OXFORDSHIRE VIRTUAL SCHOOL UPDATE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

Issue 14

Term 3
2024/25

Welcome to the 14th 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 care-experienced children and young people. If you have any questions/requests for content of upcoming issues, contact **virtualschool@oxfordshire.gov.uk**

Farewell to Hazel Fleming

For those of you who have had the pleasure of working with Hazel Fleming over the past 10 years at OCC, we wanted to share the news that the Virtual School sadly said goodbye to Hazel at the end of the Autumn Term. Hazel is in the middle of the picture to the left.

Hazel's unwavering commitment to making a difference to the lives of so many young people will leave a lasting impact. As Hazel embarks on a new venture back in schools, we wish her all the best.

In her place, we are pleased to welcome Lucy Byford (**lucy.byford@oxfordshire.gov.uk**) to the role of Secondary Phase Leader. Lucy is on the right of the picture on the left.

We look forward to the continued success and positive contributions that Lucy will bring to our team.

Making an application to primary school

Parents/carers of infant school children born between 1 September 2020 and 31 August 2021 need to apply for an infant or primary school place for September 2025.

Key dates	Event
4 November 2024	Applications open.
15 January 2025	Closing date for applications.
29 January 2025	Last date for confirmation of change of address.
16 April 2025	National Offer day: offer letters sent by second-class post where needed and emails sent to those who applied online.
30 April 2025	Closing date for late or amended applications Closing date to respond to offers made on 16 April and to join continued interests list
September 2025	Start of the school year.

Applications submitted after the deadline will be processed later in the year and have a far lower chance of securing a place at a preferred school, so please apply on time.

Parents/carers of children born between 1 April 2021 and 31 August 2021 can request a delay for their application to be considered for September 2026.

A delay means your child can start Reception in September 2026 instead of September 2025.

For more information, go to: **Reception applications | Oxfordshire County Council**

Year 10s and 11s with EHCPs

Please speak to your child's SENDCo if you are concerned about a Year 11 with an EHCP who does not have a clear destination named on their plan for Post-16 education, employment or training. 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, disappointment and/or young people becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

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. See p.4 for a list of provisions in or near to Oxfordshire. 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**

Improving Writing Outcomes

This year we are excited to again be working in partnership with Susie Spolander, English Consultant, to improve Writing outcomes for children in Reception, Year 2 and Year 6 cohorts. In these sessions with class teachers, we will aim to identify learning needs for individual children within the strand of writing, explore strategies to develop learning and secure progression.

In addition to the above, we will be working closely with the Rees Centre at the University of Oxford in 2025, where a DPhil student will be researching the experiences of children in care in secondary school English education. The aim is to develop recommendations for schools to improve the engagement and outcomes of children in care in English lessons. We thank you in advance for any contributions you make to this.

How do we ensure safe relationships when children are ever more digitally connecting?

Safer Internet Day is on Tuesday 11th February - this is highly relevant for care-experienced children.

The 2023 theme is: **'Too good to be true? Protecting yourself and others from scams online'.**

There are lots of resources and ideas for activities on the website linked **here**.

Year 11 Open Event dates and links

This is a reminder that all Year 11s should be submitting applications to college and Sixth Form. Even if they are not 100% sure what they want to do, it is best to get some applications in and they can make a decision later.

If they need any support with this, please get in touch. For those with EHCPs, you must ensure preferences for consultations have been given to their EHCP Casework Officer.

Open Events:
City of Oxford College – Wednesday 26th February 4:30 – 7pm
Blackbird Leys Campus – Wednesday 5th February 4:30 – 7pm

Activate Rugby Academy Girls – Saturday 11th January 9:30am – 1pm Harcourt Hill Campus
Activate Rugby Academy Boys – Saturday 18th January 9am – 12pm Harcourt Hill Campus

Abingdon & Witney College
Abingdon College – Wednesday 12th February 3:30 – 7pm
Witney College – Wednesday 26th February 3:30 – 7pm
Bicester Construction Skills Centre – Wednesday 5th March 4 – 7pm

Banbury College – Wednesday 12th February 4:30 – 7pm

Reading College – Wednesday 5th February 4:30 – 7pm
Berkshire College of Agriculture – Saturday 1st March 10am – 2pm

Moreton Morrell College - Saturday 11th January, 10am to 1pm
Royal Leamington Spa College - Tuesday 14th January, 5:30 to 8pm
Warwick Trident College - Thursday 16th January, 5:30 to 8pm

Northampton College – Tuesday 4th February 5 – 7:30pm

Aylesbury College – Saturday 15th March – 10am – 1pm
Wycombe College – Tuesday 18th March – 5 – 8pm

This term is key for Post-16 students

Please build in time to support applications to Sixth Forms, universities, colleges and apprenticeships. Ask your child's school if you are unsure what the options are. 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. This makes following up applications much easier – i.e. Have they actually applied? Have they missed phone calls asking them to interview? etc.

Remember our Year 11 Transition Caseworker, Izzi Crowther, is available to support this process. You can contact her via email:
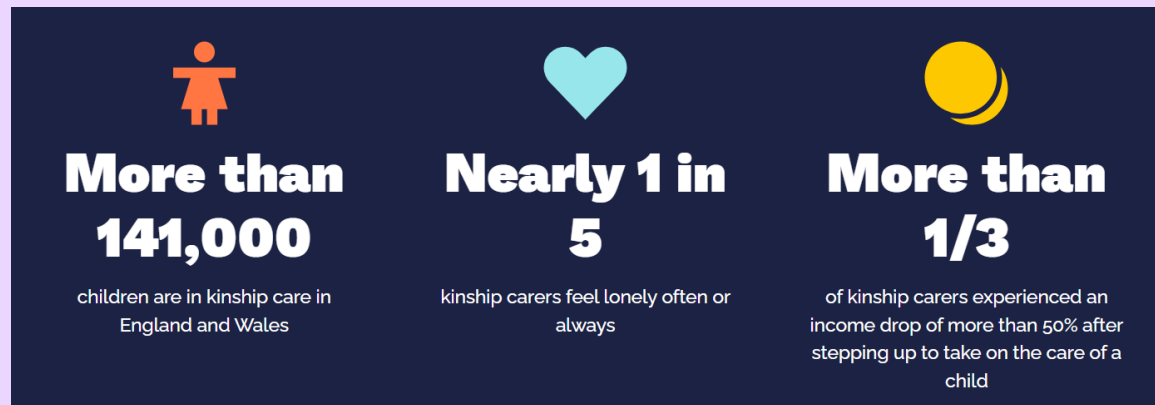**isabel.crowther@oxfordshire.gov.uk**

Focus on Kinship Care

Kinship carers are family or friends who step up, often during an unexpected crisis, to care for a child when their parents aren't able to.

Kinship carers are usually grandparents, aunts or uncles, brothers or sisters, a stepparent, stepbrother or stepsister, or someone who isn't related but knows the child well. Whatever their relationship to the child, in that moment a commitment is made. To bring love and hope to a child who has experienced trauma, no matter what.

A short film about kinship care: **https://youtu.be/-IDYP3IrmvE**

More than 141,000
children are in kinship care in England and Wales

Nearly 1 in 5
kinship carers feel lonely often or always

More than 1/3
of kinship carers experienced an income drop of more than 50% after stepping up to take on the care of a child

There are many different types of kinship care: informal arrangements, foster care, private fostering, special guardianship, child arrangement orders, testamentary guardianship and adoption.

Since April 2024, the government have commissioned a new national offer of advice, information, training and peer support for all kinship carers via **Kinship**. Kinship is the leading kinship care charity in England and Wales who work with all kinship carers. Visit the Virtual School's webpage **Children in kinship care | Oxfordshire County Council** for more information.