Advice on the use of Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ)
Central Bedfordshire Virtual School
Website: What is the Virtual School?

**Advice on the use of Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ)**

This document has been produced in line with DfE Guidance [Mental health and behaviour in schools - Publications - GOV.UK](http://www.gov.uk) and with information from the Youth in Mind SDQ website [http://www.sdqinfo.com/](http://www.sdqinfo.com/)

Further consultation took place with Designated Teachers in both Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough.

**What is a SDQ?**

*The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire for 3-16 year olds. It exists in several versions to meet the needs of researchers, clinicians and educationalists.*

**The SDQ is:**

- A screening tool to assist in ensuring that the Emotional Well Being and Mental Health Needs (EWB & MH) of looked after children are being met
- A questionnaire available from the DfE which when completed gives a rating between 0 and 40. A rating of 17+ is regarded as an indicator that further follow up (assessment, professional input or treatment) *may be* needed
- A questionnaire for children aged 2-17 years (age banded 2 to 4, 4 to 10 and 11 to 17 years old).

**The SDQ is not:**

- A sophisticated, free standing, quantitative psychological/ psychiatric/psychometric tool
- A threshold to be met to qualify for services. Children with SDQ scores below 17, may still have significant EWB & MH needs
- Children with high scores may have:
  - *Acute needs that are being met adequately with quality care and education OR*
  - *Acute needs that are being met with good care, education and specialist input, educational, pastoral, counselling, psychological or psychiatric input.*

**Context:**

Currently the *minimum* requirement is for an SDQ to be completed for Looked After Children after for one year in care and annually thereafter. The completion of SDQs and the average score of a Local Authority’s looked after children is a key performance indicator. LAs will respond to the individual needs of the Looked After Children in their care based on the SDQ score and other relevant information. For Children Looked After by (in care to CBC) a score of 13+ will instigate a consultation with CBC’s CAMHS team for looked after children and young people.
All Looked After Children who have been looked after (in care for a year or longer and are aged between 4 and 16yrs old must have an SDQ completed on them by:

Their carers, typically, foster carers or carers in residential homes at the request of their Social Workers who record the outcomes and act on them. This should include sharing with professional networks.

Additionally the Department of Education produces SDQs for educators of 2-4yr olds, teachers of children and young people 4 -17yrs old and for self completion by young people aged 11-17yrs if required. These can be downloaded in English from:


Other languages are also available at http://www.sdqinfo.com/py/sdqinfo/b0.py

Completion of SDQs by schools and settings:

Accessing the Questionnaires:

Age appropriate questionnaires can be downloaded from http://www.sdqinfo.com/py/sdqinfo/b3.py?language=Englishqz(UK)

Advice on completing the questionnaire and then uploading the results can be found at http://www.sdqinfo.com/py/sdqinfo/c0.py

Completing the questionnaire

How often will schools want to complete and why?

This will be led by the Designated Teacher or key worker for the child in the school or setting. The minimum expectation is that it will be done annually one year after the child becomes Looked After and the outcome will be shared with the social worker.

The Central Bedfordshire Virtual School requests that:

1. The teacher SDQ is to be completed by the DT or the child’s key worker every term in preparation for the termly Personal Education Plan starting from the second PEP meeting after a child comes into care.
2. For those currently in care they should be completed before the next PEP meeting from September 2016.
3. If the school generates its own score online this is shared with the social worker prior to this meeting taking place
4. If the school wants social care to generate the score they should send the questionnaire to the social worker who will generate the score and send back to the school
5. The DT ensures that the most recent school one is shared at the 12 month LAC review.
6. The questionnaire may be used where appropriate to evidence the impact of any intervention funded through the pupil premium
7. The questionnaire is used as evidence to apply for additional pupil premium funding,
However schools may wish to consider using the questionnaire at other times to support their assessment of the child and the effectiveness of the intervention they have put in place.

- If/when something has changed in their life to see if it has a negative/positive impact for example change or carer or school
- Termly or in line with PEP meetings
- Start and end of planned intervention
- To quantify concerns (vulnerability).
- Before PEP or LAC review meetings.
- When initial concerns are raised by carer/parent/teacher.
- As part of an application for a statutory assessment for SEND

**How can this be used to evidence impact of interventions/support?**

The SDQ could be used for:

**Qualitative data**

- Measuring the effectiveness of interventions
- For discussion at PEP meetings
- Administering pre/post intervention, including repeating after a period of time (4 – 6 weeks) after intervention finishes to overcome potential recent effects.
- Individual scores of specific questions to inform intervention as opposed to just overall score.
- Measuring impact over a longer period time e.g. from year to year.
- Impact on educational progress.
- Follow up by professional not involved in the intervention
- Measuring impact following move to new school/setting/carer etc.
- Initially to justify intervention and then to be given other intervention to measure impact.
- Including significant teachers/adults working with child – each to complete one to collect different views
  - Use alongside other tracking such as behaviour logs – tracking lessons/staff interactions.
- Increase in positive reports reflecting better engagement in learning

**How do we manage professional conversations if scores differ significantly?**

We should:

- Identify the biggest gaps and ask exploratory questions
- Discuss away from the child if appropriate. Sensitive if the child is present.
- Remain calm – it’s not personal
- Ensure carers/parents know that behaviour can be different at school and at home
- In school differences – look at context, relationships pull together an in school professional’s group
- Look to see where differences are and discuss/question professionally.
- Dig down into the differences of opinion – where are they?
- Be open and honest.
- Ensure you have good working relationships with the carer.
- Know the child.
- Remember there is no right and wrong!
- Acknowledge that children can dramatically change according to setting.
- Be positive. Remain focused on strategies that work and share them.
- Refer to independent person to review scores.
- Help each other to understand viewpoints and explore how they have been reached.

**Sharing results at PEP meetings? If so how do we manage this?**

We consider:
- Are we sufficiently prepared for the meeting
- Strengths/needs rather than can/can’t positive/negative
- The emotional and intellectual needs of child and foster carers
- How we liaise with the social worker, carer and other agencies before to discuss what is required before the meeting
- How and when we information about the child? Should they be present?
- How we meet with the child separately if they do not want to attend. Discuss in simple, child friendly terms if they are present.
- How we share with child prior to meeting.
- How and when we make contact with other professionals before the meeting if there any major concerns.
- That we ensure child is supported and confident if they choose to attend – empower/value.

**How can we share results to get the best outcomes for the child?**

We should:
- Make sure the results show clearly where the difficulties of the child are most evident
- Look at the biggest gaps and explore further
- Ensure all parties are together and have an Independent Reviewing Office as the mediator a LAC review.
- Triangulate and report with scores in the set areas
- Produce a list of next steps as a result of the score and areas of need.
- Share information with all involved adults including child/young person if appropriate.
- Include young person/child including their views and helping them understand next steps.
- Share strategies with other staff members – distribute strategy sheets.
- Ensure the process is cyclical – assess/plan/do/review.
- Support teachers – make them aware of what these tools mean re the child/young person.

**Summary**

The completion of the SDQ by Designated Teachers will support the Virtual School and Social Care to identify the most appropriate support for a looked after child. It may also be used by schools to evidence the impact of the interventions they put in place, in some cases funded by the pupil premium plus.