

# Practice guide

## SEND and Alternative Provision

### Virtual School and SEND Team-Joint Practice Guidance, Salford

#### Background, purpose and rationale

Cared for children are more likely to have special educational needs than their peers and a significant proportion have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). When a child was moving out of authority, cared for children in Salford were experiencing unnecessary drift and delay in consultation for places due to EHC transfers not being timely across authorities.

Escalation procedures were unclear for SEND issues, particularly when the child was cared for and under the responsibility of the virtual school. Although the relationship was strong between the Salford Virtual School and Salford SEND department, they recognised that communication and joint working was critical and could be further improved and they could be more consistent in their approach. Each department had contacts and procedures that could support the other to reduce drift and delay when working cross authority. Devising joint working protocols meant everyone was clear on each other's roles and responsibilities.

#### What we did to improve children's outcomes and policies/experiences

The Joint Practice Guidance (JPG) in Salford establishes a standardised framework for collaboration between the Salford Virtual School Team and the Salford SEN Team. Its primary aim is to improve educational outcomes for children with special educational needs who are cared for by Salford.

##### Development and Implementation

- A SEND Joint Working Protocols document was developed to clarify the respective responsibilities of both teams and outline escalation procedures. A dedicated Microsoft Teams channel was created to facilitate shared access to key information:
  - The Joint Working Practice document.
  - The SEN Register, identifying all cared-for children with SEN Support/EHCP
  - The Belonging Register, which records the local authority responsible for each child's plan, the allocated caseworker, and their contact details.

##### Key Contacts and Communication

- A key contact has been identified within each team: the Virtual School SENDCO serves as the main liaison for the Virtual School and Senior Caseworker is designated as cared-for children specialist within the SEN Team.
- These contacts meet biweekly to review priority cases, including concerns or escalations, movements of cared-for children and Annual reviews and timescale compliance. Information is gathered by Virtual School Advisors and discussed collaboratively, with actions reviewed at subsequent meetings.

##### Information Management and Sharing

- When a child's EHCP is held by another authority, the Virtual School obtains a copy, which is stored by the SEND Team to ensure continuity in the event of a change in living arrangements.

- A North West Key Contacts List has been developed, including SEN, Inclusion, Virtual School, and Children's Social Care contacts, to streamline inter-authority communication.

#### Panel Decisions and EHCP Processes

- The Virtual School receives weekly updates from the SEND Team on decisions made at panels, ensuring visibility of cared-for children progressing through the EHCP assessment process.
- The Virtual School also notifies the SEND Team when a child receives a 'yes to assess' decision from another authority.
- When an EHCP request is submitted for a cared-for child, the Virtual School is listed as an advice contributor. Through the EHCP Hub, they upload Personal Education Plan (PEP) documents as evidence of need and to support the assess-plan-do-review cycle.

#### Access to Systems

Access to the EHCP Hub and SharePoint enables both teams to retrieve up-to-date information on a child's SEN needs, identify caseworker details, track statutory timescales, and provide Support Teacher Advisors with timely and accurate information.

#### What was the impact?

The Joint Working practice has improved and strengthened the relationship between the two teams meaning information and actions have been clear, leading to a reduction in lead times for SEND referrals and movement out of authority. This has been celebrated within a ILACS inspection when a case study was shared. The SEN register, belonging register, and key contacts list has meant that information is readily available, and actions are moved forward more quickly.

The escalation procedures have meant that the right actions have been taken jointly; this was commented on and praised within an ILACs meeting as it was clear how both teams had advocated for cared for children to ensure the right provision was put in place. The biweekly meetings have meant that all information is shared in a timely manner. Where a cared for child is placed out of authority and funding needs to be agreed, this can be escalated through these meetings ensuring that needs are met in a timely way. Better communication between different LA SEND teams and the Virtual School has reduced drift and delay for cared for children placed out of area with an EHCP.

#### Resources

Joint protocol working policy (SEN and VST)

Presentation slides

#### Find out more

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