

# Guidance on the education of school age parents

**Secondary school headteachers and teachers**  
**Local Education Authorities**

Status: Recommended

Action: None

Date of issue: 12/10/2001

Ref: DfES/0629/2001

## **Related documents**

- Social Inclusion: Pupil Support Circulars 10/99 and 11/99
- Sex and Relationship Education Guidance
- Social Exclusion Unit report on Teenage Pregnancy
- Connexions and Teenage Pregnancy
- Ofsted report 'Sex and Relationships Education in Schools' available in Autumn 2001

## **Superseded documents**

None

## **Overview**

How to support pregnant pupils in school. Pregnancy is not a reason for exclusion from school.

## **Action required**

None

## **Further information**

**School** Inclusion Division

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## Introduction

1.1 Britain has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Western Europe. The Government aims to:

- halve the rate of teenage conceptions among under 18s by 2010; and
- get more teenage parents into education, training and employment, to reduce their risk of long term social exclusion.

1.2 This guidance is part of the drive to achieve the second of these aims. It provides information for schools and Local Education Authorities (LEAs) when they discover that a girl of compulsory school age is pregnant and advice on supporting young fathers and young fathers-to-be. It is not about reducing conception rates or sex education, which is covered in the Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) guidance.

1.3 This guidance builds on paragraphs 4.2-4.4 of DfEE Circular 11 /99 which covers teenage parents amongst groups of pupils who need particular help. Case studies are available in the Ofsted publication 'Sex and Relationships Education in Schools' due to be issued in Autumn 2001. This will be available from [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

## Working with other agencies

### Links with local teenage pregnancy strategy

2.1 All LEAs should maintain links with the teenage pregnancy coordinator in their area who has been jointly appointed by their Health and Local Authorities. In addition to supporting improvements in SRE, LEAs have an important role in contributing to the local teenage pregnancy strategy through supporting the education of pregnant girls and school age parents, and supplying progress reports and data to the teenage pregnancy coordinator. The coordinator has up to date information on local organisations and agencies that can provide support and advice to pregnant schoolgirls and school age parents. The teenage pregnancy coordinator will produce a directory of these organisations by March 2002, which will also be held by Healthy Schools coordinators and school nurses. The local Healthy Schools Programme provides support to schools on sexual health issues in the context of Personal Social Health Education (PSHE). In areas where there is a Sure Start Plus Pilot programme, a Sure Start Plus personal adviser will co-ordinate tailored support packages for teenage parents. Many LEAs employ reintegration officers to help pupils to get back to education. It is particularly important that these officers link effectively to the local strategy and with the designated member of school staff.

### Connexions

3.1 The Connexions Service is being introduced to provide integrated information, advice, guidance, support and access to personal development opportunities for all 13 -19 year olds in England. It aims to help young people engage in learning, achieve their full potential and make a smooth transition to adult life. Connexions will work with existing services and build on work already taking place, with the overall aim of providing the best support for the young person whilst ensuring that Connexions does not duplicate the work of other services. The Connexions Service will work more intensively with teenage parents, helping them to access the support they need to reach their full potential.

3.2 It is important that strategic links are developed between Connexions and those involved in the local teenage pregnancy strategy, including teenage pregnancy coordinators and reintegration officers and through protocol agreements and representation on the Connexions Local Management Committees, in addition to individual Teenage Pregnancy Workers and Connexions Personal Advisers. Connexions Partnerships will need to be aware of the content of and involved in the further development of local teenage pregnancy strategies.

3.3 In areas with high rates of teenage pregnancy there may be a number of other agencies working with teenage parents, and where appropriate, other workers may take on the lead Personal Adviser role. Where there is a Sure Start Plus Adviser in the area, it will usually be appropriate for them to take on the role of the Connexions personal adviser. Connexions Partnerships outside the Sure Start Plus pilot areas will need to consider how they can provide specialist advice to pregnant teenagers and teenage parents to ensure that they remain engaged in learning and that their risk of social exclusion is minimised.

3.4 Guidance on Connexions and those involved in the local teenage pregnancy strategy is being issued in September 2001, to help them plan together how to most effectively structure their work in relation to one another. Further information on Connexions is available on the website at [www.cnnnPxinns.anvijk](http://www.cnnnPxinns.anvijk)

## Responsibilities of the Local Education Authority

### Duties

#### Statutory duties

4.1 LEAs have a duty to provide suitable education for all pupils for whom they are responsible, including pupils of compulsory school age who become parents. 'Suitable education' must meet the particular needs of the pupil. This means that LEAs should not impose one policy for all but should consult the pupil, their parents or carers and their school to secure a package which is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and individual needs, including any special educational needs they may have.

#### Pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN)

5.1 Pupils with statements who become pregnant should be treated in the same way as other girls under the LEA's teenage pregnancy strategy. However, the LEA may need to review the statement under section 328 of the Education Act 1996 and The Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations 2001 in order to ensure, for example, that the placement named and the non-educational provision set out in the statement remain appropriate. Guidance is given on reviewing statements in the SEN Code of Practice.

#### Nominated official for teenage pregnancy

6.1 An LEA officer, normally a member of the Education Welfare Service, should be nominated to be responsible for this group. This will be the specialist reintegration officer in areas that have them.

#### Data collection

7.1 Since September 1999, all LEAs have a responsibility to collect data on participation and achievement of all pupils out of school (Circular 11 /99). This includes any teenage parents who are out of school. It is also good practice for LEAs to collect separate data on the attainment of those teenage parents attending school. Their transition to further education or employment should also be monitored and recorded. For monitoring purposes, this data should be broken down by ethnic background. An example database is available from the Department for Education and Skills. All data must be collected and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Systems should be designed to complement datasets required by Connexions Partnerships.

#### Provision

##### Education out of school

8.1 LEAs have a duty to provide 'suitable' education to pupils who are unable to attend school. 'Suitable' education is described in law as suitable to the age ability, aptitude and any SEN the child may have. For pregnant teenagers or those who are mothers, the young woman's school would normally be expected to oversee her education, including setting and marking work while she is away. The LEA may find a place at a pupil referral unit (PRU) or other educational centre during periods of absence from school, or choose to provide home tuition. Decisions should be taken in the light of individual needs. If the young woman is off school with a pregnancy related illness, DfEE Circular 10/94 on the education of sick children applies. Reintegration officers, the Connexions Service and Sure Start Plus personal advisers will provide a route for re-engaging young mothers who have dropped out of the system altogether.

## Pupil Referral Units

9.1 Links with mainstream school should be maintained for pupils in PRUs. Pregnant school girls and school age mothers will remain on the roll of their mainstream school, unless they have been excluded for other reasons (Circular 10/99). The aim should be reintegration where possible, and mainstream schools and PRUs should work together to achieve this. In circumstances where the girl has become pregnant in Year 11, time may not allow for reintegration into mainstream. In that case the aim should be to encourage the young woman to consider further education or other suitable post-16 provision. The Connexions Service should provide personal support through this process. (See Circular 11/99, Chapter 6 for more detail on PRUs and the Connexions guidance on Teenage Pregnancy). The Government is committed to raising standards in PRUs. It will work with PRUs, LEAs and Ofsted to ensure that young people in PRUs have tailor made provision which enables them to catch up. Some PRUs specialise in the education of school age mothers and these units usually have childcare facilities on-site.

10.1 An LEA should normally arrange continuing education for a young person over compulsory school age, but under 18 where:

- a young person is a "year behind" in their schooling, so that when they are over compulsory school age they still need to study for a further year to complete examination courses; and
- a student has shown a high-level commitment prior to the point when they could no longer attend school.

## Childcare

11.1 Lack of appropriate or affordable childcare provision can prove to be a significant barrier to participation in education. The reintegration officer, Connexions adviser and Sure Start Plus personal adviser can provide advice to the young woman, young father or young father-to-be about accessing childcare. Only where other family members are unable to help with childcare will the teenage parents be eligible for financial help with childcare. Families where both grandparents are working, or where a lone grandparent works, may be eligible for Working Families' Tax Credit for the childcare of their grandchild whilst they are claiming child benefit for that child. Further information about Working Families' Tax Credit is available by calling 0845 609 5000.

11.2 Additional childcare help may be available from the Local Authority. This will be determined by the policy and priorities of the Local Authority, particularly in respect of children in need (section 17, Children Act, 1989). 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'. This will need to be assessed individually by Social Services Departments. Services can be provided if they are essential to safeguard and promote the welfare of mother or baby or if one of them is disabled. Local authorities are required to provide appropriate day care for 'children in need' in their area (section 18, Children Act, 1989).

11.3 Local Authorities may help to arrange or to fund such provision, or both. For more information about local childcare provision please get in touch with your local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership. Teenage pregnancy coordinators also have access to the Teenage Pregnancy Unit's website which contains information, including initiatives providing funds for childcare.

## Home-School transport for pregnant teenagers

12.1 There is evidence to suggest that help with transport for this group has a positive impact on attendance. LEAs must provide free transport if they consider it necessary to enable a pupil to attend school, and they may help other pupils with fares. LEAs must also publish annually their policy on free and assisted transport. LEAs have considerable scope to decide when transport is necessary. Free transport is always necessary for a pupil of compulsory school age who attends the nearest suitable school if it is beyond walking distance. Where no statutory provision applies, it would be good practice for authorities to provide assistance with transport in circumstances where, for example, a General Practitioner certifies that the pupil's stage of pregnancy is such that they are no longer able to walk to school.

## Responsibilities of schools

13.1 Circular 10/99 makes clear that pregnancy is not a reason for exclusion from school. Health and safety should not be used as a reason to prevent a pregnant pupil attending school. The school's aim should be to keep the pregnant pupil or school age mother in learning. This means keeping the pupil on the school roll, even if she may not be able to attend for a period of time; keeping up to date with her progress and working with the LEA looking for a suitable time to re-integrate her into the school. If, exceptionally, a headteacher considers that the school is no longer a suitable environment for the education of a pregnant pupil or school age mother, the pupil, her parents, the LEA and the pupil's Connexions or Sure Start Plus personal adviser (if she has one) should be involved in deciding the most suitable provision for that young person.

13.2 It is not unusual for a young woman to become more motivated about her education as a result of pregnancy and a desire to plan for the future. As set out in paragraph 7 of this guidance it is good practice for schools to share data with their LEAs on the achievement of pregnant pupils and school age mothers. Their transition to further education or employment should also be monitored and recorded. Ideally, this data should be broken down by ethnic background for monitoring purposes. For ease of communication between agencies the format in which this data is collected should complement as far as possible the data sets required by the local Connexions Service.

### If the school becomes aware that a pupil is pregnant

14.1 The Department's guidance on Sex and Relationship Education states that schools should have a clear and explicit confidentiality policy. The school policy should be drawn up in consultation with parents and should reflect the views of teachers, parents and the needs of the school community. The policy must be kept up to date and be available for inspection including to parents. The Healthy Schools Programme will help governing bodies and head teachers develop a policy according to these guidelines. Teachers should ensure that they act consistently with that policy. 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. Teachers should seek consent for any disclosure and should make clear that they cannot offer or guarantee pupils unconditional confidentiality. A member of staff who finds out that a pupil is pregnant should 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. In Sure Start Plus areas, the young woman should be given contact details of the Sure Start Plus personal adviser. Information about services can be found in the local directory of services available from the local teenage pregnancy coordinator. A young woman who is considering adoption or has decided not to continue with the pregnancy or who has already had a termination should also be offered access to relevant support services.

14.2 In cases where a pupil has decided to continue with her pregnancy, the pupil should be advised that the headteacher and nominated LEA officer will need to be informed so that arrangements can be made for her continuing education. The headteacher should respect the young woman's wishes on confidentiality, in line with the school policy. A member of school staff should assist the young woman and take responsibility for her continuing education. The headteacher should make sure that the pregnancy is dealt with sensitively by teachers and pupils within the school. The nominated member of staff is not obliged to tell the pregnant pupil's parents or carers unless required to do so by school policy, but they should take steps to encourage the young woman to talk to her parents or carers. They should make sure the pregnant pupil has access to the appropriate local Health or Social Services. In Sure Start Plus areas, the young woman should be given contact details of the Sure Start Plus personal adviser.

14.3 In the case of young women under 16, if a teacher believes there is a child protection issue to be addressed, they should liaise with the schools "designated teacher for child protection" (as set out in DfEE circular 10/95). Teachers should make clear that they can not guarantee unconditional confidentiality and that if confidentiality has to be broken, the pupil will be informed first.

14.4 The school should ensure that the young woman continues learning as long as possible up until the birth by exploring all opportunities for curriculum support available within the LEA's arrangements for education out of school. There may be times when the pregnant girl is unable to attend school for health reasons, but would still be able to study. In these circumstances the school should provide work for the girl to do at home. The school should try to maintain continuity of learning when the young woman is absent for the birth, especially for those studying for academic awards. It may be appropriate for the headteacher to use their discretion to disapply the National Curriculum in order for the young woman to maintain progress in her core subjects. (See Qualification and Curriculum Authority publication 'Flexibility in the National Curriculum' for more details.)

14.5 A pupil who becomes pregnant is entitled to no more than 18 calendar weeks' authorised absence to cover the time immediately before and after the birth of the child. Should the pupil fail to return within this period, she should continue to have access to support from the school, LEA and Connexions personal adviser to help and encourage her return to education when ready. If health allows, schools should encourage pupils to return to education with the minimum interruption. After the maximum length of authorised absence, the school should follow the guidance on absence set out in Circulars 10/99 and 11/99. Absence for ante-natal classes, and if the baby is ill, should be classified as 'authorised'.

14.6 Any problems of bullying should be addressed in the normal manner in line with the school's discipline policy (see the DfEE bullying pack 'Bullying: don't suffer in silence', reference 0064/2000 for more information).

14.7 There is no evidence that keeping a pregnant girl or school age mother in school will encourage others to become pregnant. Effective personal, social and health education (PSHE) can alert teenagers to the risks and realities of early parenthood and can be used to encourage understanding of young parents' situation amongst the other pupils, taking care not to reinforce negative stereotypes.

14.8 If the school finds out, usually from the Education Welfare Service, that a girl who is not attending school is pregnant, the school should arrange a meeting with the girl, her parents or carers and the LEA (reintegration officer) to discuss how her educational needs are to be met.

14.9 If a young woman in public care becomes pregnant, the designated teacher for young people in public care should be involved in discussions and review of the care plan for the young person to ensure that her educational needs are considered alongside her other needs. This is particularly important in avoiding disruptions when studying for academic awards.

14.10 As with any pupil who has spent time out of school, a school age mother who has done so should have an individual reintegration plan and panel. (See Chapter 5 of Circular 11 /99 for more details on reintegration.)

14.11 Schools should be supportive of both parents in their responsibilities for caring for their child.

#### School age Fathers

15.1 Schools should acknowledge the additional needs that school age fathers and fathers-to-be may have. If a member of staff finds out that a pupil is a father or a father-to-be they should follow the same procedure as when they find out a girl is pregnant. If the school thinks it appropriate, they should consider what flexibility they can offer to the timetable and curriculum. Schools may consider it necessary to help a boy to have access to a counsellor in some circumstances or help from other agencies such as Connexions.

Sure Start Plus personal advisers will also support teenage fathers, further information is available from [www.surestart.gov.uk/infobank/guidance](http://www.surestart.gov.uk/infobank/guidance).

## Legal framework

### Role of LEAs

16.1 LEAs have no specific statutory powers and/or duties relating to the education of teenage parents over and above those they already owe to children of compulsory school age. These are set out below. All references are to the Education Act 1996 unless otherwise indicated.

### Duties

16.2 LEAs have a general duty to contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community by securing that efficient education is available to meet the needs of the population in their area (see section 13). In exercising their various powers and duties under the Education Acts they are to have regard for the general principle that, if to do so is compatible with efficient instruction and training, and not unreasonably expensive, pupils are to be educated in accordance with their parents' wishes (see section 9).

16.3 Section 14 requires LEAs to secure that sufficient schools providing appropriate primary and secondary education are available for all pupils in their area. However, under section 19 every LEA is required to provide suitable education, whether at school or otherwise, for children of compulsory school age who may not receive suitable education unless arrangements are made for them, either because they are ill or have been excluded from school or are unable to attend school for some other reason (which might include pregnancy).

16.4 'Suitable education' is defined by section 19(6) as efficient education suitable to the age, ability, aptitude and to any special educational needs the child or young person may have. It is for LEAs to decide what is suitable, after consultation with a particular child's parents, in accordance with their own policies and having regard to this guidance. However, what constitutes a 'suitable education' in each case is to be determined purely by educational considerations and not by reference to the resources available to the LEA (see *R v East Sussex County Council, ex p Tandy* [1998 EL R 251]). LEAs cannot decide not to arrange any education, or to make arrangements which do not provide suitable education for that child.

16.5 When a girl is dual registered in a PRU and a school, the school cannot take her off the school roll without the permission of the LEA (Education Regulations, 1995).

16.6 LEAs do not have any specific statutory powers in relation to pregnant girls or young mothers. However, in fulfilling their statutory obligations under section 13 and 19 they have powers which can be used to provide support to pregnant schoolgirls and teenage mothers. DfES recommend that LEAs work together with social services and schools to provide support for the mother, both during pregnancy and after the baby is born.

16.7 Under section 19(4) LEAs have powers to arrange provision otherwise than at school for "young persons", defined in section 579(1) as a person over compulsory school age but under the age of 18. These can be used in support of the education of pregnant girls and teenage mothers between the ages of 16 and 18.

### Parental duties

16.8 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 LEA.