



**supporting students who are
pregnant and those who are parents
within our education system**

Guidelines for Best Practice



foreword

I am delighted to welcome the 'Guidelines for Best Practice in Supporting Students who are Pregnant and those who are Parents within our Education System'. Teen pregnancy and parenthood can with effective support lead to positive outcomes for the parent and child. The education system is one of the agencies well placed to promote this aspect of social inclusion. Teenage pregnancy and parenthood has been identified as an important social, health and education issue.

This document provides a working template for schools/centres of education to develop guidelines for best practice around the needs of these students and explores how schools/centres of education might best address these issues.

The Parent Support Programme Limerick, based in Limerick Social Services Centre, established a pilot programme, the Teen Parents Support Programme, to support young parents and pregnant teenagers. The Department of Health and Children and the Department of Education and Science funded this programme. It was one of three national programmes. During the pilot phase the need to develop guidelines to schools/support centres of education was identified. It was one of three national programmes which have since been mainstreamed by the Department of Health and Children.

An interagency working group was established with key partners including representatives from schools/centres of education in Limerick City and Limerick County, Health Promotion Department, Community Development Department (HSE, Mid-Western Area) and Limerick County VEC to draft an initial discussion document and for on-going support for relevant parties.

An external consultant was employed to facilitate a consultative process with key stakeholders including school-based teenagers, pregnant teenagers, young parents, parents and staff across a sample of schools/centres of education throughout Limerick city and county, and agencies who work directly with pregnant teenagers and young parents.

The Parent Support Programme Limerick will continue to support and address the needs of all young parents and it looks forward to further development of policies and services to support young parents and pregnant teenagers.

Phyllis Crowe,
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using these guidelines

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1.1 purpose of the guidelines

the purpose of the guidelines are:

To enable schools/ centres of education to put in place supports aimed at ensuring that students who become pregnant or who are parents are supported to continue in education¹.

The document is presented as a set of guidelines rather than a policy document. Each school/centre of education may find it useful to use these guidelines in the development of a policy in relation to these issues. *(Please refer to Appendix 3).*

specifically the guidelines will enable schools/centres of education to:

- Respond to a disclosure of pregnancy
- Identify and respond to the individual needs of students who are pregnant and those who are parents in the school/centre of education setting
- Support the student for the duration of their pregnancy and their return to education following the birth of their baby
- Ensure that health and safety matters relating to a pregnancy are met.

these guidelines will also:

- Ensure that each student who is pregnant is aware of the range of supports available to them
- Provide a recommended sample of a student care plan, which will set out clearly the roles and responsibilities of the school/centre of education and student
- Outline how a framework to support students is developed whereby partnership is promoted between the school/centre of education, the student and their parents. This is endorsed in legislation under the Education Act 1998
- Raise the awareness of those in education on the necessity to both sustain an environment where student care is paramount and whereby a student who is pregnant will feel able to disclose their pregnancy
- Enable the school/centre of education to respond in a focussed and planned way to the range of needs that emerge throughout the pregnancy
- Recommend the development of a policy on supporting students who are pregnant or parents. (Appendix 3).

¹ For the purpose of these guidelines the student / young parent will be referred to as **her** throughout this document.



1.2 core principles underpinning the guidelines

The vulnerability of a student who is pregnant needs to be kept to the fore at all times. There may be a number of issues in relation to disclosure, health issues and choices. Confidentiality is about managing sensitive information that arises in a trusting relationship and doing so in a manner that is respectful, professional and trustful.

confidentiality

- All staff should treat in confidence information about students including: name, address, biographical details and other descriptions of the individuals life and circumstances which might result in identification of the student member except as outlined hereunder where such matters should be discussed with the Principal/ Co-ordinator:
 - to protect the interests of the student in particular if there is a potential risk to health and safety such as: pregnancy, students' mental wellbeing etc.
 - any disclosure or suspicion of a child protection nature
 - to protect the interests of society
 - to safeguard the welfare of another individual.
- Specifically, a staff member should always respect the nature of a relationship occasioned by the sharing with them by a student of personal information.
- It is good practice to inform and / or seek the consent of a student to disclose personal information to a third party.
- The personal circumstance of any student should be discussed among other staff only on a 'need to know' basis.
- Access to personal information with regard to students should be available to designated personnel only.

Staff should always show respect for the interests and welfare of students and therefore the personal circumstance of a student must never become the subject of conversation between any other persons in the school/centre of education. Conversations of this kind do not include conferring with or reporting to a line manager nor to dissemination to a colleague, on a need to know basis, of information relating to the personal circumstance of a student, in the interests of that student.

other core principles underpinning these guidelines

- **Health and Well-being**

The health and well-being of each student is of paramount consideration to any school/centre of education in delivering an inclusive and integrated system of education.

- **Equity and Access**

1. Access to education will at all times remain inclusive and anti-discriminatory
2. These guidelines promote the right to the continued education and support of students who are pregnant and students who are parents within the education system



3. That schools/centres of education are committed to the elimination of any form of discrimination or harassment, which may arise for any student who is pregnant or a student who is a parent while in education
4. Each student is entitled to be treated in a consistent, fair and non-judgemental way.

- **Partnership**

1. Partnership between school/centre of education, home/family, community/statutory agencies and voluntary bodies is central to supporting a student in this context
2. Respect and support from within the education system for those who volunteer to work with these students.





responding to a disclosure of student pregnancy

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2.1 responding to a disclosure

The following guidelines aim to ensure that in the event of a disclosure of a pregnancy that the disclosure is handled in a manner, which is respectful, sensitive and at all times is supportive of the students well-being. Students should feel safe and comfortable in coming forward to make disclosures. A disclosure of pregnancy may come from the student themselves, her partner (who may also be a student), parents or a third party.

it is important to consider the following when a disclosure is made

- The initial disclosure may be a partial disclosure or a series of indirect questions about pregnancy which is often to gauge the reaction of the staff member to the fact that the student may be pregnant
- The student may be experiencing a wide range of emotions in response to the pregnancy which can often be conflicting and traumatic and include;
 - fear, uncertainty with regard to what is involved, guilt, blame, embarrassment
 - confusion and anxiety while awaiting a reaction from the person to whom the disclosure is being made
 - fear of consequence from the disclosure particularly if the parent/ carer is unaware of the pregnancy
 - stigma resulting from the perceived reaction from the staff, other students and the community generally.
- The student will most likely have deliberately chosen the person whom they wish to disclose to because of their sense of trust in the person
- All disclosures of pregnancy or suspected pregnancy should be treated seriously in an informed, sensitive and professional manner
- It is important to observe what is said and the behaviour of the student as the disclosure is being made, noting any signs of anxiety, stress, fear etc
- In the event that a disclosure occurs when the teacher is otherwise occupied, finding the space, including physical space, to stop and listen is important
- Allow the student to talk without prompting, do not rush the student
- Maintain a calm atmosphere throughout this time
- Avoid questions that provide a yes or no answer as these may curtail the spontaneous nature of the disclosure
- Be honest and do not promise what you cannot deliver
- Check with the student how she/he is at the moment both psychologically and health wise
- Inform the student about the level of assistance, which the school/ centre of education and external agencies, can provide
- Agree the next steps with the student in the process, in particular explore if parents/ guardians are aware of the pregnancy and how best to manage this
- Staff cannot make a promise to keep a disclosure of pregnancy a secret, however in the event that it is necessary to inform another person eg. a parent or the principal, this must be managed in a sensitive transparent way with the student concerned. (Please refer to the following paragraph 2.2 for specific guidelines on this matter)



- Should the student disclose or if it is suspected that the pregnancy occurred as a result of child abuse, the Principal/ Designated Child Protection teacher must be informed immediately and the school/centre of education child protection policy implemented in line with the Children First Guidelines and Department of Education Guidelines.

2.2 working with parents/carers of student concerned

In the spirit of working in partnership with parents/carers and in safeguarding the health and safety of a student, the school/centre of education has a responsibility to ensure that if parents are unaware of the pregnancy that they are informed about the pregnancy at the earliest possible convenience.

In order to ensure the best outcome for the student if a disclosure/ suspicion of pregnancy has emerged the following points should be borne in mind:

- Be sensitive to the rights, needs and concerns of parents/carers
- Good practice suggests, in order to ensure an ongoing working relationship with the parent/carer, open, honest and non-judgemental communication from the start is essential
- As an initial step it is important to work with the student on a one-to-one basis to explain why the parents/carers need to know particularly from a health perspective and to enable the student to tell them herself at home
- When it is deemed appropriate that parents/carers need to be informed and if the student remains unable to inform the parents/carers on her own, the key support person and the principal could set up a meeting with the parents/carers in consultation with the student and support the student when telling her parents/carers herself
- If the student remains unable or refuses to inform the parents/carers, it is important that she is informed that the school/centre of education is obliged to do so in her best interests, unless doing so is likely to endanger the student in any way. In the event that such a potential risk has been identified the school/centre of education will need to determine the nature and extent of the risk and if necessary liaise with colleagues in the local Health Service Executive without delay to agree on an appropriate plan of action
- If no such risk is identified the principal/ key support person will set up a meeting with the parents/carers and the student to inform them about the pregnancy, remaining at all times sensitive to the potential stresses at this time. It is important that the school/centre of education offer support to the student and the parents/carers and link them to other support services as required. (Please refer to Appendix 1 for names of local agencies)
- The school/centre of education should reassure the parents/carers and the student of their commitment to support the student to remain in school/centre of education and partake in school life
- A set of subsequent meetings to be arranged to provide ongoing support and information with both the parents/carers and the student. During these meetings the parents/carers should be informed of the role the school/centre of education will now play including the development of a care plan in partnership with the parents/carers, student and other agencies.



2.3 fatherhood

young men who are expectant parents or parents within our education system

'All too often young fathers, simply because of their age fade away into the background. They tend to be an 'invisible' group, receiving little encouragement or acknowledgement by others. Society often sees young fathers in a negative light; they feel undervalued, disregarded, excluded (Parents in Partnership Infant Network Website <http://www.pippin.org.uk>)'

The needs of young men who are expectant parents or are parents within our education system are quite often similar to those of young women. They too may feel isolated and alone with a different set of responsibilities than that of their peers who are not parents. For those who are no longer in a relationship with the child's mother and are not their child's main carer this can be a very lonely time. Many feel guilty about not being able to support the mother and child properly, emotionally and financially. A number of barriers have been identified as to why young fathers are not more involved in their children's upbringing, namely inadequate housing, low income and resistance from the mother or mother's family.

It is recommended that schools/centres of education acknowledge young men who are expectant parents or are parents within our education system and with the assistance of these guidelines put in place supports aimed at ensuring that they are supported to continue their education and encouraged to play an active role in the parenting of their children.





guidelines for support during pregnancy

3.1 student care plan

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guidelines for support during pregnancy

In order to create the best conditions to support the student throughout their pregnancy and to provide the necessary level of support to the student good practice would suggest that a care plan be developed in partnership with the student, parent/carer and any relevant external agency.

3.1 student care plan

It is recommended that a care plan should be developed to meet the individual needs of the student which will address: *support during pregnancy, health and safety matters, expectations of the school/centre of education with regard to the performance of the student and address the issue of continuing in education following the birth.* All aspects of this plan should be developed in consultation with the student concerned. (Please refer to Appendix 2 for a sample template of the plan).

Maintaining the balance between supporting the student and carrying out its business in a normal way is crucial for the school/centre of education. This may involve discussing with the student and parents/carers what is acceptable behaviour and norms for the student during pregnancy and after the birth. This discussion should take account of the needs of the student, teachers and other students.

It may be necessary to agree with the student any parameters on discussion of the pregnancy with their peers. Agreement on how to address issues such as non-attendance or time keeping will need to be addressed in the student care plan.

The care plan should address the following issues:

- a. Role and responsibilities of staff**
- b. Health and safety**
- c. Academic considerations**
- d. Liaising with external agencies**
- e. Demographic considerations**



a role and responsibilities of staff

- A school/centre of education may decide that it is necessary to designate a member of staff to act as a key support person to work with the student throughout the pregnancy and after the birth. The individual should be student centred and have a specific interest in such matters as pastoral care and have shown particular skills in the area of student support
- The key support person is not expected to have expertise with regard to counselling a student who is pregnant on the outcomes of that pregnancy and options open to her at that time
- The support person/teacher would act on behalf of the school/centre of education as a liaison with the student and the parents/carers in addressing issues raised by the pregnancy for both the student, the school/centre of education or other agencies as required
- The key support person in collaboration with the student and his/her parents/carers would design a care plan for the care of the student while attending school/centre of education
- The care plan will involve the parents/carers and the student meeting with the assigned staff member at intervals during the pregnancy
- It is recommended that the key support person should meet with the student at regular intervals, at least monthly to monitor and review the plan
- Provision should also be made for additional ad hoc meetings with the student at other times as specific needs arise and to offer whatever support is relevant
- The key support person may also need to attend external meetings with other agencies, which may arise when implementing the plan.

b health and safety

The school/centre of education has a duty of care to ensure that the school/centre of education environment promotes conditions where the health and safety of each student is safeguarded while on the school/centre campus.

In the context of developing a school/centre of education based policy, it is essential that each school/centre of education reviews its Health and Safety policy document in light of pregnancy and parenthood among students. The following issues will need to be addressed in the care plan.

1. A review of access to the school/centre of education buildings and classrooms to ensure that in as far as is reasonable that adjustments are made to facilitate ease of access to locations of study and class
2. The provision of information on health related matters in conjunction with other agencies (the local Health Service Executive, health and safety authority etc) on any potential risks associated with pregnancy and school/centre of education attendance will include:
 - particular contact sports such as PE, team sports
 - Academic school/centre of education based activities, which may involve exposure to any chemicals considered to be hazardous in the event of exposure during pregnancy
 - Any infectious health conditions which may arise in the school/centre of education
 - Physical safety matters such as: potential difficulties regarding the student moving within the environs of the school/centre of education, carrying bags, size of desks, climbing stairs, need for special breaks, access to school/ centre transport/ bus etc
 - Flexibility around the wearing of the school/centre of education uniform to ensure that the student is as comfortable as possible etc.



3. Duration of maternity leave may need to be decided. In employment situations an employee must take at least four weeks before the end of the week her baby is due (as medically certified) and four weeks after the birth and is entitled to a minimum period of eighteen weeks maternity leave. (Maternity Protection Act 1994)
4. The school/centre of education will need to be informed by the student about visits to GPs and to both antenatal and postnatal care
5. An ongoing review of the plan will occur throughout the pregnancy, in particular liaising with other agencies such as local parent support programmes to ensure that emerging needs are met.

c academic considerations

It is recommended that an academic plan to meet the student's requirements be drawn up. This plan would make provision for the following:

- An audit of the curricular expectations for the academic year in particular identifying potential subjects requiring attention in conjunction with the range of needs which may arise throughout the stages of pregnancy and birth ensuring at all times the ongoing inclusion of the student in the school/centre of education activities
- How and when to access extra tuition including home tuition
- Special exam arrangements
- Childcare and counselling considerations.

d liaising with external agencies

- It is recommended that the school/centre of education will work in close liaison with external agencies and act as a source of referral if and when the need arises
- It is recommended that the support person involved with the student would refer the student to appropriate agencies to discuss the options available to her during the pregnancy and post birth. (Please refer to Appendix 1).
- In the event of a miscarriage, still birth or post termination it is important that the school/centre of education will continue to support and care for the student in liaison with other relevant agencies. (Please refer to Appendix 1 for relevant agencies with expertise in pregnancy counselling).

e demographic considerations

When supporting and managing the academic care of students in a rural school/centre of education, authorities should be aware that additional matters might arise for the student who is pregnant such as:

- Consideration may need to be given to the distances students may have to travel to access ante-natal care, which can create regular and significant absences from school/centre of education
- The potential difficulties that travelling long distances to access services in late pregnancy needs to be recognised and in such situations flexibility may be required if students wish to commence maternity leave earlier than expected.





supporting the student after the birth

4.1 supporting the student after the birth

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4.1 supporting the student after the birth

New challenges arise for the student and the school/centre of education in supporting the student after the birth of her child. The student is now a parent and will be coming to terms with her new status and responsibilities. The challenges presented by the birth of the child may cause the student to review her commitment to completing her education. It is important that the support process begun during pregnancy continues.

The following issues may need to be addressed:

- a) Student as a parent within the education system
- b) Continual affirmation of the student as a young person with the same needs as other young people her age
- c) External support structures that will assist the student to continue in education.

a student as a parent within the education system

In consultation with the student, the school/centre of education may need to plan how best to manage the student's return to the school/centre of education post the birth of the baby and her reintegration to the class. The school/centre of education may need to address this in their policy. Practical issues relating to the student's role as a parent may also need to be addressed, such as increased academic support due to maternity leave, facilitating attendance at child health clinics etc.

It is important that the student is given every opportunity to reintegrate into school/centre of education based activities as soon as is reasonably safe to do so. It may be appropriate to await a medical certificate of fitness for reintegration to particular activities such as sports etc.

Given the additional demands that parenting will entail it is important that the school/centre of education adopts a flexible approach with regard to the participation of the student in particular school/centre of education activities and academic demands.

Consideration may also need to be given to the extent to which the student concerned can introduce his/her baby to the school/centre of education or class concerned.

b continued affirmation of the student as a young person with the same needs as young people their age

Encourage the student to be continually engaged in activities with their peers such as sports, field trips, excursions etc. Although their lives have changed, they are still young people with the same needs as their peers.



c external support structures that will assist the student to continue in education

Continued liaison with external agencies is imperative to enable the student to cope with the additional demands both psychological and practical of being a parent. Please refer to the Parent Support Programme Limerick (Appendix 1) for relevant/ additional contact numbers.

d support for students who choose not to return to education

In the event that the student concerned does not return to school/centre of education following the birth of her baby, it is important that the key support person meets with the student subsequently. A meeting should be held to provide her with the opportunity to address any concerns she may have which may act as an impediment to her returning to complete her education.





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useful contacts



student care plan

Student Profile

Name:

Date of Birth :

Address :

Tel Numbers

Home :

Mobile/s :

Parent/Guardian

Name's :

Address :

(If different from above)

Name/s and contact numbers in the event of an emergency

Name/s :

Relationship to student concerned :

Tel Numbers :

Home :

Mobile/s :

School /Centre of education details

Name of school/centre of education :

Academic year :

Class Tutor/ Year Head :

Designated Teacher :



medical profile : during pregnancy

General Practitioner

Name:	
Address :	
Tel Numbers:	
Surgery :	Mobile/s :

Maternity Services/Obstetrician

Name's :
Address :

Name/s and contact numbers in the event of an emergency

Name/s :	
Tel Numbers :	
Surgery :	Hospital :

Relevant Medical Details :

Expected date of delivery : <i>(Medical letter of confirmation to be attached)</i>	
Expected date to commence maternity leave:	
Ante natal care appointment schedule :	

Any additional medical information which may be relevant to the school eg allergies :



health and safety : during pregnancy

The school/centre of education has a duty of care to ensure that the school promotes in as far as is reasonable, an environment where the health and safety of each student is safeguarded while on the school/centre of education campus. The following criteria are not exhaustive and must be read in conjunction with the specific Health and Safety Statement operational within the school/centre of education. The purpose of conducting the following audit is to inform a student who has returned to school/centre of education after the birth of her baby and her parent/carer of any potential hazards which may impact on the health of the student particularly if she is breast-feeding and in so doing to either isolate or remove the potential hazard or to ensure that the student has minimal contact with the hazard at this time.

REVIEW OF CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS AFTER THE BIRTH OF A BABY

Hazard Identification	Audit of Risk	Action/Comment
<p>Physical Agents : <i>Audit and monitor for</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Safe handling of equipment and other products such as carrying bags, woodwork, metalwork, tools etc - Exposure to harmful energies, electricity, radiation, VDU - Adequate Thermal levels - Adequate ventilation and exposure to noise levels <p>Chemical and Biological Agents : <i>Exposure to substances and/or chemicals which may be considered hazardous if breast feeding a baby</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mercury - Chemical agents that may be absorbed through the skin - Lead and lead derivatives - Rubella virus and toxoplasma if not protected by vaccination <p>Other aspects of health and safety which may vary as the pregnancy progresses : <i>Require ongoing monitoring and appropriate response</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Morning sickness - Backache - Varicose veins - Frequent toilet visits - Increasing size and flexibility re-school uniform - Balance if in areas that may be wet/slippy - Comfort: Adequate space for movement - Engagement in sports/PE etc 		

(The above material has been adapted and is sourced from Safety, Health and Welfare at Work-Law in Ireland: A Guide, Raymond Byrne, 2001 pg 240-250)



academic year profile : during pregnancy

An audit of the curricular expectations for the academic year will ensure that any particular areas with specific demands such as exams, practicals, field trips etc can be planned for in advance taking account of additional factors which may arise for a student who is also a parent, in particular adopting flexible arrangements regarding school/centre of education work timeframes and deadlines etc.

SUBJECT AREAS SPECIFYING ANY SCHEDULED ACTIVITIES EG EXAMS, PROJECTS ETC:

Subject	Specific Demands	Action Plan/Comment
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
Extra Curricular Subject		
11.		
12.		
13.		

EXTRA TUITION REQUIREMENTS :

SPECIFIC ACADEMIC/EXAM REQUIREMENTS :



policy development

the policy development process

These guidelines are developed to enable schools/centres of education to initiate a policy framework in consultation with students, staff, parents and other agencies on the management of school/centre aged pregnancy within their own particular location and specific context, ethos etc.

In order to progress this development the following identifies a number of process steps, which may be followed. Good policy process is achieved through:

- Clear communication with all partners
- Openness and transparency
- Inclusiveness
- Proper facilitation to allow full debate (formal and informal)
- Reasonable time frame
- Clearly identifiable feedback mechanism
- Designated person to steer the process.

School/centre of education/ Management will endeavour to ensure that a proactive supportive climate prevails within the school/centre of education by:

- Promoting an atmosphere of openness, honesty and respect in which students, teachers and parents are encouraged to talk openly about concerns generally.
- Promoting student self-esteem in a cross curricular way in particular key values such as:
 - identifying and expressing feelings and emotions
 - being sensitive to and respecting the rights, needs and wishes of others
 - raising awareness on the impact of negative relationships and issues of trust
 - developing skills of sharing, negotiation, co-operation, listening and dealing with conflict
 - enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence
 - identifying a range of trusted adults to share concerns with
 - offering support to students who are pregnant
 - providing time and space for students to explore why discrimination occurs and to take positive steps to control it
 - the development of student centred problem- solving skills.



policy development and implementation

- Step 1** Schools/centres of education management should take responsibility to propose and mandate the development and implementation of the policy.
- Step 2** A draft discussion document should be developed for circulation.
- Step 3** All partners within the schools/centres of education should be consulted by setting up a focus group where the document should be discussed and following consensus should be circulated to a representative for further consultation e.g. Parents Council, Staff, and Students Council etc.
- Step 4** Resources required to develop and implement the policy should be identified as part of the process.
- Step 5** Each schools/centres of education with regard to development and implementation should set an agreed time-scale and plan of action where all partners should share in the responsibility for the development of the policy.
- Step 6** Following a broad consultation process the policy and procedure document should be formally adopted by management and available publicly
- Student care and needs during pregnancy and after the birth
 - Training needs for staff
 - Consulting and supporting parents
 - Including policy in annual induction programme for staff and students.
- Step 7** The policy should be included in the annual induction programmes for staff and students on policy and procedure awareness.
- Step 8** A teacher/ panel of teachers should be assigned to process the development and implementation and act as a support person.
- Step 9** Training requirements for staff should be identified and a corresponding workshop should be provided if required.
- Step 10** The policy should be reviewed and evaluated every three years.

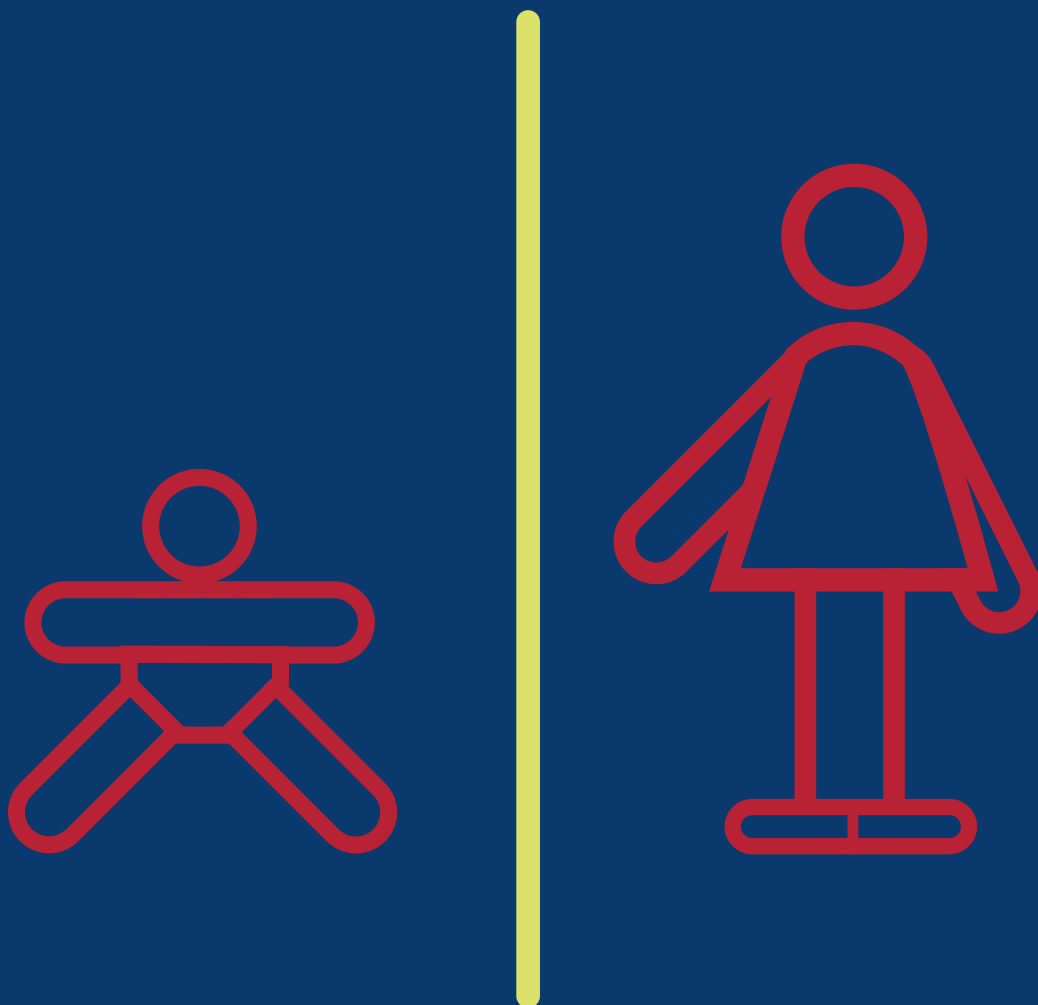


review and evaluation of the policy

An evaluation and regular review of the policy is essential to ensure that all needs stated and emerging are adequately met. This may entail the following:

- Clarify, review and where necessary update the purpose of the policy
- Identify the level of progress towards the achievement of the above
- Assess the effectiveness of methods and approaches used in implementation in particular the care plan and partnership agreements
- Assess the level of participation and partnership in particular the outcome for any student to which the policy is applied, members of the schools/centres of education/community, parents/ guardians and other agencies etc
- In the light of the evaluation to update the policy and implementation process accordingly.





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