

**Coventry Virtual School**

**Policy on the management of school placement moves for looked after children**

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| Author: | Jim Horgan, Head of the Virtual School |
| Relevance: | The Virtual Head and all Virtual School staff  All social workers and social worker managers dealing with looked after children within Coventry City Council |
| Review date | 2020 on the review of the DfE guidance document: *Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children* |
| Related documents authored by the VS | Template for notification of school placements  Flow chart of procedures for notifying school placement information |

# **Introduction**

The management of school places and school placement moves by social workers, who have parental responsibility for looked after children, and the Virtual School Head [VSH], who has a statutory remit as the ‘corporate parent’ to champion their education, is governed by the statutory guidance document *Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children* (February 2018)[[1]](#footnote-1), issued under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970. Of particular relevance to this document is the requirement of the VSH to “maintain an up-to-date roll of its looked-after children who are in school or college settings and gather information about their education placement, attendance and educational progress” and paragraphs 8 to 11 of the section ‘Securing appropriate education’, which states:

* “the child’s allocated social worker should do everything possible to minimise disruption to the child’s education, whatever the child’s age, and this should involve the VSH”
* “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 VSH at the same time as the care placement. The VSH is responsible for supporting social workers to ensure timely provision of a suitable education placement for looked-after children”
* “In arranging a school placement, the child’s social worker …should seek a school or other education setting that is best suited to the child’s needs”

The purpose of this document is to outline the policy and procedure and responsibilities of council officers which will govern the management of school placement moves within Coventry City Council such that the VSH is at all times aware of the educational establishment in which every looked after child is placed and that social workers are effectively supported in applying for school places to meet the best interests of the child.

# **Responsibilities of the Virtual Head and the Social Worker**

It is the responsibility of the social worker to:

* Ensure that all children who become looked-after are immediately flagged as such on Protocol.
* Keep the information on Protocol with respect to the current school placement of the child up-to-date, ensuring that all changes are recorded as soon as they happen.
* Ensure that relevant information concerning the child’s educational need is recorded on Protocol.
* Except in emergencies consult with the Virtual Head, or one of the advisory teachers within the Virtual School, ***before*** enacting any care placement move for the child which would impact upon their school placement. Any educational placement move should be arranged to coincide with any care placement move.
* In the case of emergency care placement moves, consult the Virtual School as soon as is practicable with respect the arrangement of an educational placement. The child must be found a suitable educational placement within 20 days.
* Solicit the views of the child and his/her carers with respect to their school place and record these, without making promises that cannot be kept.
* Make an application for the child new place, including the completion of all admissions paperwork.
* Ensure that the Virtual School is notified immediately when a looked after child changes school place, is taken into custody and will be educated in a detention centre, is placed in a residential home with education on site, or is taken into hospital and will be educated in a hospital school.
* In the case of difficulties in gaining admission for the child to the most appropriate educational institution, consult and collaborate with the Virtual Head to initiate such appeals processes as are necessary.
* Organise an initial PEP meeting within 20 days of a school placement move or 10 days in the case of emergency moves.

It is the responsibility of the Virtual Head (or one of the Virtual School’s advisory teachers on his/her behalf) to:

* Provide advice and guidance to the social worker in identifying an appropriate school or educational placement for the child.
* Provide advice and guidance to the social worker on any additional educational considerations for the child given their individual needs, wishes and circumstances.
* Collaborate with the social worker to ensure that a child has a new school place within 20 days.
* Collaborate with the social worker and champion the child in the event of difficulties in gaining admission for the child in the most appropriate school, where necessary directing schools to accept them.
* Working with other departments as necessary, ensure that any additional educational requirements of the child, for example SEND, are met.
* Ensure that the social worker has timely access to the ePEP system to organise PEPs and view educationally relevant information.

# **Principle Points of Guidance**

The advice and guidance given to social workers about suitable placements will be highly individual depending on the wishes, needs and circumstances of the child. However, there are some general principles to which the Virtual School endeavours to adhere unless there are compelling reasons not to. These are:

* Children taken into care should maintain their current school place whenever possible.
* If the present school placement cannot be maintained, schools judged by Ofsted to be ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ should be prioritised. If consideration is given to schools judged ‘Requiring Improvement’, VSHs and social workers should have evidence that the school is providing high quality support to its vulnerable pupils. Unless there are exceptional evidence-based reasons, looked-after children should never be placed in a school judged by Ofsted to be ‘inadequate’.
* Children should not move school place during Key Stage 4
* Children should be placed within the Coventry LA where ever possible.

In all cases the child is entitled to a suitable educational place within 20 days. The Virtual School will take all necessary steps to prevent delay in obtaining a suitable place.

In some circumstances and at the discretion of the Virtual Head, the Virtual School will organise private tuition for children without a school place. This is never ‘full time’ and never an effective substitute for a permanent school place. It is also very expensive to provide, using resources which could otherwise be used to support the child his or her new school place. For these reasons, such tuition is only organised where exceptional circumstances have caused an unavoidable delay, beyond 20 days, in obtaining a school place. Any such tuition is intended to provide a very temporary means of preventing the child from falling further behind educationally. Social workers should not assume that the Virtual School can provide this service and should not permit any delay in pursuing a suitable place because the child may be temporarily in receipt of tuition.

# **Arranging Educational Placement Moves Out of City**

The responsibility for making application for school places for looked after children remains with the social worker as they hold the parental rights and responsibilities for the child. For schools within Coventry, the social worker should be guided by the admissions team to complete the necessary paperwork.

For schools in other local authorities, the social worker should investigate the procedures of the authority in which the child resides and follow the guidance of the admissions department of that authority. Instructions and appropriate paperwork are often available on line. Links to the relevant sites for the most commonly used authorities are noted on the flow chart attached to this document.

**CARE PLACEMENT MOVE FOR SOCIAL WORKERS/VIRTUAL SCHOOL/COVENTRY SCHOOL ADMISSIONS/SEN**

PLEASE ENSURE A NOTIFICATION TO PLACE FORM IS COMPLETED

Actions with respect to education

* Coventry Virtual School to contact hosting authority to obtain up to 3 proposed schools. Coventry Virtual School to supply Social Worker with proposed schools and link to hosting authority in school admissions. Also to offer advice & key words to complete application.
* Social Worker to consult with Virtual School **before** the move.

Does the Young Person have an EHCP Plan or Statement of SEN? If so School Applications **MUST** be made via the SEN Team in Coventry: email: [SENAdmin@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:SENAdmin@coventry.gov.uk) or telephone 024 76 831614. **Aim to secure Admission process within 20 working days of submitting application.**

* Social Worker makes school application. **Aim to secure Admission process within 20 working days of submitting application.**
* Day 20 – Coventry Virtual School/Advisory Teacher to contact the hosting authority school admissions to review response and outline their action direct the school for a place.
* Day 14 – Coventry Virtual School/Advisory Teacher and Coventry School Admissions collate information for letter/email to hosting authority for an update on school application. Update Social Worker of the progress.
* Day 12 – Coventry Virtual School/Advisory Teacher to contact Coventry School Admissions and request that they contact the hosting authority school admissions to request an update on school application and update Advisory Teacher of the progress.
* Day 5 & Day 10 - Coventry Virtual School/Advisory Teacher to contact the hosting authority school admissions to request an update on school application and inform the Social Worker of the progress.

# **The Notification of Educational Placement Moves**

In order to monitor our looked after children effectively and to promote their education, it is imperative that the Virtual School is at all times aware of every child who is looked after and of their current educational placement. For this reason, it is ***essential*** that social workers keep the Virtual School abreast of the fact that children are taken into care (by flagging this on Protocol), and anything else that will affect the circumstances in which they are educated.

Any school changes should be recorded promptly on Protocol. The Virtual School recognises however, that there are sometimes technical difficulties in recording schools which are outside of the Coventry LEA and that there are certain types of emergency move that forcibly mean a child’s new educational placement is within an establishment that is not negotiable with the Virtual School; say, in a detention centre or hospital. These locations may prove difficult to record. The Virtual School administration team will endeavour to help resolve these recording difficulties, but to do so will require prompt response to their enquiries to social workers. A flow chart representing the procedure for checking and resolving issues with information on placement moves is attached to this document along with the template used by administration staff to request clarification of educational placement details.

# **Further Advice and Guidance**

Further assistance can be obtained from Virtual School staff on 024 7697 5535.

# **Appendix One**

***Administration template for clarification of school placement***

Good morning/afternoon,

We have received notification that the following pupil:

Name                date

has been moved outside the city of Coventry.

**Can you please confirm as a matter of urgency what provision has been made to support their education**?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Please delete as applicable: |
| Will the pupil continue (or return shortly) to their current school placement? | Yes/No |
| Is the child currently without a school place? | Yes/No |

If the child will remain in their current school, you do not need to take any further action. Please return this form to the Virtual School admin.

If the child now requires a new educational placement, you should contact the Virtual School and discuss appropriate provision with the advisory teacher: ( ). As the social worker with parental responsibility, you will then need to apply for a new school place or other educational provision. Please see the advice sheet attached for guidance on how to do this.

If you have already completed these steps and the new provision has now been arranged, please provide the details by completing the form below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What type of provision has been arranged for the child?** | Please delete as applicable: |
| 1. The pupil will attend a school placement provided through their residential home, or |  |
| 1. The pupil will attend a new school placement. |  |
| 1. The pupil will attend some alternative educational which is not provided by a school |  |

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| --- | --- |
| **Details of the educational provision for this pupil:** | |
| The name of the new school or educational provider: |  |
| Address: |  |
| Post code of school or provider |  |
| Telephone: |  |
| Designated Teacher: |  |

*Please remember that the pupil will require a first PEP in their new provision within 20 days*

If you require any additional guidance please do not hesitate to contact the Virtual School.

Kindly complete and send this information back to us at [virtualschool@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:virtualschool@coventry.gov.uk)

Your co-operation in this work is very much appreciated.

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children> [Accessed 16/11/2018] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)