



**Children & Education Select Committee
27 March 2014**

Personal Education Plans for Looked After Children

Purpose of the report:

To respond to a request for more information on Personal Education Plans for Looked After Children.

Introduction: Context of the Surrey Virtual School (SVS)

1. Local Authority Virtual Schools are dedicated to improving the educational outcomes for Looked after children (CLA).
2. The Headteacher of the Virtual School has responsibility for monitoring the educational progress of all CLA within their own authority and those placed out of area. CLA may be attending a diverse range of educational provisions.
3. By analysing available data and 'soft' information on educational achievement, the Headteacher (VSH) identifies priorities for improving education provision, both for individual children and for the overall cohort. Working with a range of colleagues in schools, across the local authority and within social care the Virtual School provides support and raises awareness of the additional needs of children in care to ensure the pupils within the school receive the best possible education.
4. The Virtual School Headteacher post is statutory and a key part of SCC's role as corporate parents for children in their care.

Designated Teachers for Children in Care

5. Every school in the country is required to nominate a Designated Teacher for CLA. Their role is to support and advocate for looked after children attending their school, and ensure that all CLA are monitored and tracked as a discrete cohort. They are required to provide an annual report to the Governing Body on the progress of the CLA cohort as well

as issues affecting individual CLA. This should assist governors in their role of supporting the educational progress of children in care.

6. Designated Teachers are the 'field force' of the Virtual School and Virtual School Assistant Headteachers (AHTs) are expected to train and support these staff in their role.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

7. Every CLA has a care plan to ensure the local authority is fulfilling their role as corporate parent. The educational aspect of this plan will be delivered and evidenced through the PEP.
8. The child's Care Plan provides the overarching vehicle for bringing together information from all assessments, including the child's developmental needs. The health and education dimensions of the care plan are populated by the health plan and the PEP. Most children coming into care are already known to children's social care, so core assessments for most should already be current and Care Plan Regulations expect PEPs to be initiated prior to entering care, as part of the care plan process.
9. The PEP is a document which relates to a particular child and sets out their educational targets for educational progress and attainment. It provides a multi-agency framework for how these outcomes will be impacted upon by relevant agencies. Local authorities have a duty to promote the educational achievement of children in care under section 52 of the Children Act 2004 and must ensure all children in care have an effective, robust and up-to-date PEP. Social workers must liaise directly with schools and all other relevant parties to arrange PEP meetings and ensure an up-to-date PEP exists and is being used as part of the care plan. SVS should support partner agencies at all stages of this process.
10. Schools are also accountable for ensuring all children in their care have an up-to-date PEP in place and will be asked about these at the time of any inspection.
11. The PEP is a record of the child's education and training. It should describe what needs to happen for a CLA to help fulfil their potential and reflect (though not necessarily duplicate) any existing education plans such as a statement of special educational needs or an individual education plan. The local authority should work in partnership with the child, their school (especially the Designated Teacher), carers and other professionals to develop and review the PEP in order to make sure it fully reflects the needs of the child, remains up to date and is implemented.
12. The PEP should interrelate with other strands of the care plan, particularly those relating to health, emotional and behavioural development. Surrey's Virtual School takes a lead role in ensuring the

quality of PEPs for its pupils and in training social workers to develop their understanding of progress measures and appropriate, personalised target-setting. This is achieved through auditing completed PEPs and ensuring that training is provided to all professionals involved in the PEP process.

13. PEPs must be reviewed at least twice a year. In the case of emergency placements the PEP should be initiated within ten working days, and for all their PEP should be available for the first statutory review meeting of the care plan (28 days after entry to care or accommodation).
14. Key points of an academic year for the review of PEPs are autumn and spring terms. Following entry into care and an initial PEP, social workers and schools will plan for reviews to take place within these timeframes although individual circumstances will determine this along with other factors such as school holiday periods. This does mean there are a significant proportion of PEP reviews at certain points of the year ie. October/November and March/April where fluctuations in monitoring data are more likely to occur.
15. It is the responsibility of both the assigned Social Worker and the Designated Teacher at the relevant educational provider to ensure the PEP is completed in a timely way and to a good standard. Surrey Virtual School should support all professionals involved in this process.

Issues Identified

16. Ensuring PEPs are completed within the statutory timescales is part of the Care Plan process. Weekly reports on timeliness provide relevant information to support the monitoring of this. Over the last six months as part of the new audit process, senior management action has seen timeliness rates improve from 54.5% in September to 85.5% currently.
17. Ensuring PEPs are of a sufficient quality and demonstrate multi-agency planning in the interests of the young person. An audit process has been developed and undertaken by SVS to ensure that all existing PEPs are of sufficient quality. This applies across the 48 local authorities in which Surrey's CLA currently attend education provision.
18. Ensuring the voice of the young person is represented in the PEP meeting and has as significant an impact as possible on the outcome is a developing theme in our PEPs. Simple questionnaires have been devised for all children and young people to complete, either with the help of an adult, or by themselves.
19. There is a greater likelihood that a looked after child will change education placements. The PEP is the core document which enables continuity of good provision when these moves are unavoidable.

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20. Over the course of an Academic Year the number of pupils (those of statutory school age) in the SVS increases. In recent years, starting with around 450 pupils in September and rising to over 500 by the end of the academic year. Within this period there is also a significant 'turbulence' of pupils. Since September 2013 there have been 133 pupils starting and 72 leaving the school. This creates a challenge in terms of initiating PEPs as well as ensuring every PEP for a child in care is reviewed at least twice a year. These changing circumstances affect completion rates.
 21. The significant turnover of pupils along with factors such as placement moves and school holidays means that a target of 100% of PEPs completed within timescale at any given time is extremely unlikely to be met. However services should aspire to achieving as high a completion rate as possible.

Proposed Actions

22. Relevant managers should continue to ensure that PEPs are prioritised by their teams and that management action is taken when appropriate. This should ensure that PEP completion rates continue to be of a good standard.
23. Surrey Virtual School to continue to audit PEPs for quality and ensure our training offer is effectively communicated to all social workers and designated teachers involved in the PEP process. We currently estimate that approximately 80% of PEPs have been fully audited for quality. We expect this number to increase as the new system becomes fully embedded.
24. Review of the PEP document to ensure the young person is encouraged to represent their views. We now have a section on the PEP to encourage this and will continue to review this based on service user feedback. The new [SVS website](#) can also support with this.

Conclusions:

25. All PEP indicators are improving. Effective systems are in place across the directorate to make further progress against PEP indicators.
26. Continued progress against PEP indicators will improve progress towards overall performance indicators for the education of CLA.

Recommendations:

- For the Committee to endorse the proposed actions and support the work of Children's Services and SVS towards further improving educational outcomes for CLA.

Next steps:

The VSH to present an update on progress towards the end of 2014

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Sources/background papers:

PEP review document on Voice of the Child

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