

Teacher Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire Guidance for Designated Teachers

What is the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)?

The SDQ is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire. The SDQ consists of three questionnaires that are filled out: one by the teacher, one by the student (dependant on age) and one by the parents/carers – they have the same questions in them, just asked in slightly different ways. The focus of this document is on the Teacher SDQ only. Each questionnaire consists of 25 questions assessing the following areas: emotional symptoms; conduct problems; hyperactivity; peer relationship problems; kind and helpful behaviour. There is also a short impact supplement.

Why does the Virtual School collect this information?

Government guidance, '[Promoting The Education of Looked-After Children and Previously-Looked After Children](#)' (Feb 2018) outlines that the Virtual School Headteacher should work with Designated Teachers to ensure that schools are able to identify signs of potential mental health issues and know how to access further assessment and support where necessary. This is in line with Government advice for Designated Teachers (see Paragraphs 56 and 57 of the statutory guidance for Designated Teachers), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-teacher-for-looked-after-children>, which states that:

'Designated teachers should put in place robust arrangements to complete their element of the SDQ and engage with the relevant VSH and, where the school has one, the officer responsible for links with mental health services regarding this. Designated teachers should use the results of the SDQ to help inform the child's PEP'.

What are the benefits of completing the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire?

The SDQ provides a means of regularly measuring the emotional and behavioural experiences of looked-after children and supports the professional network to form a view about a looked after child or young person's (CYP's) emotional wellbeing. Regular review enables the network around the child and young person to act earlier to put in place appropriate support to minimise these needs.

When does the Virtual School collect this information?

From April 2020, the Virtual School will be gathering information annually on the mental health and wellbeing of children looked after via the use of teacher completed Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs). This information will be collected from Designated Teachers, prior to the Summer Term PEP meeting. The Teacher Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire is required to be completed for **all** children and young people in care and will form part of the Personal Education Plan

What if a child is new into care?

If a child is new into care, you don't need to wait until the Summer Term PEP to complete the SDQ. If there is a teacher who knows them well and has regular contact with them (see who should complete the SDQ section below), you should complete SDQ prior to their first PEP meeting. If the child or young person is new to your school, and there therefore isn't a teacher who knows them well, then complete the SDQ prior to the following term's PEP meeting. Please contact the Virtual School for the electronic questionnaire to be sent to you.

Who should complete the teacher version of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire?

The SDQ needs to be completed by someone that knows the child or young person well and has regular contact with them. Regular contact can be viewed as someone that has had involvement with the child or young person 3 or 4 times a week for at least 3 months but preferably 6 months or more. The Designated Teacher does not have to fill

out the SDQ themselves, but is responsible for identifying the most appropriate Teacher to complete it, and ensuring it is completed. The following should be considered:

- Who might be the best person to complete the SDQ?
- Who knows the child best and do they need support to complete the form?
- It is crucial that the person completing the SDQ is not basing their answers on a specific day but rather over a period of time. Otherwise, the results may not provide an accurate reflection of the child or young person's needs.

How do I complete the Teacher Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire?

AfC Virtual School has invested in an online platform to complete and score the SDQ so that: it is as quick and efficient as possible to complete; the data is stored and transferred electronically between a child or young person's school and the Virtual School, in line with data protection and GDPR regulations; human error in completion and scoring is minimised.

The SDQ's will be filled out electronically via a link sent to the Designated Teacher, at least two weeks prior to the Summer Term PEP date. This may mean that the link is sent in the final week of the previous term for PEP meetings due to take place in the first two weeks of the Summer term. The questionnaire takes between 5 – 10 minutes to complete. You will need access to a computer / laptop that is connected to the internet. The process is outlined below:

1. The Designated Teacher will be emailed a link to a secure webpage, and a password by Virtual School Business Support. This link can be passed onto the teacher who will be completing the SDQ, if this is not the DT.
2. The password is 'live' for 5 days from the date of sending, giving 5 days to complete the SDQ questionnaire. If you have been unable to complete the questionnaire within this time, contact the Virtual School for a new link to be issued. However, to avoid drift, this should be avoided where ever possible.
3. Click on the link in the email to take you to the secure website, or copy and paste into your browser.
4. When prompted, enter the password provided in the email from the Virtual School. Each password is related to a specific young person. Care and attention is required if you are sent multiple links for multiple young people, to ensure you are clear which young person the link is for when you enter the data as no names are visible on the online platform.
5. Follow the instructions on the screen to complete the questionnaire.
6. Once you have completed the questionnaire, the results will automatically be saved on the online platform and sent to the Virtual School. Please note, you will not see the results on screen at the time of submitting your responses.
7. The Virtual School will upload the results as a PDF on the ePEP document, ready for discussion at the PEP meeting.
8. Prior to or during the PEP, please add the scores for each area in the relevant section on the ePEP document.

Who completes the carer and young person Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires?

Social Care are responsible for ensuring SDQ information is gathered from Foster Carers and the young person themselves, if they are aged 11 and over, and give their consent. Plans are in place for this information to be gathered by health professionals at LAC Health Reviews using the same online platform. Social Care and the Virtual School work closely together to triangulate the information from the different questionnaires, to gather a holistic picture of a young person's mental health and wellbeing.

SDQ results: Interpretation, discussion at PEP, identification of next steps

The results of the teacher SDQ will be shared with Designated Teachers and Social Workers via the PEP document. A new section has been added to the ePEP to ensure that the information gathered through the SDQ is reviewed, discussed and recorded during the PEP meeting. This includes the identification of appropriate targets, derived from review of the SDQ information (and other relevant sources), to meet any identified Social, Emotional or Mental Health (SEMH) needs. The network is required to identify strategies to support the child to meet the identified needs, including planned impact and termly review.

SDQ results and preparation for discussions regarding emotional wellbeing at PEP meetings

The SDQ is a tool that supports us to think about a young person's mental health and wellbeing. However, it is important to ensure SDQ information is triangulated, that is, that the SDQ score is considered as one part of the picture, alongside other sources of information available about a CYPs wellbeing.

To prepare for discussion at the PEP meeting, the following questions may be helpful to consider:

1. Are there any concerns (high / very high) in any areas?
 - What may be contributing to this?
 - What is already in place that is supporting the CYP's mental health and wellbeing?
 - How do we know if this is making a difference?
 - What else can be put in place to support these needs?

Please note: Targets and support should focus on the root cause of difficulties. For example, consider whether difficulties with concentration and attention may be related to the CYP finding it difficult to settle to learning due to their emotional needs, rather than an underlying attention difficulty? If this is the case, targets and support need to focus on the emotional needs.

2. What other information does the network have about the CYPs emotional wellbeing? For example, but not limited to:
 - Foster Carer and Young Person SDQ if available;
 - Round Robin teacher views regarding CYP's emotional wellbeing and presentation across school;
 - In house systems for assessing CYP's wellbeing
 - Information from other professionals involved with the CYP.
3. Is there a clear understanding of the CYP's areas of strength and difficulties in relation to their emotional wellbeing? If not, what needs to happen / what information needs to be gathered, and from whom, in order to develop this understanding?
4. Does the information gathered from a range of sources 'fit' with what the SDQ results are indicating? Do you need to find out any more information in a particular area to further explore this?
5. Are there any differences between what different sources of information are telling you? If so:
 - What may have led to these differences?
 - Consider whether the CYP presents differently in different contexts.
 - If so, what do we know about when they are managing well? How can we apply what is working well in one context to another context?
 - Does the person who completed the SDQ only see them in particular types of situations? Is this representative of their presentation and behaviour more generally?
6. What are the CYP's views about their own social, emotional and mental health needs?
 - What are their main concerns? What do they think might support them?
 - How can we take their views into consideration when identifying targets / strategies?

What do the scores mean?

SDQ scores are grouped into different categories (overall stress; emotional distress; behavioural difficulties; hyperactivity and concentration difficulties; difficulties getting along with other young people, kind and helpful behaviour). Responses to each category fall in one of four levels of difficulty (close to average, slightly raised, high, very high). The authors of the SDQ outline the rough percentage of children and young people in the general population that would be expected to fall into each level for each category. In the general population, roughly 80% of children score 'close to average', 10% score 'slightly raised', 5% score 'high', and 5% score 'very high'. The pro social scale for kind and helpful behaviour is an exception, where roughly 80% of children would score close to average, 10% 'slightly low', 5% 'low' and 5% 'very low'.

Close to average scores: If an SDQ score is categorised as close to average, this should be recorded on the child's ePEP. No direct additional intervention is likely to be required. Good practice would dictate that consideration of how to maintain and further enhance wellbeing is discussed at the PEP meeting.

Helpful questions to explore at the PEP

- Are there any trigger points that can be foreseen that may impact the CYP's mental health and wellbeing? (e.g. anniversary of significant events i.e. coming into care, parent or sibling birthday; transitions; exams; change in contact arrangement; sensitive curriculum topics etc.)
- What additional support can be put in place in relation to these trigger points?

Slightly Raised results indicate SDQ responses are slightly higher than the average for the general population. This should be recorded on the CYP's ePEP alongside a target to enhance the CYP's emotional wellbeing and resources or strategies required to support.

Helpful questions to explore at the PEP (in addition to those outlined above):

- Does the CYP have a trusted adult in school who they are aware that they can talk to about their emotional wellbeing and seek support / be signposted to additional support if needed?
- What additional support is available that might be appropriate for this CYP? e.g. school nurse / in school pastoral support / key person / mentoring / extra curricula activities / group work targeting a specific area e.g. self-esteem; social skills; understanding and managing emotions etc.?
- Do current interventions / support need to be adapted in terms of frequency / length / group composition / contexts / target setting and / or progress monitoring?

High results indicate SDQ responses are higher than the average for the general population. They are likely to need additional support to enhance their wellbeing. This should be recorded on the CYP's ePEP alongside a target to enhance the CYP's wellbeing and resources or strategies required to support.

Helpful questions / actions to explore at the PEP (in addition to those outlined above):

- Consult with appropriate professionals (e.g. Virtual School staff, Social Worker, School EP, Mental Health and Wellbeing Practitioners, CAHMS).

Very High results indicate SDQ responses are higher than the average for the general population. They are likely to need additional support to enhance their wellbeing. This should be recorded on the CYP's ePEP alongside a target to enhance the CYP's wellbeing and resources or strategies required to support.

Helpful questions / actions to explore at the PEP (in addition to those outlined above):

- Risk assessment: Is this young person at immediate risk / experiencing mental health crisis? Please follow your school guidance and liaise with the CYP's Social Worker.
- Please note, if a young person experiences a mental health crisis, and poses an immediate risk to themselves or others, they should attend A&E immediately. Please contact the CYP's Social Worker to inform them.

PLEASE NOTE: A HIGH or VERY HIGH OVERALL STRESS score will trigger a consultation with Virtual School, Social worker and an Educational Psychologist and / or Emotional Health Service (Tier 2 CAMHS).