Dorset Virtual School Practice Standards

Jo Smark Richards
3-17-2023

Contents

Dorset Virtual School Staffing Structure

Dorset Virtual School has the following staffing structure:

- Virtual School Head (VSH)
- Virtual School Service Manager
- Specialist Teacher with responsibility for SEND
- Specialist Teacher with responsibility for data and assessment
- 8 Virtual School Leads

Where this document states Virtual School Lead the same practice standards apply when the child is on the caseload of a Virtual School Specialist Teacher and Service Manager.

Key Operational Areas for the Virtual School

The Virtual School should:

• know who is on the roll of their Virtual School

• know where they live and where they go to school

• know, at any time, how they are doing and be able to say if that is good enough

• determine what actions to take if the child is not doing well enough

• evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve attainment and progress, and

• understand their accountabilities and how their Virtual School will be inspected, and its impact judged.

Virtual School Development Plan (SDP)

The VSH is responsible for producing an annual school development plan that addresses identified areas for development. VSLs and Specialist Teachers will be responsible for the delivery of the plan alongside the VSH, so it is essential that they are familiar with the plan. The plan will be reviewed on a half termly basis and all members of the team should be able to provide evidence of progress towards identified targets.

Virtual School Self Evaluation Form (SEF)

The VSH will complete a SEF each year which indicates the school's grading against ILACS criteria and DFE Guidance (Promoting the Education of Looked after and Previously Looked after Children). Actions identified should then form part of the next SDP.

The Virtual School Head Teacher's Annual Report

The VSH is responsible for providing an annual report to the Governing Body and Corporate Parenting Board which should summarise the work of the Virtual School and be analytical and evaluative in nature. It should include:

Introduction
- Executive summary
  - A brief bulleted list of the key points in the annual report
- Context
  - Brief information on the national, regional and local developments in the past year the Virtual School has been working with.
- The Virtual School
  - Brief information on numbers of Children in Care; staffing; number of schools; etc.

The experiences and progress of Children in Care and Care Leavers
- Educational progress
  - Attainment and progress data by key stage and by groups especially ethnicity; SEND; gender; EAL; UASCs etc including numbers and percentages, progress since coming into care and comparison with national and regional outcomes. Progress will be compared with Children in Need and LA non-Children in Care.
  - Commentary: strengths and concerns; reasons; actions taken and impact.

- Educational engagement
  - Admissions including any barriers to timely admissions; Ofsted gradings of schools/providers; placement types
  - Placement changes – how many? Reasons and impact.
  - Attendance and exclusions. Comparison with national and regional outcomes etc.
  - Alternative Provision – important to include comments on attainment and progress, also monitoring of children in Alternative Provision.
  - Residential placements – same as for Alternative Provision.
  - Commentary: strengths and concerns; reasons; actions taken and impact.

- Educational opportunities and enjoyment
  - Examples of the range of social, educational and recreational opportunities available to Dorset's Children in Care.
  - Commentary: strengths and concerns; reasons; actions taken and impact

- Children and Care Leavers who live away from their 'home' Local Authority
  - Number and percentage; attainment, progress, attendance and exclusion data; admissions
  - Commentary: strengths and concerns; reasons; actions taken and impact. Is there any difference between the outcomes for out of area Children in Care and those within the home authority? If so why and what are you doing about it?

- Agencies and professionals working together
  - How the VS works with social care, schools, carers, CAMHS etc. Include training for schools. Individual case studies to demonstrate effective practice
  - Commentary: strengths and concerns; reasons; actions taken and impact.

- Personal Education Plans and resources including Pupil Premium Plus
  - Completion rates of PEPs; quality monitoring

- How the VSH has managed the PP+ and Early Years Pupil Premium for Children in Care. What resources have been used for.
- Commentary: strengths and concerns; reasons; actions taken and impact. How do you monitor the impact of the resources you allocate and what does that monitoring tell you?

- Support for children who are adopted
  - Provision by the Virtual School; number of requests for advice and guidance received in past year and how they have been dealt with
  - Commentary: strengths and concerns; reasons; actions taken and impact

- Care leavers
  - Care leavers education and employment opportunities, including work experience and apprenticeships
  - Care leavers' progress and achievement especially retention and completion rates; suitability of courses; English and Maths retakes and progress
  - Commentary: strengths and concerns; reasons; actions taken and impact

- Leadership
  - The Local Authority as a corporate parent; how the Virtual School provides leadership across the Local Authority; how the Virtual School promotes the development of leadership e.g., in its team, in schools.
  - Examples of practice that is informed and sustainably improved by feedback and research
  - Commentary: strengths and concerns; reasons; actions taken and impact

- Priorities for the next year
  - Summarise the main strengths and areas for development

Child-level Personal Information

The Virtual School Specialist Teacher responsible for Assessment and Data should ensure that the school has the information needed on every child on their Virtual School roll. They will be supported by the VSL with responsibility for the local database. As a minimum this should include:

- Forename (and used name if different)
- Surname (and alias if appropriate)
- Gender
- Date of Birth
- Unique Pupil Number
- Social Care Database Reference Number (Mosaic)
- National Curriculum Year Group
- Current school
- Special Educational Needs (SEND) status and principal need
- Ethnicity and English as an Additional Language (EAL) status
- Legal Status (care order, interim care order, or section 20, and whether an unaccompanied minor/asylum seeker child)
- Date into care (first time and current episode, if different)
- In care for 12 months +
- If child is NEET
- VS Lead allocated to child
- The child Social Worker/Personal Advisor and contact information
- The foster carer's supervising Social Worker and contact information
- The child's Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer (QARO) and contact details

This basic information will be supplemented by detailed information on care placement and educational placement

Children must be added to or removed from the Virtual School roll within three working days of receipt of care status. When removed, a closure date must be entered into the database that matches the date provided by the Social Care Team. Information on removed children must still be held as they may be included in reports throughout and at the end of the year.

Virtual School Leads hold a responsibility for ensuring that they provide details of any changes to all the above information as soon as it happens in order to maintain an up-to-date database. When the notification of a child coming into care comes into the Virtual School, the VSL responsible for the local database will add the child to local database, the Specialist Teacher responsible for Data and Assessment decides who to allocate to and the VSL responsible for local database forwards on the notification to the relevant VSL.

Virtual School cohort profile

The Specialist Teacher responsible for Assessment and Data should ensure that the school can quickly summarise the nature of the looked after cohort. This context is essential, particularly when comparisons are drawn within and beyond the local authority, and should, as a minimum, include:

• Breakdown by national curriculum year group

• Breakdown by SEN status

• Breakdown by legal status

• Break down by date into care

• Breakdown by age into care

• Breakdown by time in care

• Breakdown by ethnicity and EAL status

Wherever possible unique features of the cohort should be demonstrated by comparison with all children locally and nationally, with looked after children nationally, and with Children in Care in statistical neighbour local authorities.

The Specialist Teacher for Data and Assessment is responsible for providing current achievement and other data to the Senior Leadership Team (monthly), Corporate Parenting Board (quarterly) and Virtual School Governing Body (termly) as follows:

- % Looked After Children with an Education Health and Care Plan (termly)
- % Children in Care achieving GLD at Early Years (annually)
- % Children in Care achieving expected standards in core subjects at Key Stage 1 (annually)
- % Children in Care achieving expected standards in core subjects at Key Stage 2 (annually)
- Average attainment 8 of Children in Care at KS4 (annually)
- % of Children in Care achieving basic measure in English and Maths at KS4 (annually)
- Average attendance for Children in Care of school age (monthly)
- % unauthorised absence for Children in Care (monthly)
- % Children in Care who have had at least one fixed term suspension (monthly)
- % Children in Care on a reduced timetable (monthly)

Analysis should include looking at sub-groups of children within the Virtual School where needed, for example looking at outcomes of children with SEND as a sub-group.

The Virtual School Leads will collect in-year attainment on every child in every year group through the PEP process. This data will be used to assess whether a child is making expected progress and to support schools where progress is poor, or progress appears good but against low school expectations. When combined with attendance and suspension data a rich picture of the child's current educational context can be built up and used to identify those in need of support and the support they need. It is this picture of current educational need that should drive the allocation of the Pupil Premium Plus (PP+).

All Virtual School staff will attend a monthly Virtual School Pupil Progress Meeting at which the progress of identified children or cohorts will be reviewed. Actions will be logged, which must be followed up by Virtual School staff and written updates provided in readiness for review at the next month's Pupil Progress meeting. Children flagged as red due to high levels of concern must be followed up by the Virtual School Lead as a priority.

Education Placement

In identifying the appropriate education placement for a child, the following principles should apply:
• educational provision should mean a full-time place (generally taken to be 25 hours per week for school age children and 16 hours per week for post-16 young people)

• the child's wishes and feelings should be considered, and the suitability of the education setting tested by arranging an informal visit for the benefit of the child though the corporate parent should not abdicate its responsibilities simply because a child wants to go to a certain school

• the choice of education setting should be based on what any good parent would want for their child and be based on evidence that the setting can meet the educational needs of the child and help maximise their progress in learning

• the choice of education setting should maintain opportunities for the child to socialise with their peers through after school activities

• schools judged by Ofsted to be 'good' or 'outstanding' should be prioritised for Children in Care in need of a new school

• unless there are exceptional, evidence-based reasons, Children in Care should not be placed in a school judged by Ofsted to be 'inadequate'

• where a school 'requires improvement' the Virtual School Lead should be clear that the reasons for that judgement will not disadvantage a Child in Care, or be outweighed by the impact of a change in school place

• Regardless of the last Ofsted judgement the Virtual School Lead should ensure they have a current understanding of the quality of education offered and the plans for improvement so they can offer informed advice on a school choice.

Wherever possible a child should remain in the same education provision to reduce the disruption an extra transition can cause to the child's educational and wellbeing outcomes.

Where a child in care would benefit from attending a boarding school, either in the state or independent sector, Virtual School Leads and Social Workers/Personal Advisors should be proactive in considering this option. This decision is usually based on the care placement needs of the child and the boarding school's ability to meet these needs.

Education Placement Details
The Virtual School Lead should ensure they have the information they need on each child's education placement. This should, as a minimum, include:
- School name
- School address & postcode (flagging out of area school)
- School DfE number
- Type of school
- Start date at the current education placement, record of previous education placements, and reasons for any change
- Most recent OfSTED judgement & note of rationale where a child has been placed in a provision if it is judged less than good
- Designated teacher and contact details
- Data on the child's current attainment, progress, attendance and engagement with learning
- Child's prior attainment including at the end of previous key stages
- Date of last PEP
- Child's attendance
- Exclusion and suspension data

School Admissions – securing appropriate education

When a child or young person becomes a Child in Care their Local Authority must arrange a suitable care placement. It is the Social Worker's responsibility to complete an application for schools unless the child has an EHCP, in which case the SEND Provision Lead is responsible for consulting with the school of choice. In doing so, the child's allocated Social Worker should do everything possible to minimise disruption to the child's education, whatever the child's age but particularly at Key Stage 4, or earlier if they have already embarked upon GCSE or similarly accredited programmes, that will be essential to their future progression to education, employment or training.

In relation to school admissions legislation a child must be legally looked after at the time of the application for a school place if they are to benefit from the priorities associated with that status in the Admissions Code.

If it is not possible to maintain the child's existing education placement, the child's new education placement should be arranged in consultation with the Virtual School Lead at the same time as the care placement. It is the statutory duty of the Local Authority where a child lives to provide education, and the Virtual School Lead should support Social Workers/Personal Advisors to ensure this duty is fulfilled without delay.

Children in Care have been given the highest priority within school admission arrangements and admission requirements for Children in Care are set out in the School Admissions Code which applies to maintained schools and academies, including free schools.

A Child in Care must be given a place in the school chosen irrespective of the current numbers on roll or in a class. The home Local Authority can require the host Local Authority to direct admission to any school. However, children with an EHCP are subject to a statutory consultation process first, and any direction must conform to the practice in the host authority.

The VSH should ensure that Social Workers, QAROs, admission officers for the schools maintained by the Local Authority, and SEND teams understand and comply with the requirements in the School Admissions Code relating to the priority admission arrangements for Children in Care to maintained schools and academies and the special educational needs and disability code of practice 0 to 25 years.

It is also the responsibility of the VSH to ensure that:
• admission authorities understand that Fair Access Protocols do not apply to Children in Care and that they are 'excepted pupils' in relation to primary school class size limits;

• the Local Authority, as a Corporate Parent, does not tolerate drift and delay where Children in Care are without an education placement that is appropriate to their assessed needs. This includes using their Powers of Direction in a timely way rather than delay issuing a direction as a result of protracted negotiation

The choice of school requires skilled working between relevant people. It should be based on a discussion between the child's Social Worker, their carers and, where they retain parental responsibility, birth parents. The Virtual School Lead should be consulted to avoid choosing a school that is unlikely to meet the child's needs. Delegated authority relating to school choice should be addressed explicitly in the child's permanence plan, which is part of their wider care plan.

Designated Teachers should be made aware of the arrival of a Child in Care in advance. They should then receive full details of a child's care placement and other relevant information within 24 hours

of the child joining the school. In the case of child coming into care this enables a meaningful Initial Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting can take place in time for the first (28 day) care review. In the case of children already in care but moving schools, it provides an opportunity for an early PEP Review meeting that ensures the new school has access to the most up-to-date education information on the child and the previous school's existing plan to support them.

The VSH should consider whether and how to capture the effectiveness of admission arrangements for Children in Care by working with the Admissions team to track the time between an application for a new school place being submitted and the child being placed on roll, as well as those cases requiring a direction or referral to the ESFA, Regional Schools Commissioner or Secretary of State.

Information on Dorset's Admissions Policy can be found at [School admissions policies - Dorset Council](#)

Considering A School's Ofsted Rating When Placing a Child

The school's Ofsted rating is available on Welfare Call. If considering a new school, the rating (and report can be found at https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/

Careful consideration should be made if placing a child in a school with an Ofsted rating below 'Good'. The Education Challenge Lead in the relevant locality will be able to provide information about the suitability of the school to support the child. Consideration will be given to where the school is in its improvement journey and whether outcomes generally at the school are improving. If the school is outside of Dorset, the VSL should approach the host Virtual School to ask about the suitability of schools for the individual child.

Exclusion

The VSH should ensure that Virtual School Leads, Social Workers, QAROs, Admission Officers, Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) teams, and ALL state-funded schools (whatever their status) understand and comply with the statutory guidance on school exclusion, including the limited powers of an independent review.

To support schools to avoid exclusion where it has concerns about a child's behaviour, the Virtual School Lead should be informed and involved at the earliest opportunity. Then the Virtual School Lead, working with others, can:

- consider what additional assessment and support (such as additional help for the classroom teacher, one-to-one therapeutic work or a suitable alternative placement or funding through the Pupil Premium Plus) needs to be put in place to address the causes of the child's behaviour and prevent the need for suspension
- advocate for a clear plan to put additional support in place to support the child's on-going education in the event of a suspension.

It is therefore essential that the VSL uses the information provided by the attendance monitoring service provided by Welfare Call to respond rapidly if there is a notification of a suspension. The VSL should not wait for others to act if a child is suspended and should take responsibility for leading the multi-disciplinary response.

i) 6th day/1st day provision

Schools must provide a full-time offer of learning to children from the 6th day of a suspension. The Virtual School Lead should explain to headteachers that the difficulties experienced by Children in Care are often exacerbated by exclusion from learning and encourage them to adopt best practice by making a full-time learning offer to looked after children from the 1st day of a suspension.

ii) Permanent Exclusion

No Child in Care should be subject to permanent exclusion before Social Workers, Carers, QAROs and VSLs have had a chance to meet together with the school and consider alternatives. If a headteacher does permanently exclude a Child in Care then Social Workers and Carers (and parents where appropriate) should be supported to attend the meeting of governors that must be called to either uphold or overturn the Headteacher's decision. Where Governors uphold the decision the VSL should advise on the limited powers of an independent review and the likelihood of such a review benefitting the child, supporting Social Workers/Carers to state their concerns if appropriate (statutory guidance on school exclusion: School suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)).

Escalation Of Concern by a Member of the Virtual School

Where a Virtual School Lead is concerned that a school is not responding to advice and guidance, they should raise their concern with the Locality Team Manager, Virtual School Specialist Teacher or Virtual School Service Manager who may take one or more of the following steps:

- Provide advice and guidance to the Virtual School Lead
- Recommend an additional PEP Review is held
- Recommend a Professionals Meeting or Team Around the Child (TAC) meeting is held to put in place a rapid plan for the child
- Communicate directly with the school about the concern
- Recommend escalation within the locality
- Recommend the involvement of the QARO

Professional's Meetings and TAC Meetings

VSLs should not wait for someone else to call a meeting in support of a child if they think that it is needed. Delay in suitable education placement, suspension, risk of permanent exclusion, sudden change in behaviour, engagement or educational achievement are all examples of where a VSL should step in and bring professionals together to halt or avoid a decline in outcomes for the child. They can be used to share information but should also give clear direction, resolve uncertainty and map out next steps.

These meetings should include:

- An identified chair
- An agenda that clearly identifies the aims of the meeting
- All key parties invited
- Summary notes from the meeting including actions and who is responsible for them

Special Educational Needs and Disability

The proportion of Children in Care with an identified need or Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is higher in comparison to the child population as a whole. The Virtual School Specialist Teacher responsible for SEND will ensure that:

- the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice, as it relates to Children in Care, is followed (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25); and,
- the child's EHCP is coordinated with the PEP and care plan to describe how the child's holistic needs met. Professionals should consider how the EHCP contributes to planning around education and informs the PEP Process. The EHCP, PEP and Care Plan should complement one another.

The Virtual School Specialist Teacher responsible for SEND has responsibility for the oversight of placement moves and admissions, timely annual reviews, progress, achievement, attendance and suspensions of Children in Care with a SEN need or EHCP. Analysis of this cohort of children will be reported to the Virtual School Service Manager as part of the overarching governance of Children in Care. The Virtual School Specialist Teacher will ensure that targeted interventions that draw on PP+ funding are appropriate, SMART, meet the terms for the grant and compliment the child's EHCP.

Emotional Health & Well-Being

Evidence suggests that a Child in Care is nearly five times more likely to have emotional health needs in comparison to the child population as a whole. Since April 2008 all local authorities in England have been required to provide information on the emotional and behavioural health of children and young people in their care, and to report back to central government on an annual basis. Data is collected by local authorities through the completion of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) on individual children and a summary figure for each child (the total difficulties score) is the outcome measure used for tracking the emotional and behavioural difficulties of Children in Care at a national level.

The SDQ is not merely a data collection tool. When used consistently and, when outcomes for each child or young person are analysed, the SDQ is a very useful way in which Social Workers/Personal Advisors and others working with Children in Care can identify their emotional health needs, act upon them accordingly and review progress and improvement of outcomes. The SDQ should be used alongside other relevant information including qualitative and quantitative data about a child's emotional health and wellbeing. The SDQ has five sections that cover details of emotional difficulties, conduct problems, hyperactivity or inattention, friendships and peer groups and Pro Social behaviour.

- It is a requirement that the SDQ score is included within the Personal Education Plan to enable the school and Virtual School Lead to understand the child/young person's social and emotional wellbeing and put interventions in place.
- If a school suspects that a pupil is presenting with emotional and social needs, they should put support in place as soon as this need is identified.
- If the score is above 14 when completed by the main carer or parent then an SDQ **must** be sent to the school to complete within one month of the PEP and Child in Care review meeting.
- The SDQ informs the child's care plan and clearly outlines the interventions required.

VSLs should familiarise themselves with Dorset's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire Policy and Guidance document, which details the process for using the SDQ. Ongoing training is available to support staff in using SDQ information effectively.

Personal Education Planning

Dorset Virtual School use the EPEP Service provided by Welfare Call. This is designed to provide a vehicle for Virtual School Leads, Social Workers/Personal Advisors, Designated Teachers, QAROS, and Carers to plan and monitor improved attainment and progress for Children in Care. The Virtual School Lead is responsible for ensuring that the plan a live document that captures the child's journey through learning rather than just an administrative event.

When a child enters care their VSL should take the lead to:
- Organise an initial information gathering meeting with the Designated Teacher in school, Carer (and the child's parent or family member as appropriate to their circumstances/legal status), the Virtual School Lead, Social Worker/Personal Advisor and other relevant professionals
- ensure there is an effective initial personal education plan (PEP) meeting within 20 working days in time for the first statutory Care Review Meeting

As a minimum this initial Plan should indicate:

- who needs to contribute to the PEP
- that there has been some initial analysis of the child's educational needs and that this has been shared between at least the school, Social Worker/Personal Advisor and carer
- that a meeting has been arranged to discuss how those needs will be met through a more thorough and detailed plan
- what actions named professionals need to take in the interim until that first full PEP is completed within the remainder of the term

If the child has moved to a new school as part of coming into care, then the previous school's information about the child must be collected so that it can be used to inform the initial PEP meeting. If the child was already in care and moved schools, the receiving school should be provided with the child's most recent PEP from their previous school. The first (initial) PEP meeting in the new school should be thought of as a planning meeting. The Designated Teacher with the VSL's and the SW's help, will be planning for a successful transition into the school.

The QARO should expect the PEP document to have been reviewed, and changes outlined, in time for the subsequent (6 monthly) Care Reviews. Good practice is to ensure the Social Worker/Personal Advisor, Designated Teacher, Virtual School Lead and Carer have the date of the next PEP Review meeting in their diary before they leave the initial, or subsequent, PEP Review meetings. That date should be sufficiently in advance of the next Care Review date to allow the outcomes of the PEP Review to be shared via the Social Care database (Mosaic\0. It is the VSL's responsibility to upload each PEP once quality assured.

Whenever a child's education provision changes the VSL should facilitate an interim PEP Review meeting, so that information is shared with the new provision to continue to support the child with interventions already in place.

Where there is a risk that a child may be permanently excluded, or where there is a pattern of suspension, or significant behaviour concerns raised by a school, the Virtual School Lead should expect the Social Worker and DT to co-operate in calling an interim PEP Review so that strategies to address any concerns can be discussed and agreed as an alternative to further suspension.

Virtual School Leads should attend all PEP meetings and are responsible for completing the attendees and meeting notes. This enables them to get to know their children, and to directly support professionals in the team around the child.

The PEP Review Meeting

The PEP meeting is a collaboration between the Virtual School Lead, the Designated Teacher, Social Worker/Personal Advisor and carer. The chairing of the meeting is open for discussion; however, the VSL is responsible for ensuring that the date, time, venue and invites are in place.

There is an expectation that the child's Social Worker/Personal Advisor will attend as corporate Parent and the Designated Teacher as a representative of education and complete their sections of the PEP document in advance of the meeting. When appropriate, additional professionals such as Educational Psychologists, CAMHS worker, SEND Provision Lead etc will be invited to support the child' progress. There is an expectation that a PEP document will be complete and ready for QA within 20 days of the PEP occurring.

Three PEPs are held per year. Where possible, the expectation is that these will be held in person wherever possible. However, at least one PEP per year must be held in person. On some occasions, some children may have an interim meeting to support the child's progress in education for that term and will form part of the PEP document.

The content and format of a Personal Education Plan

Dorset Virtual School expect PEP Review meetings to provide an opportunity to build effective positive working relationships between members of the team around the child and to ensure that key information is up to date and shared as appropriate, such as:
- contact numbers/emails for key members of the team around the child such as Carer, Social Worker/Personal Advisor, Designated Teacher and Virtual School Lead;
- contact numbers/emails for key members of the school team, including the Designated Teacher, relevant senior members of staff/pastoral care staff, SENCO, and front office/reception;
- SEND status, key dates relating to SEN Reviews and copies of any SEN plan
- significant changes to the care plan and its long-term objectives.

While there is no agreed national format for a PEP document, the best practice;
- enables the Virtual School Lead to collect the information they need to promote the educational outcomes of their child
- summarises the child's current attainment and progress relative to robust and aspirational targets
- summarises the child's attendance
- summarises the child's engagement with learning, including any behaviour concerns
- summarise any sanctions applied, up to and including those triggering suspension
- provides an opportunity to note the child's broader development, emotional health and well-being, relationships with peers and adults, and engagement with activities beyond the taught curriculum

- provides evidence of the child's view of their schooling, its strengths and weaknesses and their view on what they believe would help them, as well as opportunities for them to refine or revise their aspirations for the future
- sets out the longer term aspirations of the child in relation to future education, employment or training, and how the school will meet their obligations to provide the child with effective information, advice and guidance in advance of transitions within education, employment and training
- sets short term SMART learning targets, in the context of longer-term aspirations, and any longer term educational and developmental needs (such as those captured in an Education Health and Care Plan or Individual Education Plan)
- clearly defines actions for named professionals in relation to supporting the child's progress
- clearly describes the deployment of the PP+ funding allocated to the Child in Care to support SMART targets and the longer-term aspirations of the child
- provides an easily accessible, comprehensive and enduring record of the child's experience, progress and achievement through their education journey.

Dorset CiC living outside of the Local Authority

Dorset Children in Care who are educated outside of Dorset Local Authority should receive an equitable standard of support living within Dorset. Three PEP meetings a year will be held. However, due to the significant distance away of some children, it is acceptable for up to two of the three PEP meetings a year to be held virtually. The Virtual School Lead will make a professional judgement as to whether more than one meeting a year needs to be face-to-face.

The quality of PEPs

It is the duty of the VSH to ensure every child has a high-quality PEP which is reviewed termly. All members of the Virtual School must participate in a termly PEP quality assurance which enables the school to understand the strengths and areas for development of PEPs and take action to improve PEP quality where needed through CPD. There is a PEP Quality Assurance document to enable an objective and robust QA process to take place, and to enable all staff to have a clear understanding of what makes a PEP 'good'.

Where a PEP requires improvement, the Virtual School Lead must provide appropriate feedback to the DT that will ensure improvement of the PEP to be made promptly and before the next PEP review. The Welfare Call system records the previous QA feedback as terms of reference. The VSH is responsible for ensuring that termly Designated Teacher training supports the production of good quality PEPs and addresses aspects of the PEP which have been identified as needing improvement across the school.

Conflict Resolution / Escalation

It is essential that the VSL supports processes to move situations that are not in the best interests of the child forward as rapidly as possible. This includes where suitable education has not been found for a child. Where the QARO believes that the Local Authority has failed in any significant respect to prepare the child's Care Plan; review the child's case or effectively implement any decision in consequence of a review; or are otherwise in breach of their duties to the child in any material respect, the following procedure will apply:

 i. Informal discussion through a discussion between the QARO, the Social Worker and Team Manager;

 ii. If no resolution is reached at this stage then the formal escalation policy should be followed - see Dispute Resolution Process (Escalation Process).

Level	Responsible Officer	Response Expected within *Working Days*
Informal	Social Worker and / or Team Manager	According to child's need
Level 1:	Team Manager & cc Service Manager	5
Level 2:	Service Manager & cc Head of Locality	5
Level 3:	Head of Locality & cc Corporate Director for Care & Protection	5
Level 4:	Corporate Director for Care and Protection and Executive Director People - Children	5
Level 5:	Referral to CAFCASS	

It is the role of the QA Manager to encourage and assist the resolution of issues and problem solve together, at the lowest level.

Informal Stage

The QARO will aim to resolve any issues at the lowest level as possible.
Informal Stage - 6.1 IRO Handbook - One of the key functions of the IRO is to resolve problems arising out of the care planning process.
It is expected that QAROs establish positive working relationships with the social workers of the children for whom they are responsible. Where problems are identified in relation to a child's case, for example in relation to care planning, the implementation of the care plan or decisions relating to it, resources or poor practice, the QARO will, in the first instance, seek to resolve the issue informally with the social worker or the social worker's managers.

Informal escalation:

It is important that any escalation is captured. The QARO will record the informal escalation on the Mosaic form which is part of the workflow for all children in care.

Formal Escalation

The process within Dorset is that where a QARO identifies a serious concern (for example, where there is an actual or potential significant impact on the welfare of a child/young person as a result of the above criteria), s/he will raise these in writing to the relevant Team Manager and copy in the responsible Service Manager.

Discussions which are significant and change the direction of a case or cause decisions to be made or changed, will need to be recorded as part of the child's MOSAIC record. The action needs to be recorded on the child's case file in appropriate strength based and child appropriate terminology.

Stage 2

If the concern is not resolved, the QARO will alert the relevant Operational Service Manager copy in the Head of Locality. The Service Manager will need to respond on the Mosaic workflow document within 5 working days (unless the QARO has specified a different timescale) of receiving the concern. The response should include views about the concerns and how the concerns will be/have been addressed.

If necessary, the QARO and/or the QA Manager will make direct contact with the Service Manager to discuss the issues raised within 5 working days, depending on the nature and urgency of the concerns raised. Discussions which are significant and change the direction of a case or cause decisions to be made or changed, will need to be recorded as part of the child's MOSAIC record. The action needs to be recorded on the child's case file in appropriate strength based and child appropriate terminology.

Stage 3

If not resolved the QARO or QA Manager will raise the matter directly with the Head of Locality, copying in the Corporate Director. The Head of Locality will seek to resolve the issue by engaging all key parties in a meeting or will make a formal response or decision, if required, within 5 working days of notification of the concern at level 3.

Discussions which are significant and change the direction of case planning or cause decisions to be made or changed, will need to be recorded as part of the child's MOSAIC record. What is recorded and who does so will be agreed.

Stage 4

Should the matter remain unresolved the matter should be raised directly with the Corporate Director for Care and Protection and Executive Director People - Children, by the QARO or QA Manager in consultation with the Head of Quality Assurance and Partnerships. The executive director will be copied into the formal escalation.

Discussions which are significant and change the direction of case planning or cause decisions to be made or changed, will need to be recorded as part of the child's MOSAIC record. What is recorded and who does so will be agreed.

Stage 5

Referral to CAFCASS

QAROs have the authority to refer the case of any looked after child to Cafcass [under Section 118, 2002 Act] if they are of the view that the child's human rights have been breached and all attempts to resolve the matter have been exhausted. IROs should exhaust all stages of the dispute process (or deem that the time it is taking to exhaust the stages is unreasonable) and (s)he believes there is still a danger that the child's human rights may be being breached due to action or inaction of the local authority.

The QARO has the discretion to refer matters to CAFCASS at any time. They will inform their QA Manager if they are considering this. The QA manager will inform the Head of Quality Assurance and Partnerships who will advise the Corporate Director for Care and Protection.
The IRO handbook 6.2 states "The IRO may bypass any stage and progress the dispute to the level s/he considers most appropriate". This needs to be in consultation with the QA manager and Head of Quality Assurance and Partnerships.

Legal proceedings should only be considered as a last resort - i.e., in extreme cases where all other attempts to resolve the problem have failed. This decision needs to be discussed with the QA manager. The QARO must act if the local authority is failing to comply with the Regulations or is in breach of its duties to the child in any material way, including making a referral to Cafcass. When considering whether to make a referral to Cafcass, the QARO should consider the impact that a referral would have for the child. Cafcass Legal operates a duty helpline which is available to QAROs for the discussion of possible referrals. The lawyers at Cafcass Legal cannot give QAROs legal advice but will discuss with the QARO whether any other steps can be taken before a referral is made.

Full details of the QARO escalation process can be found in the Children's Services Procedures Library.

Strategy for Pupil Premium Plus Funding

Dorset Virtual School's policy on PP+ funding and use of it clearly outlines the terms of the grant. PP+ Panel meet weekly and consider every application for funded interventions. A record of decisions made is available on the subsequent day to all VSLs to share with Designated Teachers. The policy should make the arrangements for PP+ allocation:

- as un-bureaucratic as possible, whilst providing for strong transparency and accountability, and,
- enable the VSH to report to managers, schools, Ofsted, or other interested parties on the details of how they have managed the PP+ (and Early Years Pupil Premium) for Children in Care; and
- evidence of how the VSH's spending of the premium has supported the achievement of the Children in Care, including clearly setting out how any centrally retained funding has supported this.

Virtual School Leads should ensure that requests for funding are brought to the Pupil Premium Plus Panel on a timely basis with a clear 'golden thread' throughout the PEP document.

The panel consists of three members of the Virtual School and for each decision, at least two members must agree and unconnected to the child the request is for. Monthly budget meetings with the Virtual School Service Manager, Virtual School Specialist Teacher leading on data, and Children Services Accountant review the Virtual School budget and evaluate the effectiveness of spend on particular types of intervention.

All Virtual School Leads should ensure that they have attended at least one panel a year as a guest for their own professional development purposes.

Funding For Post 16 Young People

VSLs should be aware of the 16-19 Bursary Fund. This is designed to provide financial support, so students are able to overcome specific financial barriers to participation. There is a specific bursary for vulnerable groups which includes Children in Care. The ESFA (Education and Sills Funding Agency) encourage institutions to pay bursaries in kind rather than as cash wherever possible. The Bursary is held and managed by the Post 16 setting. Further details can be found on [16-to-19-bursary-fund-guide](#)

Training and Professional Development

The VSH should be the authoritative voice of the learning needs of Children in Care and how they can be met. They should, with the support of all members of the Virtual School team, therefore:

- take a lead in supporting Social Workers/Personal Advisors to understand schools, and school staff to understand social work and the needs of Children in Care
- provide regular professional development for Designated Teachers and encourage Designated Teachers to exchange their best practice.
- be a routine contributor to Social Worker/Personal Advisor induction programmes as well as providing examples of good practice to inform social work supervision arrangements
- seek opportunities to bring together the professionals working with Children in Care

The VSH should ensure that termly Designated Teacher training includes, among other things, information about:

- school admission arrangements
- SEND
- attendance and suspensions
- Effective use of the PEP document
- Supporting transitions
- attachment and trauma awareness
- Effective use of SDQ information
- promoting positive educational and recreational activities and supporting children to be aspirational for their future education
- progression to training and employment.
- Supporting children seeking asylum
- Supporting children in Early Years Provision

Virtual School Team Professional Development

The VSH is responsible for ensuring that all staff within the Virtual School have good quality CPD that enables them to effectively meet the requirements of their roles and the school development plan. CPD sessions will be calendared termly, with additional sessions added if required. VSLs and Specialist Teachers should take responsibility for raising requests for CPD learning that would support them in their role.

Virtual School Team Supervision

Supervision is a fundamental role that managers will undertake to support the development of the skills and practices of their staff in relation to working with children, young people and families and the safeguarding of those in their care. Supervision is a partnership in which "one worker is given professional responsibility to work with another in order to meet certain organisational, professional and personal objectives. These objectives are competent, accountable performance, continuing professional development and personal support."
Morrison 1993, (adapted from, Harries 1987)

The Virtual School Team is provided supervision as a group on at least a half termly basis by a Senior Educational Psychologist. Brief supervision notes are taken and provided to the team at the end of the supervision session. The sessions are to provide professional development and support and are therefore important to the effective functioning of the team.

Statutory Guidance

It is all members of the Virtual School team's responsibility to ensure that they are fully familiar with the following documents and implications on their daily work:

- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683556/Promoting_the_education_of_looked-after_children_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf
- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683561/The_designated_teacher_for_looked-after_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf
- https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services
- Pupil premium: allocations and conditions of grant 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) This is updated annually.

It is the VSH's responsibility to alert the team to any other updates to key documents or new key documents.

Virtual School Self Evaluation Criteria

Through Ofsted monitoring, the Virtual School will be responsible for providing evidence on the following criteria. Virtual School Leads will be asked to contribute to this process.

Criteria NB: These criteria are just based on the Ofsted ILACS framework and promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities, DfE February 2018	Examples of Evidence
The experiences and progress of Children in Care and care leavers	
Children and young people make **good educational progress** at school or other provision since being in care. They receive the same support from their carers as they would from a good parent.	Progress data from previous key stage and from entry to care Attainment data
Children and young people who do not attend school have prompt access to suitable **good-quality registered Alternative Provision.** There is regular review of their progress. Urgent action is taken if children are missing from education or if their attendance reduces.	ALTERNATIVE PROVISION Ofsted reports PEPs
Children and young people **enjoy what they do** and have access to a range of social, educational and recreational opportunities.	Attendance data PEPs Audit of involvement in opportunities
Children and care leavers **who live away from their 'home' Local Authority** have access to education and health services that meet their needs as soon as they move outside of their 'home' area.	Audit of data of out of area Children in Care compared with those in area
All agencies and professionals **work together effectively** to reduce any unnecessary delay in receiving support and achieving permanence for children.	Case studies examples of effective partnership working
The accessibility, style and clarity of **case records [i.e., PEPs]** enhance the understanding that Children in Care and care leavers have about their histories and experiences.	PEP quality assurance systems
Children who are adopted, their adoptive families, their birth relatives and adopted adults are informed, and are aware of, their entitlement to receive an assessment of their adoption support needs. When support is needed, it is provided quickly, effectively and leads to improved circumstances for the children, young people, families and carers involved.	Record of support given to support adopted children and, where available, its impact
Care leavers	

Care leavers have good education and employment opportunities, including work experience and Alternative Provision and apprenticeships. They are encouraged and supported to continue their education and training, including those aged 21 to 24 years. Care leavers are p**rogressing well and achieving their full potential** through either being in further and higher education or in their chosen career/occupation.	Records of education and progress of care leavers and education support plans

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	
The **Local Authority** is an **active, strong and committed corporate parent** – in line with the corporate parenting principles. There is a corporate sense of responsibility for Children in Care and care leavers and the chief executive leads a Local Authority that recognises and prioritises the needs of children in all aspects e.g., housing, career opportunities, education and learning.	Corporate Parents group minutes Case studies of effective corporate parenting from other LA teams
The Local Authority can demonstrate evidence of **practice that is informed and sustainably improved by feedback, research and intelligence** about the quality of services. The experiences of children, young people and families who use them are important, including learning from their complaints and from successful or disrupted placements or adoption breakdown.	Record of training by VS and evaluation of its impact

Performance management	
The local authority, through performance management and monitoring, has an accurate and systematically updated **understanding of its effectiveness** and uses this to drive improvement.	Annual report
Management oversight of practice, including practice scrutiny by senior managers, is established, systematic and used clearly to improve the quality of decisions and the provision of help to children and young people.	Line management meeting minutes VS team meeting minutes IRO scrutiny

Pupil premium plus (taken from *Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance for local authorities* February 2018)	
The Virtual School Annual Report includes: • details of how the VSH has managed the PP+ and Early Years Pupil Premium for looked-after children; and • evidence of how the VSH's spending of the premium has supported the achievement of the children looked-after by their local authority, including clearly setting out how top sliced funding has supported this.	PP+ income and how it has been used. Assessment of effectiveness