



Virtual School Briefing – Statutory Extension (April 2026)

Purpose

This briefing summarises the key messages from the Virtual School Online Briefing for Schools and Settings held on 23rd April 2026. It is intended for colleagues who attended and those who were unable to join. Slides and a video recording are available for further detail.

Key Messages

Statutory Extension of Virtual School Duties

- From September 2026, the Virtual School's statutory role will extend to include children with a social worker and children in kinship care, alongside Children We Care For, Care Leavers and Previously Cared For Children.
- This formalises existing practice and brings new expectations for schools and settings, including stronger system oversight, increased collaboration and sharper accountability.

DfE and Ofsted Expectations

- Updated statutory guidance from the DfE is expected soon; current guidance dates back to 2018.
- There is **no additional funding** for the extended duties - implementation must be proportionate and focused.
- Ofsted will look for evidence of inclusive practice, strong safeguarding, early identification of risk and impact over process.
- Schools and settings must be able to demonstrate how vulnerable learners are identified, supported and how support is adjusted when things aren't working.

What Changes and What Remains the Same

- The Virtual School will not take over school responsibilities or introduce a new PEP process for children with a social worker and children in kinship care (not cared-for)
- Schools and settings remain responsible for teaching, learning, safeguarding, inclusion, attendance and engagement.
- Pupil Premium Plus arrangements for eligible groups remain unchanged.
- The Virtual School's role is to provide system-level leadership, strategic advice and challenge, focusing on influence rather than intervention.

Practical Steps for Schools and Settings

- Review how vulnerable learners are identified and supported.
- Strengthen relationships with carers, social workers and the Virtual School.
- Ensure Designated Teachers and leads understand the broader groups covered by the extension.
- Prioritise trauma-informed, relational practice and use Virtual School guidance constructively.

Support Available

- Oxfordshire Virtual School offers practical support, training and resources for all cohorts.
- Dedicated support continues for Children We Care For and Care Leavers, including named Virtual School Workers, PEP support and support in overcoming barriers.
- Extended Duties Team provides advice for professionals supporting previously cared for children, children with a social worker and children in kinship care.
- Annual conference, training and new self-evaluation tools are available to help schools and settings evidence impact and prepare for inspection.

Next Steps

- Await revised statutory guidance from the DfE.
- Further clarity and local arrangements will be communicated once guidance is published.
- Schools are encouraged to focus on what genuinely helps children and families, with clarity and consistency.

Further Information

- Slides and video recording from the briefing will soon be available via the 'Newsletters and other resources' section of our website.
- For advice, support, or questions, contact Oxfordshire Virtual School via virtualschool@oxfordshire.gov.uk or visit the [Oxfordshire Virtual School | Oxfordshire County Council](#)

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to vulnerable children and young people.