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Dear Colleague

Circular CCPD/2/2011 - Personal Education Plans for Looked After Children

Children in care have the right to expect the same outcomes as we want for and aspire to for every child. Helping them to succeed in education, reach their potential and fulfil their ambitions will make a major contribution to realising positive outcomes for children in care. Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts and the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board have a duty to promote the welfare of children in their care under Article 26 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. This includes their educational achievement and therefore they must ensure that all children in care have an effective and robust Personal Education Plan (PEP) in place to ensure focused planning and personal support to each child.

Introduction

1. The *Care Matters in Northern Ireland* strategy¹ was endorsed by the Executive in 2009. *Care Matters in Northern Ireland* recommended that all looked after children should have a Personal Educational Plan (PEP). Personal Education Plans focus on the whole child/young person by ensuring that they are fully supported to take advantage of the best learning opportunities within education, while recognising the relationship between the home environment, school and opportunities available to children and young people within communities to engage in youth work based and/or alternative programmes.
2. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Department of Education (DE) have produced a joint PEP for looked after children. A copy of the new PEP with guidelines is available on the Department’s website.
3. The development of the PEP materials has resulted from close working between the two departments, HSC Trust representatives, the Education and Library

¹ *Care Matters in Northern Ireland, a Bridge to a Better Future* (DHSSPS, 2007)
http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hss/child_care/child_care-carematters.htm

Boards and the Looked After Children in Education project group (LACE). All parties recognised the need to promote and drive better outcomes for children placed in care.

4. Current research indicates that children in care perform at a much lower level in education terms compared to their peers within the whole school population.
5. A significant number of Looked After Children have very low educational achievements. Of the children who left care in 2009/2010, only 17% achieved 5 or more GCSEs (Grades A*-C) compared with over 70% of general school leavers and 43% of care leavers left care with no qualifications.²

Purpose of this Circular

6. The purpose of this circular is to inform the HSC sector of the arrangements for the application of PEPs and to explain, in detail, what is required of each individual involved in the process.

Purpose of the Personal Education Plan (PEP)

7. The Personal Education Plan (PEP) is a requirement for all children in care which promotes positive educational outcomes for the young person in order to achieve their full potential. It is the overarching education plan for the young person which builds on the young person's views and brings together other education plans such as the Individual Education Plan, Statement of Special Educational Needs etc. The PEP is also part of the legal Care Plan for young people in care. PEPs serve as a record of academic progress and achievement. It also takes account of social and emotional development and clearly sets out and reviews short term targets in support of longer term educational plans and aspirations held by the young person.
8. Completion of PEPs is aimed at ensuring a sustained focus on the educational journey and attainment of children in care thereby laying the foundation for continued planning and achievement and assisting young people to make important choices when they reach critical milestones particularly at 16 and beyond. Assisting children in care to attain stability, security and fulfilling lives in adulthood through continued opportunities to engage in further and higher education and to have support in seeking and attaining employment through learning and experiential opportunities are an inherent facet of services in place to support throughcare planning and after care support. To this end, seamless planning and emphasis on the educational pathways of children and young people from the point of entry to care is essential.

LAC Review Meetings

9. LAC review meetings should highlight the importance of education planning for young people in care. This reflects the commitment of the social worker, carers, parents (if appropriate) and any other significant adults in taking joint responsibility for improving educational outcomes under the principles of Corporate Parenting. A PEP should be completed for all Looked After

² Northern Ireland Care Leavers Aged 16-18 Statistical Bulletin 2009/10 (DHSSPS, 2011)
http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/ni_care_leavers_09-10.pdf

Children/Young People admitted to care at the 3 month LAC Review, the 6 month LAC Review and at 6 monthly intervals thereafter to coincide with LAC Reviews.

Listening to Our Young People in Care

10. Central to any LAC Review meeting are the needs and wishes of young people which are sought and, gathered by seeking, listening to and recording their views. Young people **must** be encouraged to contribute to the LAC Review meetings in a way that is most comfortable and appropriate for them. Completion of the PEP aspect of the overall care planning and review process must also encompass and reflect the views and wishes of the child / young person. This may be achieved through young people talking with a teacher, or an adult that they feel comfortable with prior to the meeting or by being assisted and supported to attend the meeting in person.

The Statutory Framework

11. Article 26 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 states every authority looking after a child shall “safeguard and promote his welfare.” This includes their educational achievement.

12. Articles 34A and 34C sets out the need for preparing pathway plans for eligible and relevant children. Regulation 7 of, and the schedule to, The Children (Leaving Care) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 sets out the matters to be dealt within the pathway plan which includes a detailed plan for the education or training of the child or young person.

13. Regulation 4(1) of, and Schedule 3 to, The Arrangements for Placement for Children (General) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996 advises of the educational considerations which an authority must have regard to when making a placement.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Social Worker

14. When a young person becomes looked after, the HSC Trust who looks after him or her must ensure that the school is notified and receives the PEP. This should be pre-populated by the social worker with the basic information at Section 1. If they are already looked after when they join the school they should have an existing PEP. This should be transferred to the young person’s new school so that they have it by or on the first day that the young person joins the school.

Education Role

15. A PEP for a Looked After Child will be initiated by the young person’s social worker who will send Section 2 to the School Principal for completion when required. Schools only complete the PEP when requested to do so by the social worker and are not required to initiate the process.

The Child

16. Young people should be offered support with completing their part (Section 3). Those supporting the young person should use their professional judgement to support the young person’s understanding of the questions.

The Court

17. For Court proceedings for the young person the Social Worker needs to provide a completed PEP in respect of Sections 1 and 7 on the understanding that the Judiciary are informed that a full PEP is available, on request. The PEP is necessary to allow the Court to see the provision that is being made to support the young person's educational attainment and his/her progress through the various stages of education assessment.

The Carer

18. The Foster Carer, as supported by the Social Worker, or where the child resides in a Children's Home, the Residential Social Worker will need to consider relevant information to support the young person's learning in relation to home such as motivation, and attitude towards learning, homework. They will also need to consider opportunities outside of learning such as leisure opportunities and health needs. At the LAC Review they should share relevant information regarding the young person at home and how they as carers support the young person's educational needs. Foster carers complete Section 5. They should also help the young person in completing their plans at Section 3.

Parent(s) (if appropriate)

19. Where appropriate, parents should be encouraged to contribute in a positive way to the completion of the PEP Section 4 by the Social Worker.

20. Once a PEP for a child has been agreed and established, it will be a continuous running record which should be updated accordingly following each Looked After Children Review.

Training

21. Training will be provided to all HSC staff as required to enable them to fully undertake and participate in the PEP process.

Monitoring of the PEP Process

22. The PEP and the associated guidance have been agreed by all key stakeholders in the process. To be effective and improve the educational experience and outcome of young people PEPs are aimed at helping all parties gain a clear and shared understanding of the learning provision necessary to meet the child's educational needs and how these needs will be met. The PEP therefore must be seen as a living and purposeful document. To sustain this, the HSC Board will be asked to monitor the implementation and use of PEPs by Trusts and to assess their overall contribution to meeting young people's specific and holistic educational requirements both within the school environment and more broadly within the community in terms of engagement in leisure activities, extra-curricular activities etc. A report will be required by the Chief Social Services Officer on an annual basis outlining the use of PEPs in relation to the LAC population by each Trust and their effectiveness, to be quantified in terms of personal and behavioural targets.

23. A PEP is an opportunity for dialogue between all those concerned with the young person's education and ensures that everyone involved knows the needs of the young person, including those contained within the Care Plan and what they and others need to do to promote the young person's education and future well being. When examining needs it is important to explore friendship groups, ability to maintain relationships and participation in extra-curricular activities as these activities and special interests also contribute to a young person's enjoyment and motivation both at school and at home.
24. In producing the PEP and its associated guidance it is expected that all contributors will implement these plans to the best of their abilities and in keeping with their respective roles and responsibilities in the process of promoting better outcomes for Looked After children and young people.

Enquiries

Initial enquiries regarding this circular should be made to:

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This circular is available on the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety website:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hss/child_care/child_care-guidance.htm