

**“As unique individuals, we do our best at work and play for the love of God and others.”**



**St Benedict's Catholic Primary School**

# **Menopause Policy**

**Written by Cheshire East HR January 2023**

**Adopted: March 2023**

**Ratified by Governors May 2023**

**To be reviewed May 2027**

This policy applies to all employees (including agency workers) of St Benedict's Catholic Primary School

It does not form part of any employee's contract of employment, and we may amend it at any time following consultation with the recognised trade unions.

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

We recognise that many employees will experience the menopause and that for some the menopause will have an adverse impact on their working lives. The purpose of this policy is to raise awareness of the menopause, and to encourage open conversations between the Headteacher/Line Managers and employees to seek to provide the right support to manage menopausal symptoms at work.

The policy aims to enable employees experiencing the menopause to continue to be effective in their jobs and help the School/Academy to recruit and retain employees. We are committed to supporting employees who are affected by the menopause and to signpost relevant advice and assistance to anyone who needs it.

It should be noted that people who are non-binary, transgender or intersex may also experience menopausal symptoms. Due to a variety of factors, the experience of the menopause may be different for those among these communities.

St Benedict's Catholic Primary School is committed to providing a flexible, supportive and inclusive working environment for everyone who works here. We have a responsibility to look after your health and wellbeing, and we recognise that people who experience menopausal symptoms may need additional consideration, support and adjustments before (perimenopause), during and after the menopause.

St Benedict's Catholic Primary School also seeks to comply with its legal obligations as set out below:

- The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers. Under the Act, employers are required to do risk assessments under the Management Regulations which should include specific risks to menopausal women if they are employed.
- The Equality Act (2010) prohibits discrimination against people on the grounds of certain 'protected characteristics' including sex, age and disability. Note that conditions linked to the menopause may meet the definition of an 'impairment' under the Equality Act and require reasonable adjustments.

This policy should be read in conjunction with other policies and procedures covering wellbeing, flexible working, leave/time off and absence management. These documents are available via the staff shared area and the website.

## **WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM THE SCHOOL/ACADEMY**

We will:

- Seek to ensure that your mental health and wellbeing is always treated as a priority and ensure that you are supported if you are facing such issues.
- Aim to foster a supportive working environment and create a culture where we are all more comfortable openly talking about the menopause and facilitate discussion about any concerns.
- Listen to you and work proactively to ensure that the right support and adjustments are in place wherever possible so that the workplace does not contribute to making menopausal symptoms worse.
- Ensure regular check-ins are available to review any support and adjustments.
- Provide information about flexible working options or signpost you to the appropriate source for the information.
- Respect and ensure the confidentiality of all information relating to your personal circumstances in line with HR practice and data protection legislation.
- Treat all employees with dignity and respect.

Your Headteacher is key to enabling the School/Academy's commitment to you.

## **WHAT THE SCHOOL EXPECTS OF YOU**

We expect you to:

- Take responsibility for caring for your own health and wellbeing by adopting good health behaviours.
- Seek to understand more about the menopause and become familiar with the terms of this policy, and support colleagues where necessary.
- Inform your Headteacher at an early stage if you are struggling with the perimenopause or menopause (directly or indirectly).
- Seek advice and support from your GP and/or Occupational Health (via management referral) if you need support with menopausal symptoms.

## **WHAT IS THE MENOPAUSE?**

The menopause is a natural transition stage in most lives of those who menstruate where menstrual periods stop. It is experienced usually between the ages of 45 and 55, with the average age being 51 in the UK. The menopause can be experienced earlier than this due to 'early/premature' menopause, or due to surgery or medical treatments.

People will be affected by the menopause in different ways and to different degrees over different periods of time, and menopausal symptoms can often indirectly affect their partners, families and colleagues as well.

We understand that trans and non-binary people may also experience menopausal symptoms and need to be treated with dignity and respect.

## **DEFINITIONS**

### **Perimenopause**

The term perimenopause describes the time leading up to the menopause where hormones can fluctuate significantly and menopausal symptoms are experienced, but periods are still occurring. The average time to be perimenopausal is between four to five years. During this time, periods may become increasingly irregular and can be heavier or lighter in flow. For the purpose of this policy, any reference to the menopause includes the perimenopause.

### **Early or Premature Menopause**

Early or premature menopause happens when periods stop before the age of 45. It can happen naturally or as a side effect of some treatments. This is sometimes called premature ovarian failure or primary ovarian insufficiency. The NHS estimates that 1 in every 100 will experience premature menopause.

### **Medical or Surgical Menopause**

There are some medical circumstances that will create an immediate menopause and/or associated symptoms, whatever the person's age, such as:

- medically induced menopause to shrink fibroids;
- when the ovaries are damaged by specific interventions such as treatment for cancer (radiotherapy and chemotherapy);
- when ovaries are removed as part of a hysterectomy (an operation to remove the womb); or
- when younger people under treatment for conditions such as endometriosis infertility may experience menopausal symptoms.

Surgical and medical treatments as part of an individual's gender transition can also result in menopausal symptoms.

### **Post Menopause**

Post menopause is the term used to describe the period of time after the menopause has occurred, starting when a period has not occurred for 12 consecutive months. The average time for people experiencing symptoms of the menopause is four years from the final period. However, around 1 in 10 experience them for up to 12 years.

## **MENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS**

The severity of symptoms varies significantly, and may be experienced even though menstruation continues, i.e. during the perimenopause. Symptoms of the menopause can manifest both physically and psychologically, and commonly include, but are not limited to:

- Period changes and heavy/light periods
- Hot flushes and night sweats
- Sleep disturbances/difficulty sleeping
- Tiredness, fatigue and low energy
- Mood changes, such as feeling irritable and depressed
- Anxiety and panic attacks
- Brain fog, problems with memory and poor mental focus/concentration
- Urinary problems, such as recurrent urinary tract infections and loss of bladder control
- Heart palpitations – when your heartbeat becomes more noticeable
- Migraines and headaches
- Joint stiffness, aches and pains
- Hair and skin changes
- Dizziness or feeling faint

Each of these symptoms can affect motivation, confidence, comfort, attendance and performance at work. The School/Academy has a duty to provide a safe working environment for employees and therefore commits to ensuring that support and adjustments are available.

Some commentators have referred to the ‘andropause’ in males during their late 40s to early 50s where similar symptoms may be experienced, e.g. mood swings, insomnia and poor concentration, however, lifestyle factors or psychological issues can be responsible for these symptoms (see [NHS website](#)). In these circumstances, you should talk to your Headteacher/Line Manager and/or access the sources of available support outlined in this policy.

## **OPEN CONVERSATIONS**

The School aims to encourage an understanding working environment in which colleagues can have open conversations about the menopause. We are also committed to taking positive action to support employees experiencing the menopause. We recognise that the menopause is a very personal experience, therefore different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed. All

employees should also be aware of the menopause so that they can support those going through it or otherwise affected by it.

If you are affected by the menopause (directly or indirectly) and you think you would benefit from adjustments at work, speak to your Headteacher about your experience and discuss the support you may need to minimise the impact at work. We are aware that you may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed approaching the Headteacher, so you may find it helpful to have an initial discussion with another manager instead. You should also consider talking to your colleagues, so they are in the picture about day-to-day considerations.

Managers should be ready and willing to listen and, wherever possible, respond sympathetically to any requests for adjustments at work. We understand that support can make a difference to how you deal with the menopause, enabling you to continue working well and productively.

All conversations should be treated sensitively, and any information provided – including health information – should be handled confidentially and in accordance with the School's data protection policy.

### **RISK ASSESSMENTS**

We are committed to ensuring the health and safety of all our employees and will consider any aspects of the working environment that may worsen menopausal symptoms. This may include identifying and addressing specific risks to the health and wellbeing of those going through the menopause. Any risk assessment will be undertaken in association with the employee.

### **SUPPORT AND ADJUSTMENTS**

While many who go through the menopause will be able to carry on their working lives as normal, we recognise that you may benefit from adjustments to your working conditions to mitigate the impact of menopause symptoms on your work and help you to remain productive.

If you believe that you would benefit from adjustments or other support, you should speak to your the Headteacher in the first instance. If you feel unable to do so, you should approach another manager instead.

We may discuss with you about a referral to occupational health to seek medical advice to better understand any adjustments and other support that may help alleviate symptoms affecting you at work. You are also encouraged to speak to your GP or a health professional to benefit from additional medical support.

Agreed adjustments identified through discussion, risk assessments and/or advice from occupational health should be recorded and confirmed in writing. All agreed adjustments should be adhered to and regular discussions should be arranged as necessary to review them to seek to ensure that the adjustments continue to support your needs.

Common areas to consider include the temperature of classrooms or other rooms, provision of fans, ventilation, ensuring that windows can be safely opened, fitting blinds to windows and the materials of workwear which is provided. Welfare issues such as access to adequate toilet facilities and drinking water, during and outside break and lunch times, should also be considered. Depending on individual needs and the demands of the School, adjustments such as more frequent rest breaks or changes to work allocation may also need to be considered.

These are examples only and not an exhaustive list of measures; we will actively listen and consider other suggestions. We also recognise that many of these practical changes to the workplace will benefit all staff.

We also recognise that flexibility is key to anyone experiencing the menopause and the School aims to facilitate flexible working wherever possible. The School has a Procedure for Requesting Flexible Working that provides the opportunity to request changes to your contract such as the number of hours worked (e.g. part time) and the times of work (e.g. changes to start and finish times) which will be considered fairly by the School.

The menopause should also be a subject that is discussed openly and supported in the context of other work-related conversations and processes, for example – performance, absence and discipline. It is helpful if you are open and transparent about anything that could affect your performance at work, the reasons for absence and any other mitigating factors, which could include the fact that you are going through the menopause.

## **DATA PROTECTION**

The School processes personal data, including information about your health, in accordance with its data protection policy. Inappropriate access or disclosure of your data constitutes a data breach and should be reported immediately in accordance with the School's data protection policy. It may also constitute a disciplinary offence, which will be dealt with under the School's disciplinary procedure.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION AND SOURCES OF HELP**

Sources of external information and advice are also widely available, please see the following resources and websites:

- [NHS](#) – information about the symptoms and treatment, also includes a video of people describing their experience of the menopause.
- [Daisy Network](#) – provides information and support to people diagnosed with Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI), also known as Premature Menopause.
- [British Menopause Society \(BMS\)](#) – educates, informs and guides Healthcare professionals on the menopause and all aspects of post reproductive health.
- [Women's Health Concern \(WHC\)](#) – is a charitable organisation that provides a confidential, independent service to advise, reassure and educate people of all

ages about their gynaecological and sexual health, wellbeing and lifestyle concerns.

- [Menopause Support](#) – information and advice on the menopause, includes links to several free resources (factsheets, videos and podcasts).
- [The Menopause Exchange](#) – provides independent advice about the menopause, midlife and post-menopausal health; also includes access to a free newsletter.
- [The National Education Union \(NEU\)](#) - advice on working through the menopause, guides and checklists for leaders and school reps.
- [GMB Union](#) - toolkit including factsheets and a video.

## **EQUALITY**

The School is committed to promoting equal opportunities in employment. You (and any job applicants) will receive equal treatment regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partner status, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation or caring responsibility. This means that the policy may need to be adjusted to cater for the specific needs of an individual including the provision of information in alternative formats where necessary.

## **MONITORING AND REVIEW**

The School will monitor this policy to ensure that it is operating fairly, consistently and effectively. The policy will also be reviewed in the light of operating experience and/or changes in legislation.

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Prepared by: Education HR Consultancy

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