing Bodies and Local Authorities. This advice is reviewed annually.

Protection for pupils from discrimination because of pregnancy and maternity in schools is new in the Equality Act. Although the specific provision in the Act is new, schools should already be aware of their specific responsibilities to any pupils in their care who become pregnant or parents. Previous government guidance issued in 2001, (DfES/0629/2001 on the 'Education of School Age Parents') inserted below, and in the Absence and Attendance Codes Guidance for Schools and Local Authorities (January 2009, page 8), available at www.education.gov.uk makes it clear that schools must not exclude a pupil simply on the grounds of her becoming pregnant, but should allow no more than 18 calendar weeks authorised absence to cover the time immediately before and after the birth of her child. This is in order to ensure that she is reintegrated into education as quickly as possible.

Schools already have a duty of care to their pupils and we do not expect them to have to alter their policies because of this new legal provision, providing they are not excluding pregnant pupils or requiring them to study at home or in alternative provision when they wish to remain in school, and are letting them return to education when they have had their babies. The DfE Equalities Legislation Team is hoping to extend their guidance on the law relating to school age mothers.

Accessing Support

The aim of the school should be to keep the pregnant student or school aged parent in education; this means keeping the student on the school roll, even if she/he may not be able to attend for a period of time. A designated member of school staff should act as an advocate and assist the student to take responsibility for her/his continuing education.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES and DH, 2000) issued Sex and Relationships Education Guidance for Schools, stating that schools should have a clear confidentiality policy. Head Teachers should ensure all school staff and parents are aware of the policy and that school staff adhere to it. School staff are not duty-bound to inform parents of any disclosure by pupils unless the school's safeguarding and subsequent confidentiality policy requires them to do so.

As soon as a member of staff has been informed by a student that she is pregnant, the School Aged Parent Team (0121 464 7221) should be contacted, in order to identify any support service that may be able to offer advice about pregnancy options.

If the student has not already done so, she should be encouraged to inform her parents/carers of the pregnancy. She may need some support to do this. School staff should always seek consent from a student before disclosing any information but should make it clear that they cannot guarantee confidentiality if there is a possibility that the young person or someone else could be harmed, for example, risk of harm to the young woman and/or the unborn child.

The fact that a young woman under 16 is pregnant or has a baby does not automatically mean that she or her baby is a 'child in need'. However it is recommended that consent is gained and the Children's Advice and Support Service (CASS – 0121 303 1888) is informed if there are any concerns regarding the safeguarding and well-being of the pregnant student. This is to ensure the young woman has the appropriate level of support whilst offering early help and advice.

Although the age of consent to sexual activity is 16, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 does not intend to criminalise young people of a similar age who have consensual sex. A child protection issue arises when there has been non-consensual sex or an exploitative relationship, particularly with an older person or someone in a position of trust.

Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, children under the age of 13 are considered of insufficient age to consent to sexual activity. If the student is under the age of 13 and pregnant, there **must always** be a referral to Children's Social Care (CSC) on telephone

number 0121 303 1888. For further information and guidance with regard to sexually active young people, please refer to the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board website - www.lscbbirmingham.org.uk;

An enquiry to CSC is recommended in all cases where the student is under the age of 16 in order to see if any other agencies are involved with and working with the pregnant student and if CSC involvement is required. In the case of a student under 16, if the nominated member of staff believes there is a child protection issue to be addressed, they should liaise with the school's "designated teacher for child protection" (as set out in DfEE circular 10/95). The nominated member of staff should make clear that they cannot guarantee unconditional confidentiality and that if confidentiality has to be broken, the pupil will be informed first.

If the name of the father of the child has been disclosed, or he has revealed his identity, his needs and rights should also be taken into account. Schools should be supportive of **both** parents, acknowledging the additional needs that school age fathers and fathers-to-be may have. In some cases both the mother and father-to-be may be attending the same school; this may cause difficulties if the relationship has ended, the pupil has rejected his responsibilities, or been excluded from his parenting role.

Pregnancy

Ante-natal appointments

Pregnant teenagers are less likely to access maternity services and ante-natal care in early pregnancy. This can result in raised levels of medical complications and premature births. Pupils should be encouraged to attend ante-natal appointments and would be expected to evidence these as they would any other medical appointment during school time. The father's positive involvement in a child's early life is associated with a range of good outcomes for babies and children. A positive relationship between the mother and father is also a protective factor for post natal depression (DCSF 2008). Time off during school time for young fathers-to-be to attend ante-natal appointments should be negotiated with the school. Alternatively, the school may recommend that young people ask for ante-natal appointments to be made after school wherever possible.

Maternity

The school should ensure that the student continues to attend school and classes for as long as possible, up until the birth and after, by exploring all opportunities to ensure continuity of education.

A pregnant student is entitled to up to 18 calendar weeks of authorised absence to cover the time immediately before and after the birth of the baby. **It would be *inappropriate* to authorise a year 11 student to take 18 calendar weeks authorised absence before the official school leaving date.** The link between the low educational attainment of teenage

mothers and child poverty is well documented. Children born to teenage mothers have a 63% increased risk of being born into poverty compared to babies born to older mothers. Teenage mothers are 20% more likely to have no qualifications at the age of 30 than mothers giving birth aged 24 or over. (Sewell. A, 2011).

Many young girls choose to take **less** than 18 weeks leave and remain in school until the baby is due, returning soon after the birth. The dates of the maternity leave should be agreed between the school, the student, her parents/carers and the School Aged Parent Coordinator. Once the maternity leave has been agreed the school should send the School Aged Parent Team the completed Maternity Leave form. The school should consider how they can best support the students' education during the period of maternity leave, for example by sending work home. If health allows, schools should encourage the student to return to education with the minimum disruption. Schools should avoid pressuring the student to return before she feels ready.

After the period of maternity leave, the young mother should return to school at which she is on roll. There may be instances when it is agreed, in consultation with the student and her parents/carers that a return to mainstream education would not be in her best interests. In this situation the school are advised to seek guidance from the School Aged Parent Team.

Paternity leave

Employed fathers are entitled to take Ordinary Paternity Leave of two weeks. There is no obligation for schools to allow paternity leave for school age fathers. If the school, in consultation with the young father, feels it is appropriate, and where the father has already been involved in supporting the mother during pregnancy, the school should consider what flexibility they can offer to the timetable and curriculum. In this case it is recommended that a teenage father should be allowed no more than ten days authorised absence. The school also needs to consider the stage in the young father's education, his overall attendance and whether allowing him to take 10 days will cause him to become a persistent absentee.

Note: The school needs to ensure they are not discriminating against the teenage father under any of the protected characteristic stated in the Equalities Act 2010.

Reintegration into Education

School age mothers are expected to return to full time education once their period of maternity leave ends. Evidence suggests that reintegration into education is more successful if the return is phased. The Maternity Leave Form will include the agreed process for reintegrating the young parent back into education. This should be, in all cases in consultation with the student, their family if appropriate, School Aged Parent Team and the school. This may include work sent home, home tuition, a part- time timetable or attendance at an Alternative Learning Provider however, wherever possible, the young mother should be encouraged to return to her own school.

The School Aged Parent Team should receive achievement data on all students whom are either pregnant or young parents as well as regular attendance data.

It is important to allow flexibility for the young parent to attend appointments, and to support attendance at young parents' support groups. These are important in developing good parenting skills and ensuring good health of the baby. Attendance at these groups should be built into the Personal Education Support Plan.

Childcare

Young parents under the age of 20 are entitled to funding to pay for childcare places and associated travel through 'Care to Learn'. Where a young parent is experiencing difficulties in accessing childcare, the Family Information Service (FIS) can offer support and assist in finding a suitable childcare provider.

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding has a strong protective effect on the health of the mother and baby. Research suggests teenagers are a third less likely to breastfeed and teenagers who do initiate breastfeeding are much less likely than older women to continue. (DCSF and DOH 2008). It is important that schools support the student's choice to breastfeed. If the childcare is close to the school, the pupil should be allowed to leave at agreed times. The school should identify a private area to enable the student to express milk and provide suitable facilities to store milk during the school day.

Birmingham Local Authority Procedure:

- The Local Authority, School Aged Parent (SAP) Team, receives notifications from all schools, academies, children's services and the health sector in regards to student's pregnancies.
- On receipt of all notifications, student's information is recorded on a database and relevant information is shared with relevant external agencies such as Children's Centres.
- Also on receipt of a notification the SAP team will investigate via Children's Social Care (CSC) if there have been any past or current CSC involvement and will contact any named professional to alert them to their involvement with the student if necessary.
- On completion of the above actions, all new notifications are appraisal by the SAP Co-ordinator, so that any safeguarding concerns identified by the school or referrer have been appropriately referred to MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) and/or the Police.
- Any significant safeguarding concerns raised within the referral but not reported to MASH and/or the Police by the school or referrer, will be immediately and appropriately addressed by the receiving SAP Co-ordinator.
- The SAP team will monitor that notifications are been sent in a timely fashion from all referrers.
- Schools and referrers are invited to contact the SAP team if they require any support, guidance or advice on ensuring the student is accessing suitable education.
- The SAP team can guide schools in confirming that they are following the national guidelines for good practice and local safeguarding policies.
- The SAP team will support safeguarding concerns for a student by attending planned professional meetings such as Child Protection, Child In Need or review meetings.
- The SAP team will also liaise with schools in creating and implementing a planned educational package to engage students if their attendance is poor.
- The SAP team will advise on the amount of maternity leave that should be offered to a student whilst recording this information for the local authority.
- The SAP team gathers all information on attendance, maternity leave, academic qualifications and Post 16 destinations.
- Any notification which indicates that a student is not on a school roll will trigger the SAP team to make contact with the student and their family. At this initial meeting the most appropriate educational placement will be discussed which may include Alternative Provision (AP) and an interview and start date will be arranged if appropriate.
- The SAP team works closely with Post 16 organisations, such as Birmingham Careers Service, to ensure that Post 16 destinations are obtained.
- The Coordinator will identify any current trends that the team data highlights and will ensure that appropriate services are notified.

Annex 1.

Recording Maternity leave and Pregnancy related absences.

Below are a list of questions sent to Birmingham Education Legal Intervention Team and the answers provided:

What maternity leave entitlement is granted for pupils and how is it recorded? Pupils are entitled to a maximum of 18 weeks recorded as authorised absence- Code C. The 18 weeks will include and holiday/ Bank Holidays which fall with this period. I.e. it is not 18 school weeks. **It would be inappropriate to authorise a year 11 student to take 18 calendar weeks authorised absence before the official school leaving date.**

When pupils work from home with agreement of school (or when work is sent to them). Code C: unless a referral has been made to the BSS/ Hospital School/ (and they have agreed to work with the pupil). It would then be recorded as Code D provided the pupil participates with the agreed program for each particular session. Using code D requires the school to change the registration status of the pupil to "Main - Dual registration" and them also to be on the roll of a second establishment as "Subsidiary - Dual registration".

Code B can also be used (Educated off site) if the Tuition Service is involved and an appropriate program of study is arranged.

How should Medical and antenatal appointments be recorded? Use Code M

If the pupil has registered in school and then leaves to attend a medical appoint: there is no need to change the existing code However, there must be a system which records that the pupil has left.

How would a Limited timetable in later stages of pregnancy be recorded? Where it is planned by the school it will be Authorised absence. Code C

How would study leave prior to exams be recorded? If year 11 pupil: A pregnant pupil or parent should be treated as any other pupils in regards to study leave. DfES guidance says "Study leave should be used sparingly and only for Year 11 pupils for mock and public examinations. Study Leave (code S) counts as Authorised Absence.

How should a part time timetable within a reintegration period be recorded? The school are authorising the absence for the sessions that the pupil is not required to be in school and the pupil should be recorded as Code C for those.

Annex 2.

Examples of Attendance Codes:

- I. Pregnancy is not an illness, therefore absence due to illness during pregnancy should be recorded – **I**
- II. Ante-natal appointments – **M**
- III. Maternity Leave - **C** if within 18 weeks. Any absence beyond this is unauthorised- **O** unless there is a legitimate reason for the absence.
- IV. Paternity Leave - **C**
- V. Illness of baby – **C**
- VI. Baby medical appointments – **C**
- VII. Lack of childcare due to unforeseen circumstances-**C**
- VIII. Failure to organise childcare, or refusal to access childcare place offered – **O**
- IX. Part time timetable – **C**
- X. Attending alternative learning programme - **B** or **D** depending on the provision

Annex 3.

Outcomes for young parents and their children (1)

Mental health and emotional wellbeing

- Teenage mothers have higher rates of poor mental health for up to three years after the birth
- Teenage mothers are 3 times more likely to experience postnatal depression
- 2 in 3 teenage mothers experience relationship breakdown in pregnancy or the 3 years after birth

Outcomes for young parents and their children (2)

Economic wellbeing

- Children born to teenage mothers have a 63% higher risk of living in poverty
- 1 in 5 girls aged 16-18 not in education, employment or training (NEET) are teenage mothers
- Women who were teenage mothers are 22% more likely to be living in poverty at age 30
- Men who were young fathers are twice as likely to be unemployed at 30

Evidence for improving outcomes (3)

Reintegration officer support for school-age parents

- Reintegration officers (School Aged Support Team), based in local authorities, support young school-age parents back into education.
- A qualitative evaluation was conducted in ten local authorities looking at the direct experiences of 93 pregnant young women and young mothers and the views of 138 schools and 106 key professionals.
- The evaluation found: reintegration officers had a positive impact on school-age mothers continuing their education; and the impact was particularly strong for young mothers who had been missing school.

Improving outcomes saves money (4)

Safeguarding

- For every child prevented from going into care, social services would save on average £65k per year.
- Every domestic violence incident prevented saves police, local authorities, the Criminal Justice System and the NHS £2,700

School readiness

- Every child who is 'school ready' who would not otherwise be – saves schools £1,000 per year

EET

- Every teen mum who gets back in to Education, Employment and Training (EET) saves agencies £4,500 per year

Mental health

- For every individual who does not develop a mental health issue saves a local authority £2,000 per year

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