

Guidance on the Education of Pregnant Schoolgirls and School Age Parents

April 2012

These guidelines have been written for anyone who works with pregnant pupils and school age parents. They are a result of collaboration between the following agencies/services:

- Teenage Pregnancy Midwifery Service
- Education Welfare Service
- Gloucestershire Hospital Education Service
- Gloucestershire Teenage Pregnancy Partnership

Introduction

This guidance has been developed to support pregnant schoolgirls and teenage parents in continuing their education, allowing them to reach their full potential. It outlines the responsibilities of the local authority and the schools and provides information on the support that is available from outside agencies. It reflects government guidance on the education of school-aged parents. It is essential that all agencies work together to provide a co-ordinated approach to assessment and support. This will maximise the student's life chances through appropriate education provision, health support, childcare and other necessary services.

Responsibilities of the local authority

The local authority has a statutory duty to provide suitable education for all pupils for whom they are responsible including pupils of compulsory school age who become parents. The local authority should consult the pupil, parents/carers and the school to secure a package that is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and individual needs including any special educational needs they may have.

The local authority may find a place at a pupil referral centre or other educational centre during periods of absence from school, or choose to provide home tuition. Pregnant schoolgirls and school age mothers attending a PRU will maintain links with and remain on the roll of their mainstream school. The aim should be reintegration wherever possible.

Evidence suggests that help with transport for this group has a positive impact on attendance. Where no statutory provision exists, it is good practice for the local authority to provide assistance with transport in circumstances where for example, a GP certifies that the pupil's state of pregnancy is such that they are no longer able to walk to school. A local authority officer has been identified as the lead for school aged parents and takes responsibility for this group.

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 requires parents to secure education of their children of compulsory school age either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Parents of teenage parents are obliged therefore to ensure that their child attends the provision arranged by the LA.

Responsibilities of schools

The DfE publication *Guidance on the Education of School Age Parents* makes specific the role and responsibility of the school if a pupil on their roll becomes pregnant. When this occurs the school must, in line with their agreed confidentiality policy, *"ensure that the pupil receives full information about services in her local area, knows how to access them and has the opportunity to talk through the options available to her."* School staff are not bound to inform parents unless their Confidentiality Policy specifically requires them to do so although staff should encourage a pupil to talk to their parents whenever possible.

The guidance is clear that pregnancy is not a reason for exclusion from school and there is no evidence that keeping a pregnant girl in school will encourage others to become pregnant.

The Equality Act 2010 removed the exemption that previously applied in schools about bringing discrimination cases on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity and these provisions were commenced in October 2010.

If the school becomes aware that a pupil is/might be pregnant

As soon as a pupil has informed a member of staff that she is pregnant, whether or not she intends to continue with the pregnancy, immediate contact must be made with the school's Education Welfare Officer (EWO) who will inform relevant agencies. If the pupil intends to continue with the pregnancy the EWO will make a referral to Gloucestershire Hospital Education Service.

Although teachers are not legally bound to inform parents or the headteacher of any disclosure by pupils unless the school's confidentiality policy requires them to do so members of staff should not keep information to themselves. It is important that a referral to Gloucestershire Hospital Education Service (GHES) is made immediately to ensure that the opportunity for support and early access to services is possible. This can be done via the Education Welfare Service if the school has an EWO.

Teachers should always seek consent from a pupil for any disclosure, but should make clear that they cannot offer or guarantee unconditional confidentiality.

If a student is pregnant and has decided to continue with the pregnancy appropriate arrangements will be made for continuing her education. The head teacher should continue to respect the pupil's right to confidentiality and ensure teachers and other pupils in the school deal with the pregnancy sensitively. The head teacher is not obliged to inform parents of the pregnancy, but should encourage the pupil to do so.

The link between teenage pregnancy and social exclusion is well established. An assessment should be made to explore whether there are likely to be additional needs, and will help to establish which professional is most appropriate to lead and co-ordinate the plan for this student within the Common Assessment Framework.

Child Protection

In the case of students under 16, if the member of staff judges that there may be a child protection issue to be addressed, they should liaise with the school's designated child protection officer.

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 is not intended to criminalise people under 16 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.

Continuing the pregnancy

The school's aim should be to keep the pregnant schoolgirl or school age mother in learning; this means keeping the student on the school roll, even if she may not be able to attend for a period of time. A pupil who becomes pregnant is entitled to up to 18 calendar weeks of authorised absence to cover the time immediately before and after the birth. Gloucestershire Hospital Education Service (GHES) can offer 1:1 tuition in this maternity leave period for school-aged mothers to allow continuity of education and to assist with reintegration.

A planning meeting should be convened in school in order to develop a pre and post-natal education plan with the support of other agencies. If the girl is looked after, a LAC representative should also be invited.

The purpose of the meeting is to identify the full picture of the pupil's needs and to plan support and reintegration within the Common Assessment Framework. A lead professional will be established.

GHER also encourages all pregnant school girls to access the YMTB (Young Mums To Be) course during their pregnancy. This course is funded by the GHER.

Out of school provision may be useful for some disengaged young students. Research carried out by the Universities of Bristol and Newcastle found clear evidence that those young women who, prior to pregnancy, had been excluded or had poor attendance patterns, benefited a great deal from attending specialist units and education other than mainstream school provision (Dawson & Hosie, 2005). It is important that different forms of provision are available.

Childcare

Evidence suggests that reintegration into education is more successful if the return is phased and the childcare is as close as possible to where the education is provided or with trusted relatives. Childcare arrangements should form part of the education planning and review process.

Funding is available through the "Care to Learn" scheme and applications will need the support of the school and GHER Support Workers can support the completion of the application form. The scheme requires the childcare to be provided by an Ofsted registered child carer for reasons of safety and quality. This could include a friend or relative of the pupil provided they become (or are already) Ofsted registered as a childminder or approved carer. Ofsted registered childminders intending to care for blood relatives through the 'Care to Learn' scheme must have a minimum of two other children on their books.

Learners under 20 years can access the 'Care to Learn' grant. This provides a sum to meet childcare and transport costs to and from a childcare provider.

Supporting Young Parents

Some pupils will have had challenging behaviour before the pregnancy. If so, it may be important to prepare for any known trigger points. However, because parenthood often motivates young people to achieve more educationally for the sake of the future of their child previous problems may be reduced.

Schools should be supportive of both parents, acknowledging the additional needs that school age fathers and fathers-to-be may have. Becoming a father is not a reason for exclusion. In some cases both partners may be attending the same school; this may cause difficulties if the relationship has ended and the pupil has rejected his responsibilities or been excluded from his parenting role. In some circumstances schools may consider it necessary to help a boy to have access to a counsellor or help from other agencies.

It is important to allow flexibility for the young parent/s, where appropriate, to attend appointments and attendance at young parents support groups as these are important in developing good parenting skills and ensuring the good health of the baby.

Useful Information and Contacts:

Local Authority Officer responsible for school aged parents

Mary Holland
Head of Gloucestershire Hospital Education Service (GHES)
Gloucestershire County Council
mary.holland@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Telephone: 01242 532363

CARETOLEARN (Childcare for young learners)

Help with childcare costs for young parents aged under 20
www.direct.gov.uk/caretolearn
Telephone: 0800 121 8989

Education Welfare Service (EWS)

Jackie Ellis
Head of Education Welfare Service
jackie.ellis@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Telephone: 01452 328014

Health Services:

Pregnancy Advisory Clinic

Telephone: 0845 4226970

Sexual Health Gloucester

Telephone: 0845 4226201

Sexual Health Cheltenham

Telephone: 0845 4222374

Antenatal Clinics Gloucester

Telephone: 0845 4226103

Antenatal Clinics Cheltenham

Telephone: 0845 4222346

Young and Pregnant (Gloucester)

A Sure Start Initiated drop in for young parents

Telephone: 07811404784

Young Mums To Be (YMTB)

Training programme at Prospect Training, Gloucester

Telephone: 01452 332996

Social Services helpdesk

Telephone: 01452 426565