

DESIGNATED TEACHER FOR CHILDREN WE CARE FOR AND PREVIOUSLY CAREED FOR CHILDREN UPDATE



Issue 53

Term 3
2025/26



The aim of this publication is to provide some information updates, contacts, useful strategies and ideas to support the work you do with our pupils. Watch out for each edition and do pass on, print and display. The more we can raise awareness, the better equipped schools are to do their best for our children. Please also take time to look at our webpages – [click here](#). If you have any questions/requests for content of upcoming issues, contact virtualschool@oxfordshire.gov.uk

CONTACT US

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Training Programme 2025/26

* [BOOK HERE](#) *

Upcoming training:

[Tuesday 13th January](#)

An Introduction to: Making Sense of Behaviour & Brain Development and the Impact of Trauma

[Thursday 20th January](#)

Attachment Theory

[Wednesday 28th January](#)

Designated Teacher Practice Day

[Tuesday 10th and 24th February](#)

PACE for School Staff

[Tuesday 17th March](#)

Planning interventions for complex children: where to start and how to go on

[Wednesday 18th March](#)

Designated Teacher (DT) Induction

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 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 a young person 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 about a young person, please contact their Virtual School Caseworker. For general queries about Year 11 to Post-16 transition, please contact Izzi Crowther at isabel.crowther@oxfordshire.gov.uk

2025/26 Pupil Premium Plus Deadline

The deadline for holding PEP meetings is **Friday 13th February 2026** before the half-term week to give us time to quality assure the ePEP documents and process PP+ funding requests within the current 2025-26 financial year.

PEP meetings held after this date will be processed in the new financial year.

- The Virtual School provides up to £2,000 per financial year for pupils placed in Oxfordshire.
- The Virtual School provides up to £2,500 per financial year for pupils placed out of county.
- Early Years settings can request upto £570 per academic year per child.

Please note: These funding amounts apply to children of statutory school age and do not cover Post-16 learners.

Primary School Applications for CWCF

If you have CWCF currently in Foundation 2 (F2), it's time for their carers to apply for a primary school place. Corporate parents of children born between 1st September 2021 and 31st August 2022 need to apply for an infant or primary school place for September 2026.

The deadline for completed applications is 15th January 2026.

Applications received by this date will be processed for National Offer Day on 16th April 2026. Missing the deadline means the application will be processed later in the year, and the child is far less likely to secure a place at one of the preferred schools. Please discuss options with the child's social worker and Virtual School Caseworker to ensure the best outcome.

Important Update: Online Briefing to Replace Designated Teacher Practice Day

As sign-up numbers have been lower than expected and we are still awaiting expected updates from the Department for Education, **the Designated Teacher Practice Day planned for Wednesday 28th January will not go ahead. Instead, we are excited to offer an online briefing later in the Spring Term** where we will share important updates and provide an opportunity for collaborative discussion.

Details of this session will follow shortly. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause. January is a challenging time for many and we want to ensure that any time you commit is as valuable and relevant as possible.

Thank you for your understanding - we look forward to connecting with you at the briefing.

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

Safer Internet Day is on Tuesday 10th February - this is highly relevant for care-experienced children.

The 2026 theme is: **'Smart tech, safe choices – Exploring the safe and responsible use of AI'**.

There are lots of resources and ideas for activities on the website linked [here](#).

DfE guidance on restrictive interventions and reasonable force

The Department for Education has published updated guidance:
“Restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force, in schools”

[Read the guidance here](#)

This guidance contains both **statutory and non-statutory elements** and **comes into effect from 1st April 2026**. Schools have three months to review and update policies and practice accordingly.

Restrictive interventions can be particularly distressing for pupils who have experienced trauma, neglect or adverse life events, including children we care for.

The guidance advises schools to:

- Consider a pupil’s history and welfare before any intervention.
- Use **trauma-informed approaches** to minimise harm.
- Ensure dignity and avoid intimidating settings during interventions.

Our recommended approach

We strongly encourage schools to embed **trauma-informed, relational practices** in behaviour policies and staff training. At the heart of this is **PACE - Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy** - which supports de-escalation and positive relationships.

Recommended actions:

- Read the guidance in full and review your policies and procedures.
- Brief your governors on their responsibilities under this guidance.
- Review behaviour support plans to ensure they include PACE and de-escalation strategies.
- Ensure systems are in place to record and report all uses of force and seclusion.
- Promote staff training in trauma-informed and relational approaches – refer to [our free training and support offer](#).

Important: Removing CWCF from a school roll

We are aware that some schools are requesting - and in some cases pressing - for children we care for to be removed from their roll, often following a placement move. This cannot happen without prior consultation with the Virtual School and a multi-agency meeting.

Under UK law (England), removing a child we care for from a school roll is not automatically unlawful, provided all statutory procedures are followed and a suitable education package is in place.

This means:

- Hold a multi-professional meeting to confirm legality in line with DfE guidance.
- Record statutory grounds and comply with Local Authority and Children Missing Education (CME) procedures.
- Document provision in the PEP and meeting minutes.
- Avoid off-rolling pressure.
- Prioritise the child’s welfare above all else.

Only when these steps are complete can removal from a school roll be considered lawful. Any sign of pressure to off-roll is a serious concern. For context, the former headteacher of Harrop Fold School was struck off for off-rolling students to manipulate performance data.

While we understand the complexities of placement changes, professionals must ensure that no child is left without education or unable to return to a school roll after a short-term move for safety reasons. If the current school can continue to provide education remotely while a new school or alternative provision is arranged, this should always be the preferred option.

Decisions must be made case by case, guided by the child’s needs – not school convenience, process shortcuts or performance metrics.

Please share this message with your colleagues.

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 25th February 4:30 – 7pm](#)

[Activate Rugby Academy Girls – Saturday 24th January 9:30am – 10am-1.15pm](#)

[Harcourt Hill Campus](#)

[Activate Rugby Academy Boys – Saturday 24th January 9am – 12.15pm Harcourt Hill Campus](#)

Abingdon & Witney College

[Abingdon College – Wednesday 11th February 3:30 – 7pm](#)

[Witney College – Monday 16th February 3:30 – 7pm](#)

[OUFC Advanced Football Programme Open Training Session, Wednesday 18th February 12-3pm](#)

[Bicester Construction Skills Centre – Wednesday 4th March 4 – 7pm](#)

[Banbury College – Wednesday 4th February 4:30 – 7pm](#)

[Reading College – Wednesday 4th February 4:30 – 7pm](#)

[Berkshire College of Agriculture – Wednesday 25th March 9.30am – 4.30pm](#)

[Moreton Morrell College - Saturday 24th January, 10am to 1pm](#)

[Royal Leamington Spa College – Saturday 24th January, 10am – 2pm](#)

[Warwick Trident College – Saturday 24th January, 10am – 2pm](#)

[Northampton College – Tuesday 10th February, 5-7.30pm](#)

[Aylesbury College – Thursday 29th January, 5-8pm](#)

[Wycombe College – Tuesday 27th January, 5-8pm](#)

This term is key for Post-16 students

Please build in time to support applications to Sixth Forms, universities, colleges and apprenticeships. Carers and social workers are not always as informed about options as school staff so will need support. 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.

If you have specific questions or concerns about a young person, please contact their Virtual School Caseworker. For general queries about Year 11 to Post-16 transition, please contact Izzi Crowther at isabel.crowther@oxfordshire.gov.uk

**** HOLD THE DATE ****

Our 2026 Annual Conference will be taking place on **Thursday 8th October at Unipart House.**

Settings will be entitled to up to 2 free spaces on a first-come-first-served basis.

For more information go to our [website](#) – bookings possible from Monday 23rd February.

Keynotes and other features soon to be confirmed.

Oxfordshire Virtual School presents:

2026 Annual Conference

Education as the Anchor: Building Stability and Futures for Every Child



Join Oxfordshire Virtual School and contributors for a day of connection, learning and shared best practice.

This conference is dedicated to exploring how education can serve as a powerful anchor for care-experienced children and children with a social worker - providing stability, belonging and hope for the future.

Amazing PEPs

We are well into the school year now and so many DTs will already have held PEPs. Many are held online. This has practical benefits but can also make the meetings less personal.

Here are some key elements that work well and make the PEP experience much more worthwhile / impactful:

- **Address queries and check attendance in advance** - Check-in with the child's Virtual School Caseworker before the PEP to query anything you are unsure about. Check that the child/young person's carer and other key professionals will be attending.
- **Check you can access our ePEP platform, [eGOV](#)** in good time – Virtual School Caseworkers can help you with login worries.
- **Pre-populate** as much of the **ePEP** as possible before the meeting. Errors and omissions (e.g. the details of your finance officer) will lead to a delay in signing off the PEP and transfer of Pupil Premium Plus funds.
- **You must ensure the child/young person has shared their unique views (Pupil Voice) and that you've reviewed their SDQ (SEMH needs scores) in advance of each PEP.** To access all that you need and for guidance, refer to our [PEP Toolkit](#).
- **Be creative in finding ways for children/young people to attend their PEP** to contribute to better understanding their needs and personalising their plans. We can't force a child/young person to attend, but it is important that they are given the option and supported to attend at least part of their PEP.
- **Ask for input** from the class teacher / subject teachers and support staff. This can be emailed to everyone before the meeting (or printed out to pass on to carers in the meeting) and uploaded to the PEP documents. It's hard for everyone to take in what is in reports when they are read out during a meeting. People in the meeting can't process the comments or be in a position to ask questions if they are hearing lots of information without a copy to reference.
- **It is critical to have up-to-date data ready for the meeting.** There is an expectation that some data will be available to share and discuss to review attainment and progress.
- **Know resources available to support SMART outcomes**, e.g. interventions via SEND department, tutoring availability, trips, etc.
- **Be aspirational** – If a child is at expected levels, this should be celebrated, but PP+ is available to accelerate progress further and to widen opportunities for care-experienced children. DTs are in the best position to see beyond potential, so be creative and aspirational with the Pupil Premium Plus funding available for your pupils. For example, secondary schools should act now to maximise impact during the school years as Post-16 PPP funding is much lower (£500 per student) - be strategic and aspirational with funding requests to support successful transitions. Pupil Premium funding requests will be approved in-line with our PP+ Policy on our website:

[2025-26 Oxfordshire Pupil Premium Policy](#)