



Learn Achieve Celebrate

Information and guidance
for Designated Teachers of Looked After and
Previously Looked After Children in
Northumberland
March 2021

Spring Conference – key messages and resources

The spring conference on 10th March was really well-attended. Thank you so much for making the time to focus on your Designated Teacher role and our looked after children. The 6 first sections of this newsletter are key messages from the conference with contact details of our guest presenters.

We're working on a shared folder for Designated Teachers so that you can easily access the presentations from previous conferences and in the future. Bear with us while we do this!



Stability

Now that schools have fully re-opened, our priority as a Virtual School is to return our looked after children safely to stable school placements.

There are 5 key ways in which we measure stability, and we are asking you to work with us to improve each one.



1. Attendance

At 8% total absence is currently in line with last year's performance. With a term of the school year still to go, we want to improve on this and are aiming for much better attendance for all looked after children.

2. Persistent absence

At 16% persistent absence is far too high. We know who the persistent absentees are and the schools and provisions they attend, and will work closely with you to reduce this figure before July.

3. Fixed term exclusions

So far this academic year there have been 31 exclusions for 18 looked after pupils on roll in 14 different schools. We need to make sure that these figures don't rise any further, and that the 18 pupils experiencing this instability are appropriately supported to engage fully with school again.

4. Permanent exclusions

With you, we have maintained our achievement of no permanent exclusions for Northumberland looked after children since 2008. We expect to sustain this every year.

5. School moves (mid-year)

There has been an excessive and unprecedent number of mid-year school moves since September 2020. This is being addressed strategically at the local authority alongside other stability factors such as changes in social worker and changes in placements. 25% of our school age looked after children have experienced a mid year school move. We need your help to keep in touch with school placements that might be vulnerable so that we can put the right support in place to avoid unnecessary moves.

Getting back on track

As we work together to get our looked after pupils back on track, we want to work with you to answer 3 key questions:

1. **What are the starting points now?**
2. **Are the right strategies and resources in place to accelerate progress?**
3. **Is this captured in the PEP?**

Every school age Northumberland looked after child will be receiving a Back on Track Pack from the Virtual School.

When your school's plans are in place, let us know:

- Arrangements for gathering evidence for GCSE grades for pupils in Year 11, and if you can please share with us each pupil's predicted grades
- What you are using the catch up premiums for
- If any looked after children are benefiting from the National Tutoring Programme
- If you plan to run summer schools in August

And finally, 3 reminders before you break up for Easter:



Spring term **Progress Reviews** are due – remember to click on submit in the ePEP when you have completed them



Spring **reviews of PEP Outcomes** are due – remember that PP+ is dispersed on receipt of this and the financial year ends on 31st March 2021 so you need to submit before that date to make sure the funding reaches your school



Autumn reviews of PEP Outcomes are overdue – if you haven't already submitted then please make sure you do before the end of term or the PP+ for the autumn term won't get to your school.

Mind of My Own

Pupil voice and **pupil views** are at the heart of the work we do with looked after children. Giving children the opportunity to be heard is fundamental to improving their outcomes and aspirations, and is one of the 7 principles of corporate parenting.

Debbie Aubrook, the Virtual School's Primary Teacher, is currently working with the Designated Teacher Working Group to review the pupil views template in the ePEP. This section of the PEP works best when it is completed as part of a conversation with the child, rather than when asked as a sequence of questions, so we are also developing resources for Designated Teachers to use with pupils to capture their views in more depth.

We also capture pupil views using the **Mind of My Own app**.

Mind Of My Own is an app that enables young people to express their views in all areas of their lives and allows them to speak up at any time. The app is a blend of tech, social work and children's rights that young people can use 24/7, either on their own or with their social worker, IRO, carer, advocate or ESLAC worker.



What schools can do to help:

- **Time & Space**
 - Support pupils to have the time, opportunity, and a safe space to complete a mind of my own statement
- **Access**

- The app can be downloaded from either the App Store or Google Play
- Check the Mind of Own website isn't blocked by school IT filters
- **Understanding**
 - This is a method for young people and their often-silent voices to be heard
 - Practitioners can also set up a "Worker Account" by going to the <https://workers.mindofmyown.org.uk/#/signup> and signing up for an account with Northumberland Children's Services.

Further information about Mind Of My Own and how it can help and support young people can be accessed: <https://mindofmyown.org.uk/>

Better care happens when children are better listened to. Mind of My Own makes it easier to evidence children and young people's views.

Attendance

We need to monitor attendance closely to support the safeguarding of looked after children, ensure they are receiving their entitlement to full-time education, and to identify at the earliest opportunity when the Virtual School needs to intervene for those at risk of fixed-term exclusions.

So we've made the way we record and share that information much easier.

As outlined at the Designated Teacher conference on 10th March, from Monday 22nd March 2021 the new attendance form in the ePEP will go live. We are requesting weekly attendance for all Northumberland looked after children, attending in and out of county schools, to be backdated from 8th March 2021.

The data you record will feed directly into the ePEP system which means you will no longer be asked to record attendance when submitting the termly progress reviews or be required to update the ePEP following a fixed-term exclusion. As the attendance form is a separate document within the ePEP it can be populated by another member of staff.

Child Name	Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM
Emily Alder	0	0	0	0	J	J	J	J	J	J
Hannah Alder	L	S	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J
Lucy Alder	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J
Hannah Alder	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J
Luke Mann	J	J	I	I	J	W	P	J	J	J

When you log in, click on the green link and you'll be directed to a page with the name of every Northumberland looked after child in your school. The attendance marks are pre-populated and only relevant sessions need editing.

When you click submit there is an option for comments, please add in any relevant information e.g where late, add in times or reasons (taxi etc), for fixed-term exclusions or C code please record the reasons.

The document will be sent out automatically every Monday and can be updated daily or at the end of the week, to be submitted every Friday after afternoon registration. Coding is in line with DFE codes including the X code for Covid related absences.

For Secondary Schools, if we know who the Attendance Officer is then log-in details have been issued and the link has been sent directly to them. As Designated Teacher can you please ensure your colleague is aware of the process. If you would like another member of staff to be responsible for attendance, please contact your ESLAC link worker with the staff member's name and email address.

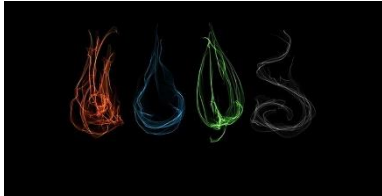
For those on a school roll but attending alternative provision, attendance will be recorded in the usual way and then submitted by the school.

Staff and pupil wellbeing

For those of you who attended the Designated Teacher Conference, you would have experienced the relaxing **Four Element self-help exercise** shared by our Lead Educational Psychologist Carol Booth. This simple yet effective technique can be used with staff and pupils to help calm and rebalance when needed. Give it a go...

Adapted from: Shapiro, E. (2012). 4 Elements Exercise Northumberland Virtual School

4 Elements Exercise for Stress Reduction (Earth Water Air Fire)



If you feel comfortable doing so, close your eyes while practicing the 4 Elements. If you do not feel comfortable or are not in a position in which you can safely close your eyes, your eyes can be kept open. Ask a trusted adult to do this with you!!!!

Earth = Grounding, Reality of Safety in the Present Moment

Take a few moments to “land” where you are. Feel your feet on the floor. Feel the support of whatever is beneath you. Feel the contact that your skin makes with whatever it is touching. Open your eyes and look around the room to notice 3 things that you have not noticed before. Notice any sounds, smells, or tastes that might be present.



Water = Turn on Relaxation Response

Make saliva in your mouth and swallow a few times. If you have trouble doing this, you can take a sip of water or suck on a sweet, think of a lemon or bite gently on the side of our cheek. When we enter Fight or Flight mode, the systems in our body that are not necessary for our immediate survival slow down. This includes the digestive system. Creating saliva turns on your digestive system, which in turn activates your body’s relaxation response.

Air = Breathing for Centering

With your eyes closed, place your hands on your stomach. Imagine you have a balloon in your stomach. When you breathe in, feel that balloon fill up with air. When you breathe out, feel the air in that balloon deflate. Try breathing in for the count of 4, holding your breath for the count of 6, and breathing out for the count of 8. Feel free to adjust these counts as needed, to something that is manageable.



Fire = Imagination



Bring to mind a place or an activity where you feel safe, calm, and relaxed, or where you feel good about yourself. Bring all of your senses into this experience, so notice what you see, what you hear, what you taste, what you smell, and what you feel. Now see above your head, a healing light pouring down on you out of the air...see the colour of the light and notice what it represents for you...feel it warm and gentle pouring over you like honey. Also notice what emotions you feel being in this safe, calm space.

As you continue feeling the security of your feet on the ground, to the feeling of calmness and control as you produce moisture in your mouth, centered with the air flowing in and out of your body through your breath, and the warm light of your imagination showing you all possibilities... Now open your eyes and come back to the present moment. Notice the state of your mind. Notice your breath. Notice how you are feeling.

Communication Needs of Looked After Children

Looked after children: risk factors for speech, language and communication needs:

- Young children exposed to five or more significant adverse experiences in the first 3 years of childhood face a 76% likelihood of having one or more delays in their language, emotional, or brain development (Westby, 2018)
- Children who have experienced trauma are at risk for a variety of developmental delays and disorders, the most likely and long-lasting being communication (Coster & Cicchetti, 1993)
- Mothers who experienced a number of ACEs have difficulty in producing coherent narrative reminiscing, which has been linked to children's long-term difficulties in using language to express feelings, regulate behavior, and engage in conversational exchanges (Siegel, 2015).

Speech, language and communication needs and learning:

- Poor language predicts poor literacy skills and between 50% and 90% of children with persistent communication needs go on to have reading difficulties. Vocabulary at age 5 is a very strong predictor of the qualifications achieved at school leaving age and beyond.
- The reading skills of 5 year olds with good and poor oral language skills were followed up; at age 6 there was a gap of a few months in reading age. By the time these young people were 14, this gap had widened to a difference of 5 years in reading age.
- Only a fifth of children with speech, language and communication needs reach the expected levels for their age in both English and Maths at age 11. Only 10% get 5 good GCSEs including English and Maths. (Communication Trust, 2011 -All Together Now Report)



For further information or to engage speech and language therapy services for a looked after child, contact:

**Ian Marks –Specialist Speech and Language Therapist
ian.marks@northumberland.gov.uk**

MSET Roadshow

In partnership with Northumbria Police, Children's Services has held two Missing, Slavery, Exploitation and Trafficking (MSET) Roadshows. Due to the success, we're running another two sessions on **23rd March at 2pm and a twilight session on 26th April at 4pm.**

The aim of the roadshow is to increase awareness and understanding of the MSET process including the referral criteria and support offer.

The Roadshows will cover:

- MSET's function
- Referral Criteria
- Paperwork
- Disruption Plans and Best Practice Examples
- MSET Panel's offer - How we help



There has been very positive feedback from colleagues in schools who attended the first roadshows, it would be great if you could drop into the March or April session if you can.

To book one of the sessions, please email elise.mielnik@northumberland.gov.uk with your preference, including your job role, Head Teacher and school.

Our acting Deputy VSH, Tara Prescott, is a panel member and will be presenting at the events.

Aligning annual EHCP reviews and looked after child reviews

Northumberland's local authority area SEND inspection in 2018 identified as an area of improvement the need to align the annual EHCP and Looked After Reviews.

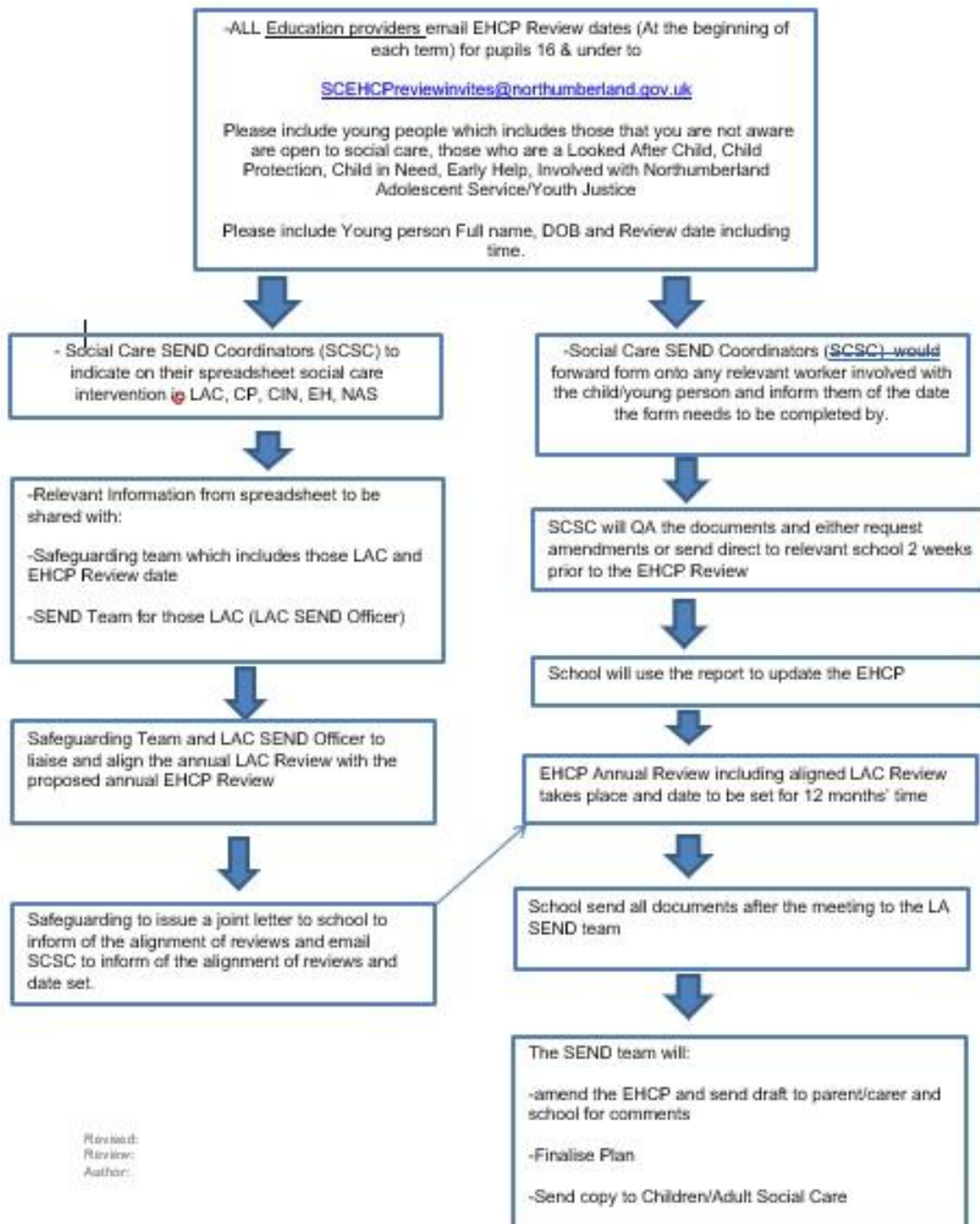
As some of the most vulnerable children in society, looked after children are subject to various reviews. This alignment will ensure that the right professionals are in attendance to co-produce meaningful documents that offer children, families, and professionals a streamlined and focused approach, while improving communication between Education and Social Care.



From a school perspective, your views are imperative to support both the emotional wellbeing and academic progress of the pupil, particularly in the current circumstances where the need to keep plans tight around the child are vital for safeguarding. Please see the revised flowchart that supports the process and if needed share it with your SENDCO.

Please note, this process is for annual reviews only, not emergency EHCP reviews.

Annual EHCP Reviews and those aligning with LAC Reviews (not including post 16 education)



Revised:
Review:
Author:



Planning is already underway for the **summer conference** in July. The theme will be looked after children with SEND so if you have any ideas for the agenda – content and guest presenters – then let us know so that we can make the arrangements in advance. The date for your diary is **7th July 2021**, 1.00-3.00pm. It will most likely be a virtual meeting and a link will be sent to you all nearer the time.

Facebook



Designated Teachers in Northumberland, you now have your own Facebook page!

The purpose of the page is to keep connected, share good practice, ideas and resources. Please feel free to join and support each other, search for us at:

Northumberland VS Designated Teacher

Contact Us

Here are contact details for teams and services that you might need when working with looked after children. Let us know if you need any others:

- OneCall 01670 536 400
- ESLAC 01670 622779
- Email: eslac.info@northumberland.gov.uk
- CYPS 01670 502 700
- Family Placement 01670 626 262
- IROs 01670 624888

Virtual School Headteacher: Jane Walker



Northumberland
County Council