

OXFORDSHIRE VIRTUAL SCHOOL UPDATE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS



Issue 9

Term 4
2023/24



Welcome to the 9th edition of the Oxfordshire Virtual School's termly update for parents and carers of Children We Care For and Previously Cared For Children. Please circulate this newsletter to other people with parental responsibility or care responsibilities for Children We Care For or Previously Cared For Children. If you have any questions/requests for content of upcoming issues, contact clare.pike@oxfordshire.gov.uk or laura.east@oxfordshire.gov.uk

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Year 6 to 7 Transition

Secondary school allocations for Year 7 September 2024 entry are due to be announced on 1st March 2024 for Children We Care For (CWCF) currently in Year 6 where social worker/carers made an 'on time' application to the relevant Local Authority by the 31st October 2023 deadline. We are mindful that times of change can be more unsettling for care-experienced young people who have already experienced difficult transitions in their life. It is really helpful if you can liaise with your child's social worker to ensure that secondary school places are formerly accepted within the necessary timescales along with any offers of transport. The deadline for accepting a secondary school place in Oxfordshire is 13th March 2024. Please note that CWCF with an EHCP should already have had confirmation of their secondary school place which typically allocated by the relevant Local Authority SEN Team by 15th February 2024.

Virtual School Caseworkers are available to support with any problems, e.g. CWCF not being allocated their first preference school. Also, just a friendly reminder to ensure the receiving secondary school is invited to any Year 6 PEP meetings between now and the end of the academic year so that you can work together to ensure a smooth transition to the new school. In a few cases, where there is an anticipated change of living address, it may not yet be possible to confirm the new secondary school allocated.

NEW Podcast series

We are embarking on developing a new podcast series.

What else would you like to hear about and who would you like to hear from?

[Tell us here](#)

Listening to the Children We Care For - We Need Your Help!

In 2017, with the national charity Coram Voice, we carried out a survey to gain an understanding of the lives of Children We Care For. Post-Covid, it is time to do this survey again. We need to understand how well Oxfordshire County Council and our partners are doing for children in our care and where improvements can be made.

With your support, we want to hear from as many Children We Care For as possible. When the survey comes through, please could you encourage them to complete it as openly and honestly as possible. It is a survey for them and we ask that no one influences their answers. We will let you know when the survey is ready to be sent; hopefully this will be in March.

What happens to the information? Later in the year, Coram Voice will provide an independent report. This will provide Oxfordshire County Council with a baseline so we can work towards improvements and changes to ensure our children are achieving and fulfilling their potential.

If you have any questions, please contact Roz
Roz.Mascarenhas@oxfordshire.gov.uk or
James.collins@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Key findings form the 2017 survey

**coram
Voice**
getting young voices heard



Your Life, Your Care: 11-18 year olds survey findings



In November and December 2017 we asked you some questions about what life is like for you to understand how we can make it better. We asked lots of young people in care the same questions. Here is what you all told us and what we want to do.

YOU SAID

What was good?

- Nearly all of you knew who your social worker was.
- Many of you knew you could speak with your social worker in private if you wanted to.
- Lots of you thought that the adults you lived with took an interest in your education
- Lots of you had at least one really good friend.
- Most of you thought you got some chances to practice life skills, like cooking or budgeting.

What was bad?

- Over half of you told us you saw your brothers and sisters 'too little' or you were unable to see them.
- Some of you did not have a pet but wanted one.
- More of you in Oxfordshire felt you were not involved in social workers' decisions than young people in care in other parts of the country.
- Some of you could not access the Internet at home.
- Some of you did not get a chance to explore the outdoors.

Year 10s and 11s with EHCPs

Please let us know if you are concerned about any Year 11s with EHCPs who do not have a clear destination named on their plan for Post-16. Due to the lengthy consultation process, there is often a last-minute rush in March to name somewhere, which may end up not being the appropriate destination, or may not provide the preferred course option which can lead to confusion and disappointment and/or a young person becoming NEET.

For those with Children We Care For in Year 10, especially those with EHCPs, it is a good idea to encourage them to attend Open Events this year to start getting an idea about their preferred destination. Those with EHCPs should have their Annual Review at the end of Year 10 or very early in Year 11 to enable those early consultations to take place.

If you have specific questions or concerns regarding Year 11 to Post-16 transition, please contact Izzi Crowther
Isabel.Crowther@oxfordshire.gov.uk

TICS Ltd (Trauma Informed Consultancy Services) offer monthly complimentary webinars which can be found here:

[Monthly Webinar Series 2024 - Trauma Informed Consultancy Services Ltd \(ticservicesltd.com\)](https://www.ticservicesltd.com)

Spring Term is key for Post-16 students

Please build in time to support applications to Sixth Forms, universities, colleges and apprenticeships. Try to take a copy of college applications that young people make, and ensure they put their social worker down as one of the key contacts. It makes following up applications much easier – i.e. have they actually applied, have they missed phone calls asking them to interview, etc.

Our Year 11 mentor Izzi Crowther is available to support this process, email: Isabel.Crowther@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Alternatively, you can contact our Post-16 Team by emailing the phase lead: mark.walker@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Smartphones

Ownership of a smartphone is one of the biggest rites of passage for today's youth – in most families, the question of introducing a smartphone has become less about “if” to introduce a smartphone to a child than “when” and “how.” This website offers advice around introducing smartphones with children. *When is the right time? What should families know about how to assess child readiness for a smart device?*

[Smartphones: Assessing Readiness - Children and Screens](#)

Internet Safety Resources

We regularly need to remind children about the dangers the internet can pose and to reinforce those messages of how to stay safe online. Below are some resources specifically for children with SEND to help you to do this:

- The [NSPCC](#) has worked with [Ambitious about Autism](#) and produced a [set of activities](#) for parents to use to discuss online safety at home.
- [Internet matters](#) have a whole range of [resources](#) aimed at supporting young people with SEND.
- An [online safety leaflet](#) from Kent County Council considering all of the areas staff may want to consider when talking about online safety with a set of links to further resources.
- A short [online film](#) 'Know your friends with Josh and Sue' targeted at young people in KS3 with learning disabilities to be introduced to the consequences of online actions.
- A [set of resources](#) to share with parents/carers from [Childnet](#).

The following resources are also available:

- Online safety videos for secondary school and college students [Online Safety Videos for Secondary and College Students \(esafety-adviser.com\)](#)
- The NSPCC offers general online safety advice [Keeping children safe online | NSPCC](#)

Internet Safety Resources for Early Years

How do you help to embed online safety in early years? Children love using technology and are learning to navigate websites, online games and consoles, and touch screen technology. We can support them by helping to embed safer practice online from an early age.

- Follow Digiduck's online adventures over five stories that have been created to help parents and teachers educate children aged 3–7 about online safety, with accompanying teaching activities: [Digiduck's Big Decision | Childnet](#).
- Another age-appropriate story you can share with early years children is Smartie Penguin [Smartie the Penguin | Childnet](#).
- Internet Matters also share useful guidance for parents and carers: [Pre-school \(0-5\) online safety tips and advice | Internet Matters](#).

This link is to an article from the Internet Watch Foundation

[Under 10s groomed online 'like never before' in 2023 find IWF](#)

Peer Education Project - Mental Health Foundation

Mental health in education has increasingly become a core function of educational establishments and their staff. However, one of the chief issues in approaching children and young people's mental health in schools is the barrier between staff and students.

Breaking down that barrier is key to getting the mental health message across to those who need it most. The Mental Health Foundation has developed a project aimed at that endeavour. Seeking to use older pupils to engage with younger pupils on mental health matters. To read more about this fascinating approach, please follow the link below:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/programmes/families-children-and-young-people/peer-education-project>