



Hampshire
County Council

Virtual School

SDQ Guide for Education Settings

Updated September 2025

Hampshire Virtual School

SDQ Guidance for Education Settings

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, or SDQ, is a behavioural screening questionnaire that all Hampshire's looked after children and young people have completed annually as part of their care plan. There are three versions of the questionnaires: one for the social worker, one for the teacher/education professional and one for the parents/carers. Each questionnaire has 25 questions assessing the five following areas:

- Emotional symptoms- This looks at worries, fears and sadness.
- Conduct problems- This includes behaviours that can be challenging for others such as rule breaking.
- Hyperactivity- This covers attention and restlessness.
- Peer relationship problems- This reflects how well they get along with others.
- Pro- Social Behaviours-This is about kindness and helping others.

Why and how SDQs are used

Local authorities are required to use the SDQ to assess the emotional wellbeing of looked after children aged 4-17. Understanding the emotional and behavioural needs of looked after children is essential so that support can be put in place and children can achieve their full potential.

Regularly reviewing the SDQ enables the people around the child to put support in place as soon as needed. This support should be discussed in the child's Personal Education Plan. The social worker should co-ordinate the gathering and recording of the SDQ score on an annual basis. Completing the SDQ would ideally be done before one of the termly PEP meetings so that the score can be discussed and any interventions or support put in place.

The education SDQ

The teacher questionnaire should be completed annually by an education professional who knows the child well in an educational context. The score should then be recorded on the child's Personal Education Plan on the Asset system, in the 'Strengths and Needs' section. [Linked](#) is an SDQ calculator which will calculate the result and show the different areas of need. There is also a link to this in the Strengths and Needs section of the PEP, for you to use to calculate the score. At the same time the social work and foster carer, would also complete an SDQ questionnaire for the child or young person. You should complete this once you have been emailed by SW. SW initiate the process to ensure that all scores are taken within an appropriate window.

Differences in SDQ scores

Each of the SDQ questionnaires may produce different scores. The scores can help professionals understand if more support is needed in different contexts.

In different settings, young people may show their emotions, anxieties and distress differently. They may not always feel comfortable sharing these feelings or reporting them on the questionnaire. It is helpful to look at the whole range of responses when deciding on how best to support a young person.

Context

Context is important, if a child has recently had a change of placement or education setting this may result in a higher score.

Equally, an SDQ score should not be completed until the child has been in care for three months to allow them to adjust to the new situation.

What the scores mean

The SDQ score falls into bands;

- Close to average scores 0-13
- Slightly raised 14-16
- High 17-19
- Very high 20-40

The important thing to remember is that the SDQ calculators on Mosaic, and linked to the PEP, break the SDQ score down into the different areas. This allows us to see if a child or young person is scoring higher in one of the [five areas](#) than another. For instance, they may have a high SDQ score but when you look at the break down, this could be because they have a high score for Peer Relationships but score lower in the other areas. This highlights the area in which they may need support.

Close to average scores

If an SDQ score is close to average, the child may not need direct support but discussions about how their social, emotional and mental health can be maintained or further improved should be discussed at their Personal Education Plan meeting.

Slightly raised, high and very high scores

A child or young person's SDQ score can be above average in the slightly raised/high/very high ranges. If this is the case, appropriate interventions can be put in place to support the young person's social, emotional and mental health needs and therefore improve their score. The suggestions for possible support and interventions for education settings are [linked](#) below and from the PEP.

Social Worker initiates gathering SDQ scores emailing Carer/Parent and the Education Setting. The questionnaires should be completed within a four-week window which is initiated by the Social Worker. Social Worker completes their SDQ on Mosaic and records score on Social Worker section of PEP.

Social Worker sends SDQ Email to Carer/Parent. The content of this email can be found below in the Parent/Carer Section. This is completed and returned to social worker who records score on Mosaic and adds to Strengths and Needs section of PEP

Social Worker emails the education setting asking to complete the SDQ score using linked resources on the PEP system and then the education setting should record the figure in Strengths and Needs section of the PEP.

Triangulation-The three scores are then discussed during the PEP/ CLA review process, as appropriate, as part of a structured conversation about support for the child or young person's wellbeing.

The process of gathering the SDQ score should be repeated yearly but the scores and any identified support reviewed and discussed more regularly at every PEP meeting and CLA review.

The Hampshire SDQ Process.

Possible School Based Interventions

All interventions are linked so that designated teachers, social workers, foster carers and IROs all have an understanding of the different interventions. This check list is by no means exhaustive but can be used to keep a record of what has already been tried to support the child or young person and will be valuable evidence for further referrals, e.g. to CAMHS, if one becomes necessary.

Assessment and Understanding Needs-Needs Analysis Tools	Impact
SDQ	
PEP Tool Kit	
Reach2Teach	
Boxhall Profile	
Thrive Assessment	
ABCC Chart	
Other	

Individual Interventions	Impact
ELSA	
TALA	
Mental Health Support Team (MHST)	
Sensory/Self-Regulation Tools (Zones of Regulation)	
Mentor/Key Person	
Targeted support for unstructured time.	
Other	

Group Interventions	Impact
Lego Therapy	
Talkabout	
Time to Talk	
Desty	
Nurture Group	
Other	

Classroom/Whole School Support	Impact
Training	
Safe Space	
'Timeout' Pass	
De-escalation script.	
Other	

Other resources

[i-THRIVE | Implementing the THRIVE Framework](#)

[CAMHS](#)

[Social care and health | Health and social care | Hampshire County Council](#)