

Virtual School Early Years Handbook



Dorset
Council

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Introduction

Dorset Virtual School equips all children for success and happiness by delivering highly effective support for their education, including their academic outcomes and their engagement in experiences that will help them towards adulthood. This handbook will provide a guide for Early Years settings and staff to support our children in care to achieve and be successful.

Our children are at the heart of every decision we make.

We are relentless in making sure that every child is in the right setting for them and will support and challenge those settings to help our children to achieve great educational outcomes that prepare them for their next stage in education.

We want all children:

- to work with us, along with their parents and carers, in shaping how we manage and organise the planning, resources and services that support and care for them.
- to be happy and healthy, both physically and emotionally, to be safe and protected from harm and exploitation, and to be supported each step of the way to adult life.
- to achieve their potential in the early years, to make the most of the play and learning opportunities they are offered and to participate in the decisions affecting their care and their lives.

Children in Care

In most circumstances a child in care is a child under 18 years of age who has been provided with accommodation or cared for by the local authority for more than 24 hours because the parent(s) or guardian(s) for whatever reason are prevented from providing them with a suitable accommodation or care.

In the Children Act 1989, children in care are known as Looked After Children (LAC). Some people also refer to these children as Children Looked After (CLA).

An early year's child in care will have:

- An allocated social worker
- Regular Child in Care Reviews
- An Early Years Personal Education Plan (EY PEP)

Foster Carers or the staff in residential homes work closely with schools, social workers and other professionals to make each of these work in support of the good progress and development of the child in care.

Children in Care are either the subject of a care order (an order made by the court) or are in care through a voluntary agreement with their parents.

The Care Order

A Care Order is given as the result of a decision made by a court to protect the children from significant harm or other reasons which meet the threshold for coming in to care. When a child is subject to a Care Order the local authority shares Parental Responsibility (PR) with the parents.

The child may also be subject to an Interim Care Order (for up to eight weeks in the first instance) where, in an application for a Care Order, the proceedings are adjourned or where a court, in any proceedings, gives a direction for the investigation of a child's home circumstances.

Voluntary agreement

A voluntary agreement is when a child is provided with accommodation by the local authority with the consent of those with Parental Responsibility. The arrangement is based on co-operative working between the local authority, the young person and his or her parents and the parents retain legal Parental Responsibility for the child or young person.

Any person who has parental responsibility for a child may, at any time, remove the child from accommodation provided by, or on behalf, of the local authority. If the young person is 16 or 17 years old, they can leave the accommodation without parental consent.

A voluntary agreement is often referred to as 'Accommodation under Section 20' as this relates to the section in the Children Act 1989 that applies in these circumstances.

Adopted Young People and those on Special Guardianship Orders (SGO)

Early Years settings also have a responsibility to support the education of previously looked after children, including SGO and adopted children.

The Virtual School offers educational advice and guidance for parents, schools and guardians of the above children.

This role, expanded to discharge the responsibilities within the Children and Social Work Act, (DfE, 2017), provides a signposting service for support around educational issues and pupil premium funding.

More intensive or bespoke support for adopted / SGO children and families can be accessed, by referral, through Aspire Adoption, the regional adoption agency for Dorset, tel. 0300 123 9868.

There is a separate Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) Handbook for schools specifically focused on children who were previously in care.

Purpose

The Virtual School provides distinct educational expertise around the issues that have an impact on children in care and it works to maintain the focus on the child's high aspirations and their academic achievement. The level of effectiveness of the Virtual School depends on the relationship it has with early years settings and education providers as it needs to combine the necessary support to children with an appropriate level of challenge that drives improvement.

Responsibilities of the Virtual School

The Virtual School is responsible for supporting early years settings in monitoring and improving the performance of Children in Care (CIC) and will help promote contact between early years settings, carers and Social Workers. Each early years setting has an allocated member of the Virtual School Team who will be the first point of reference when advice or practical support is needed or there is any concern about a young person. When a child comes into care, they will be allocated a Virtual School Lead who will contact the early years setting to advise them of their support. The Early Years Support and Advice Officer or the Portage Consultant will work alongside the Virtual School Team.

The Virtual School Team will ensure that early years settings and Social Workers attend Early Years Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings regularly, especially where there are issues which are proving particularly challenging in helping the young person to "narrow the gap" with peers. In some circumstances a member of the team will also attend Child in Care Reviews.

The Virtual School will ensure that all our children have a suitable provision. In relation to the admission of Children in Care to schools and academies, the School Admissions Code of Practice 2021 affirms the continued top priority given to children in care, over and above any restrictions in relation to school Planned Admission Numbers (PAN). We will always endeavour to talk with early years settings about incoming children and provide support to enable a successful transition. Admission of Children in Care should be a priority for early years setting.

Holding the Virtual School to account

The Virtual School follows the guidance in the Dorset Virtual School Practice Standards to ensure that we provide the best possible service to our children and Early Years settings. If you would like to see a copy of our practice standards, please ask.

The Virtual School is held to account by its Governing Body and the Corporate Parenting Board. Full details of the membership of the Governing Body are available from cs-servicesupport@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Any complaints in relation to the Dorset Virtual School, its work and/or team members should be addressed, in the first instance, to the Virtual School Head. Any complaints unresolved at this level, or about the Virtual School Head, should be addressed to Dorset County Council Complaints Team: complaints@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

The Role of the Designated Key Person

The Designated Early Years key person, alongside that of the Virtual School Team member, Social Worker and Foster Carers, is essential in supporting the good educational progress and development of children in care.

Termly training and development sessions are run by the Virtual School and are available to early years practitioners. They are published on the Nexus course booking system.

Virtual School Team members are in regular communication with the Designated Key Person and can be contacted at any time for advice and support. There is a Virtual School Teams site for designated teachers and Key Persons, containing useful information and guidance. If you do not have access, please ask your Virtual School Lead.

The key responsibilities of the Early Years Designated Key Person are to:

- Promote a culture of high expectations and aspirations
- Make sure the child's voice has been heard throughout the meeting.
- Be a source of advice for staff
- Make sure that carers understand the importance of supporting learning at home
- Have lead responsibility for the development and implementation of the child's Personal Education Plan (PEP) within the Early Years setting

What is Early Years Pupil Premium?

Pupil Premium plus funding for Early Years Children in Care is given directly to the settings to use to support our Children in Care from the point at which the child accesses the 15 hours free government three year old funding

The child could:

- have access to extra resources and equipment suited to their needs
- have new play, learning and activity experiences
- be more prepared for starting school

Childcare providers have to show Ofsted how they have used the funds to improve the child's education. If your child moves to another provider, and you are still eligible, your funding will get transferred.

- Working Tax Credit Run-on, paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- The child will be eligible:
- If they are looked after by the local authority for at least one day.
- has been adopted from care
- has left care through special guardianship
- is subject to a child arrangement order

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

The Personal Education Plan (PEP) is the statutory tool to ensure that everyone is actively prioritising the education of the Young Person, carefully tracking their progress and supporting them to achieve and to be aspirational.

For a child new into care, the first PEP meeting will be held within 20 days of them coming into care.

For a child placed in emergency care, the first PEP meeting will be held within 10 working days of them coming into care, wherever they are placed.

All Children in Care have a statutory Care Plan, which is drawn up and reviewed by the Local Authority that looks after them. The PEP is a legal part of the Care Plan; which is a statutory requirement for CIC from a child of 3 years if in education provision up to the age of 18.

Ongoing PEP meetings:

- Always book your next meeting at the previous meeting
- It is effective practice to hold three PEP meetings per year (one per term). Holding regular PEPs ensures that: plans are always based on current information
- Plans continue to meet the child's educational needs
- Information from the PEP is available at the next statutory care plan review

Who attends the PEP?

Will attend the PEP:

- Designated Key Person/Teacher from the setting
- Social Worker
- Virtual School Lead
- Young Person
- Carer

Might attend the PEP:

- Other relevant school staff
- SEND Provision Lead (If holding the EHCP annual review at the same time)
- School link staff (transition PEP)
- Parent (the social worker will advise)

The ePEP on Welfare Call

The ePEP system is a secure website and only people authorised by Dorset Virtual School can use it. The system is available 24/7 on any device.

Each section of the PEP is colour coded to identify who should complete them. After the meeting, the PEP is quality assured by a member of our team. One of the main benefits of the system is its capacity to hold information and generate reports. This allows us to assess the education and interventions in place for our children in care.

Education settings will be able to view and add to:

- Information relating to all children in care in your setting.
- Details of the social worker and QARO (IRO) allocated to the child.
- Previous and current PEPs.
- Prior attainment and the information we hold on the child's current attendance.

If you have forgotten your password, click on the 'forgotten username or password' link on the home screen and enter your username. An email for you to reset your password will be sent. If the designated teacher details in your setting have changed please contact your Virtual School Lead for guidance

Navigating around the PEP on Welfare Call

Once you are logged in you will find the full list of your caseload under EPEP > My Case Summary. This will show your cases with basic level details regarding other professionals linked to the young person, there is also a link which will take you directly to the PEP document: Go To (Young Person's Name) PEP

Alternatively, you can click on EPEP on the top menu bar which will bring up the EPEP homepage. You are able to view the status of your caseload which appears across 3 columns labelled 'overdue PEPs', 'No PEP dates', and 'Upcoming PEPs'.

How to complete the PEP

Once you have accessed the PEP document, 1 of 2 colours will be shown across the tab headings which is to highlight which user is responsible for which sections of the PEP document:

- The Designated Teacher (DT)/ Designated Key Worker sections of the PEP are highlighted in RED
- Sections where the Social Worker will enter this information shows as BLUE

When all of the necessary information has been added to the PEP document you will need to press the 'click when completed' button situated at the top of the PEP. (Please be aware that this will only appear from the date that the PEP meeting takes place).

By clicking the complete button this will send a notification to the Virtual School to notify them that you have completed your sections. Once the PEP has been signed off by the DT, the Virtual School will quality assure the document and rate as red, amber or green based on the quality of the information inputted.

After this has happened the PEP will be fully completed and can be found in the previous PEPs section and the system will provide a new PEP form ready for the next meeting.

ePEP notifications

Notifications will be sent as prompts to complete the PEP once a PEP date has been entered onto the document. If you receive an email from Welfare Call regarding a meeting that has been cancelled, it is important that once a new date has been arranged that this is entered onto the document.

Please be aware that any notifications sent via email will not include the young person's name, you will need to log into the system and check your internal mails for further details.

Saving information input into the PEP

Information input into the PEP must be saved per page. There is not an autosave function built into the ePEP and where the system does not detect any navigation or input for a period of 40 minutes, it will time you out.

Once the system notices you are within your last 10 minutes, a small green box will appear in the bottom right of your screen which will countdown your last 10 minutes. We would recommend that you save your page at this point to reset the timer and ensure no work is lost.

Support Helpline 01226 716333 or epep@welfarecall.com

Acronym list – Virtual School

AfC	Action for Children
AP	Alternative Provision
BCP	Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole Council
CE	Child Exploitation
ChAD	Children's Advice and Duty Team
CiC	Child in Care
CLA	Children Looked After
COLA's	Children from Other Local Authorities
CYP	Child/Children and Young Person
DfE	Department for Education
DFM	Dorset Families Matter
DVA	Domestic Violence and Abuse
EHCNA	Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
EHE	Elective Home Education
EHH	Early Help Hub
ELSA	Emotional Literacy Support Assistant
ePEP	Electronic Pupil Education Plan
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
GDD	Global Developmental Delay
JPM	Joint Planning Meeting
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LAC	Looked After Child
MACE	Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Team
MASH	Multi- Agency Safeguarding Hub
PAN	Planned Admission Numbers
PLAC	Previously Looked After child
PO	Placement Order
PPN	Public Protection Notice
PR	Parental Responsibility
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit/ Learning Centre
QARO	Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer
RAG	Red, Amber, Green rating system 'RAG Rated'
RO	Resident Order
SDP	School Development Plan
SDQ	Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
SGO	Special Guardianship Order
SLCN	Speech, Language and Communication Need
TAC	Team Around the Child
TAF	Team Around the Family
TAS	Team Around the School
UPN	Unique Personal Number


Dorset Virtual School Team

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