

Freedom of Information (FoI) request: summary of data from question 4

Question 4: Has the Virtual School Head ever reported to the Corporate Parenting Board on the numbers and needs of Looked-After Children with an autism diagnosis? If so please forward a link to this report.

A total of 151 local authorities in England were approached. Four local authorities did not respond to the request for information: *Darlington Borough Council (North East)*, *Medway Council (South East)*, *Somerset County Council (South West)* and *Torbay Council (South West)*. Of the 147 local authorities who did respond, the vast majority (140) answered question 4 in the negative.

Positive responses

The remaining seven consisted of three local authorities who clearly replied “Yes” and attached a report, one local authority who replied “Yes” but no further information was given and two local authorities who stated they had plans to report on this information in the future. Devon County Council responded that their reports included numbers of children with an SEN need diagnosed with autism and that the Corporate Parenting Board members were able to ask questions at meetings, which suggests a qualified “Yes” response.

Negative responses

Refusals

6 local authorities refused to answer question 4 for one of four reasons:

1. They did not hold the data (1)
2. The information was reasonably available elsewhere in published reports (2) – link provided
3. Data protection (1)
4. Time/cost of accessing information to answer the question (1)

Additionally, one local authority refused to answer the question or provide information and has thus been classified as a refusal.

“No” with no further information

72 local authorities simply answered “No” to question 4 with no additional information (see Table 1).

Table 1: Numbers of “No” responses by region

Region	Total Number of Local Authorities	Number “No” with no information	% with no further information
East	11	4	36.4
London	33	18	54.5
South East	19	7	36.8
South West	16	7	43.8
West Midlands	14	9	64.3
East Midlands	9	3	33.3
North East	11	6	54.5
North West	23	5	21.7
Yorkshire & the Humber	15	13	86.7



“No” with additional information

The remaining “No” responses provided additional information.

Several local authorities made the point that it would be inappropriate to report the number and needs of looked after children with an autism diagnosis to the Corporate Parenting Board because this would make confidential information available in a public report which would raise data protection issues. This assumes that individuals would need to be mentioned in order to provide the report, however. Where numbers are low, as some local authorities asserted, this would be of particular concern for identifying individuals.

SEN/SEND/EHCP/PEP

35 local authorities specifically referred to reports that were made to the CPB on children with SEN, SEND, EHCPs or PEPs. Many of these authorities provide a regular report, annual or more frequent, on Looked-After Children with an EHCP but reports do not include separation of type of diagnosis (although they would include those with an autism diagnosis). Several local authorities, for example Enfield, commented that children’s needs would be available on their care plan and available to all involved in their care and others. Nottinghamshire County Council, stated that the Virtual Head would only have such information if it were on a child’s EHCP. Dorset County Council also stated that individual needs are discussed regularly via planning meetings.

15 of the 35 local authorities specifically stated that the reports on Looked-After Children with SEND were not broken down by area of need. Of these, only three local authorities had previously stated that they did not hold data on autism diagnosis centrally. Other local authorities stated that they reported on children with “*additional vulnerabilities*” (Kent), “*the progress of all our children*” (Buckinghamshire), those with a “*disability, including a high number of those with ASD*” (Barnet) and that they were included in an overall report (Suffolk).

The overall impression from this group of respondents is that the Virtual Head relies on EHCPs, SENDs and PEPs in order to address the needs of Looked-After Children on an individual basis via planning meetings. Reports to the Corporate Parenting Board are at a broader level which does not separate area of need or diagnosis but is reported at the cohort level.

No specific reports

13 further local authorities did not refer to SEND/EHCP but made reference to no ‘specific’ reports, as in reports were not specific to autism, or that no report specific to autism was made. Again, references were made to the cohort and reporting in broader terms. One local authority (Cornwall) also mentioned the possibility of identifying individuals as a concern with such a report.

“No” with other comments

13 local authorities gave other information supplementary to their “No” response. Wakefield Metropolitan Borough Council specified a time period of 5 years. Halton Borough Council cited small numbers and cohort level reporting: “*No - I would not separate out the yp with a diagnosis as the numbers are too small and we report on all our children in the same way.*” The remaining 11 local authorities’ comments were effectively restating the question with a negative response.

Summary of the data

- The vast majority of local authorities’ Virtual School Heads have never reported to the Corporate Parenting Board on the numbers and needs of looked-after children with an autism diagnosis.
- Some local authorities felt this would be inappropriate due to confidential information being included in a public report and associated risk of identifying individuals.



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- Many Virtual School Heads however report regularly at a cohort level and especially where there is a recognised vulnerability or special educational need or disability with reference to EHCPs or PEPs.
- When these reports are made, they do not break down area of need or report specifically on children with an autism diagnosis, although these children are often covered within other more general reports.