

The role of the Virtual School in Hillingdon and our expectations of Social Care colleagues



Local authorities have a legal duty to promote the educational achievement of their Looked After Children (LAC), to ensure regular school attendance, and to ensure they have access to the necessary equipment and resources.

While every LAC must be seen as an individual with their own characteristics, abilities and needs, taken as a group they have lower educational outcomes and poorer standards of health and wellbeing than their non-Looked After peers and are less likely to do well in adult life. The quality of care and education children receive while they are Looked After has a major impact on their ability to form secure attachments and to realise their full potential.

The Role of the Virtual School in Hillingdon

Local authorities are charged with ensuring their Virtual School Head (VSH) has the resources, time, training and support they need to discharge their duties effectively. However, each local authority will do this differently. In Hillingdon, we are lucky to have a large team who support the work of the VSH, and we are known as the Virtual School.

Our Virtual School team comprises a variety of education professionals, including qualified teachers, teaching assistants, Education Welfare Officers and some who have experience of Virtual Schools in other local authorities. We all support the VSH in a variety of ways.

Hillingdon Virtual School is able to say that all our statutory school age and post-16 young people have an allocated case worker. The Virtual School Officer (VSO) takes responsibility for arranging, chairing and recording all PEP meetings, which may be different to how other local authorities operate.

The Purpose of the Personal Education Plan (PEP)

In order to promote the educational achievement of all Looked After Children, the VSH will keep an up-to-date record of all of them, no matter where they are placed or what kind of setting they are in. The VSH will also maintain up-to-date information about their attendance, attainment and progress; the same as if they were in a single school.

VSHs are required to track and monitor the individual achievements of each Looked After Child, keeping an account of how they have achieved in the past, how they are currently achieving, how they are predicted to achieve and the targets set for them by their schools.

They will therefore be aware of which children are not achieving according to national expectations or in accordance with how they have achieved in the past.

In Hillingdon, the VS team uses the child's PEP meeting as the main vehicle through which to negotiate with a child's school the best package of support and intervention to support them to make better progress.

Every child deserves to be listened to and the VSH has a duty to promote a culture that considers the child's views in relation to their education. This is particularly important at PEP meetings and the child's views should be recorded in the PEP report.

The views of the child are particularly important when planning their future education or training and should be recorded in their PEP.

Carers, teachers, VSOs and social workers need to encourage every Looked After Child to have high aspirations for themselves, bearing in mind that some may find it difficult to imagine a future.

Hillingdon Virtual School's Commitments:

- **To make sure there is a system to track and monitor the attainment and progress of all Looked After Children:**
 - We will rigorously track and monitor attainment and progress data, including attendance, behaviour and exclusion on a termly basis for all Looked After Children under the care of Hillingdon and ensure appropriate provision is being made within schools both as curricular and extracurricular support, challenging schools where progress is not in line with local and national expectations.
 - We will work in partnership with our schools and other organisations to improve overall attainment of both individuals and cohorts of Looked After Children, by maximising educational opportunities, resources and funding, as well as by providing training and signposting of available services to support specific needs.
- **To ensure all Looked After Children have a robust and effective Personal Education Plan and monitor the use of the Pupil Premium Plus grant:**
 - We will work with our Personal Education Plan (PEP) provider and other relevant professionals to provide support and training to ensure PEPs are of a high quality and to ensure professionals are held to account for the sections for which they have responsibility. We will ensure that PEPs are subject to a rigorous monitoring and evaluation process, with impacts and outcomes that are followed up.
 - We will ensure that Looked After Children are able to access the Pupil Premium Plus grant, where appropriate and monitor the use and impact of these funds on raising educational standards. We will assist schools to explore other sources of additional funding/support where possible.
- **To champion the educational needs of Looked After Children across the authority and those placed out-of-authority:**
 - We will champion the needs of Looked After Children across the authority and spread effective practice, particularly in relation to improving behaviour and attendance, promoting stability of placement and school stability through admissions policies.
 - We will work with others in local authorities and schools to ensure measures are taken to promote positive behaviour, good attendance, and reduce exclusions, which should in turn lead to good progress and improved attainment.
 - We will ensure social workers adequately consider the educational needs of Looked After Children when a child/young person comes into care or when taking decisions about moving placements.

In order to support us to achieve these objectives and to raise outcomes and aspirations for all Looked After Children under the care of Hillingdon, we expect social workers to commit to partnership working and hence they should do the following:

- ✓ Attend the termly PEP meeting and any other meetings deemed appropriate to support the education of all children on their caseload or make arrangements with duty in the case of an emergency.
- ✓ Ensure education is part of their regular dialogue when speaking with or visiting the children and young people on their caseload. This helps the young person to understand that education is a priority for everyone.
- ✓ Ensure they have access to the [eGov Solutions](#) online PEP system for the young people on their caseload and advise the Virtual School admin team where this is not the case (virtualschooladmin@hillingdon.gov.uk).
- ✓ Log into the ePEP system for each young person on their caseload at least twice a term. Firstly, prior to the PEP meeting to update Section A (care information) and after the PEP has been signed off to ensure they are clear about the targets set and the actions agreed, particularly those that require their attention to address.
- ✓ Ensure a signed off copy of the PEP has been uploaded to the child's record on LCS on a termly basis. This ensures the PEP sits alongside the young person's care plan.
- ✓ Ensure the child's LAC status is correct on LCS to ensure the Virtual School are alerted to those becoming LAC and those ceasing to be LAC through the weekly performance lists. Failure to do this will result in data held by the Virtual School being incorrect and PEP timescales not being met.
- ✓ Advise the VSO and SEN caseworker (where the LAC has an EHCP) of any possible placement breakdowns/changes, particularly where this may result in a school change.
- ✓ Advise the VSO of any changes in the young person's health, behaviour, engagement or any other aspect of their care which may impact on their education.
- ✓ Advise the VSO of any relevant meetings which may require their attendance.
- ✓ Share relevant documents with the VSO such as care plans/pathway plans/risk assessments.
- ✓ Share any communications received from school or relating to education with the VSO. Do not assume this has been shared directly.
- ✓ Advise the VSO of any transfer of cases to new teams/social workers and ensure that new workers are aware of any meeting commitments relating to education.