

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



Issue 55

Term 5
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

Website:

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/virtualschool

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Training Programme 2025/26

* **BOOK HERE** *

Upcoming training:

Tuesday 28th April

Best practice for schools on working with adoptive and special guardian children and families

Tuesday 28th April

Transitions Training

Tuesday 12th May and Tuesday 2nd June

PACE for School Staff

Thursday 8th October

2026 Virtual School Conference

We will share our updated 2026-27 training and support offer with you in an email bulletin very soon and in next term's newsletter.

Ofsted: Children Known to Social Care at the Heart of Inspections

Ofsted has recently reiterated that children known to social care will be central to education inspections, with inspectors focusing closely on how well schools understand and meet the needs of:

- Children We Care For
- Previously Cared For Children
- Children known to Children's Social Care

Their latest update highlights the importance of personalised support, strong communication, emotionally safe environments and high-quality PEP processes.

Read the update: [How Ofsted is putting children known to social care at the heart of education inspections – Ofsted: education](#)

Designated Teachers will have the opportunity to explore this more, alongside implications of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, at an upcoming briefing. Further details and joining information are provided overleaf.

Invitation: Virtual School Online Briefing for Designated Teachers

Thursday 23rd April, 3.30–4.30pm [Microsoft Teams]

Facilitated by the Virtual School Head, Clare Pike

This online session will cover:

- What the statutory extension of Virtual School duties from September 2026 will mean for schools
- DfE and Ofsted expectations of schools, settings and Virtual Schools
- Practical support and guidance available from Oxfordshire Virtual School
- Upcoming training, resources and events

There will also be time for questions.

A recording will be available for anyone unable to attend.

Join the session:

Meeting ID: 383 002 216 501 10

Passcode: b25YN7hZ

Click to join: <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/38300221650110?p=xW3wR2STulxcZMNoAC>

Transition Planning for Terms 5 and 6

Summer term is a key time for planning for new beginnings and endings. Change is unsettling, and for many children a move up a year or to another setting is tricky. The Designated Teacher (DT) plays an important role in helping our children prepare for their next steps. DTs should know the story of each child and be able to support key colleagues in noticing changes in behaviour or motivation and recognising these as potential anxieties about the end of the school year.

Look out for tummy aches, attendance wobbles, lack of motivation, bravado or ambivalence. All of these may be masking feelings a child may not be able to articulate. Year 6 and Year 11 pupils, in particular, will be realising that they are leaving. This is a good time to hold a PEP / meet with parents and carers of previously cared-for children and make sure there is strong communication and effective planning between year groups and settings.

Don't leave things to chance - invite the DT from the new school or college to the review, set up extra visits and talk to staff in the next year group or setting so that someone is keeping the child in mind. Talk to your Virtual School Worker and parents/carers for ideas about how best to support a smooth transition.

- Create a Transition Pupil Profile – see Virtual School [PEP Toolkit](#) for more guidance and templates.
- Keep carers or parents up-to-date and listen to their worries and hopes.
- Liaise with the SENDCo for identification and sharing of SEND information.
- Booster groups and 1:1 tuition are great at transition times.
- Plan for endings – don't forget opportunities to say goodbye such as creating a memory book, signing a card, special goodbye sessions with key adults in school. This makes a huge difference to our children.

Y6 and Y11 Transition Profiles

Transition profiles for Year 6 and Year 11 pupils need to be written for all our children and young people who are moving on this September. The templates can be found [here](#). Once completed, the profiles need to be uploaded to the documents section of the ePEP. Please contact your Virtual School Worker for support (if needed), and feel free to share the profile with them by email. We need profiles in place by the end of this term.

Policies and End of Year Reporting Expectations

Have senior leaders and governors reviewed all school policies considering the needs of children we care for, previously cared for children, children with a social worker and children in kinship care? If not, please refer to:

- [The designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children](#)
- [Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements: virtual school head role extension - GOV.UK](#)

What we know is that the above guidance is currently being reviewed by the Department for Education to take into account changes outlined in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill which is due to come into force in September 2026.

Do you have a DSL report template to support your annual report to governors? If not, [click here](#) and scroll down to the 'School Governors' section for an example you can use.

Year 11s

Good luck to all Year 11s as we approach exam season. Please continue to encourage them to attend additional revision sessions, support with revision timetables and exam technique and put in further one-to-one tuition, where necessary. See overleaf for upcoming open days/events.

Post 16 Plans: Hopefully, your Year 11s will now have a conditional offer from a college or Sixth Form, but if not, please encourage and support them to apply or follow up with applications **as soon as possible**. Please do let the social worker and Virtual School Worker know the details when an application has been made.

Any Year 11s with EHCPs: The deadline for the Post-16 destination to be named on the EHCP has now passed. If there are still concerns about your Year 11 not having a clear plan for next year, if funding has not yet been approved, or you are concerned that things have changed significantly, please flag this up with the EHCP Caseworker, copying in the Virtual School Worker. For mainstream colleges, your young people will still need to apply to their chosen course, ensuring they mention having an EHCP on the application.

Thinking ahead to Results' Day: It's really important that your young people plan how they are going to collect their results on **Thursday 20th August**. If they are not able or willing to go in person, please help them arrange in advance how their results will be collected or sent to them, especially if they are moving over the summer. Ideally, they need to receive them on the day, so that they can submit their results to college to enrol in their chosen course. Young people have sometimes missed out or gone on waiting lists when they have not enrolled on Results' Day or the day after. They should plan to enrol **in-person** at the college, as sometimes the online enrolment can be unreliable. **It's important that we also receive a copy of their results on Results' Day so that we can support those who need it.** An email will be sent out nearer the time with instructions and a link to our Results' Form which we ask you or your Exams Officer to complete on Results' Day.

Mock Results: If these have not been included on a recent PEP, please send these to the Virtual School Worker, including a full list of qualifications they are expected to achieve. Please use these results to measure whether they are on track to meet the entry requirements for their Post-16 course and put in additional support where needed.

PEPs and Transition Meetings: Please arrange a third PEP or transition meeting to take place towards the end of the year, after exams have finished. The DT at the college or Post-16 destination should be invited. If a full PEP is not needed (e.g. if no further PP+ funding is required), this [Year 11 Transition Planning Form](#) can be used to record the meeting instead of the ePEP. Please also use the [Transition Profile](#) in place of the Pupil Voice sheet.

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.

City of Oxford College – [Wednesday 6th May, 4.30-7pm](#)

The Leys College - [Wednesday 29th April 4:30 - 7pm](#)

Abingdon and Witney College

Abingdon College – [Wednesday 17th June 3:30 – 7pm](#)

Witney College – [Wednesday 17th June 3:30 - 7pm](#)

Bicester Construction Skills Centre – [Wednesday 24th June 4 – 7pm](#)

Common Leys Campus – [Click here for more information](#)

Banbury College – [Wednesday 22nd April 4:30 – 7pm](#)

Reading College – [Wednesday 29th April 4:30 – 7pm](#)

Berkshire College of Agriculture – Open Event [Saturday 18th April 10am – 2pm](#)

Moreton Morrell College – [Click here for more information](#)

Royal Leamington Spa College – [Click here for more information](#)

Warwick Trident College – [Click here for more information](#)

Northampton College – [Thursday 11th June, 5-7.30pm](#)

Aylesbury College – [Click here for more information](#)

Wycombe College – [Click here for more information](#)

New College Swindon – [Range of Subject specific Taster events](#)

Queens Drive Campus – [Wednesday 29th April 7-9pm](#)

North Star Campus – [Tuesday 2nd June 5 – 7pm](#)

A key time 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 Worker. For general queries about Year 11 to Post-16 transition, please contact Izzi Crowther at isabel.crowther@oxfordshire.gov.uk

COMPETITION

"You help me feel safe when..."

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU
For chance to tell adults:

WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS YOU FEEL SAFE AT SCHOOL/SETTING? AND WHAT REALLY DOESN'T?

Win
HEADPHONES,
BOOK VOUCHERS,
AND MORE!

OXFORDSHIRE
VIRTUAL SCHOOL
Looking After Learning

Share your truth... your way.

ENTER WITH: POEMS VOICE NOTES SHORT VIDEOS (30-60 secs) POSTERS
DRAWINGS COMIC STRIPS SHORT WRITTEN PIECES DIGITAL DESIGNS

Every entry gets celebrated. Every voice matters.

Ideas
TO GET YOU
STARTED

THINGS ADULTS DO
THAT HELP ME:

"If you want me to learn, do more of this..."

"School/setting feels way better when adults..."

"What makes me feel calm, seen and ready for the day..."

"Stuff adults do that actually helps me feel safe at school/setting..."

THINGS ADULTS DO THAT
DO NOT HELP ME:

"Stuff adults do that makes school/setting harder..."

"School/setting feels worse when adults..."

"What adults do that makes me want to disappear..."

"This is the stuff that makes me feel unsafe or shut down..."

CELEBRATION EVENT

Your work will be showcased at our **Annual Virtual School Conference** in Oxford on Thursday 8 October 2026 and also via our website. If an entry includes any identifying information, we will contact you to request permission before it is shared.

How To ENTER

Deadline: Tuesday 30 June, 5pm

Send to: virtualschool@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Please include: name, age, school/setting and an adult contact. (Names will not be shared publicly.)

OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

What Children Need Us to Hear

Please promote this competition to all children and young people with Children's Social Care experience in your school.

It's a safe, creative way for pupils to share what helps them feel safe in school, and every entry will be valued and celebrated.

**Are you a child,
young person,
family member,
or carer?**



If you have had support from any of our
Children's Social Care teams
at Oxfordshire County Council,
we want to know what you think.

It will help us improve how we support people going forward.

Have your say online

It will only take a couple of minutes and
your feedback will be totally anonymous.

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/childrensocialcarefeedback

or email childrenservices.engagement@oxfordshire.gov.uk
and we'll send you a paper form.

Scan me



Please promote this feedback survey to all children and young people with current or previous Children's Social Care involvement in your school.

Participation is optional and anonymous, and helps improve future CSC support.

Reassure pupils and signpost sensitively.

Children in Kinship Care – What You Need to Know

Children in kinship care include those who are cared for and placed with family or close friends, as well as children living in kinship arrangements outside of care. While these children often benefit from familiar relationships, their needs and vulnerabilities can be less visible in school.

Many will have experienced significant adversity, such as family breakdown, neglect, domestic abuse, substance misuse or bereavement. These experiences can affect emotional wellbeing, behaviour, attendance and learning, regardless of whether the child is formally in care. Kinship carers may also face challenges that make it harder to navigate systems or access support, particularly for children who are not looked after.

Education settings play a vital role in recognising children in kinship care as a potentially vulnerable group and responding with sensitivity, strong communication and trauma-informed practice to promote stability, belonging and positive outcomes.

Information about the support available to schools and carers through the Virtual School can be found via the link below:

[Children in kinship care | Oxfordshire County Council](#)

Care to Dance 2026-27

Care to Dance continues to be one of our most impactful and genuinely transformative enrichment programmes. Our young people consistently tell us about the confidence, friendships, sense of belonging and improved wellbeing they gain.

From September, in line with the formal expansion of our duties, access will extend to children previously cared for, those in kinship care and those who are adopted, alongside children we care for and care leavers - mirroring approaches that are working well in other local authorities. Young people can also attend their nearest Care to Dance community if they live closer to another programme, an option that has already benefited several Oxfordshire children.

The offer is fully funded by the Virtual School (PPP and Section 31 grant funding), with families only responsible for transport.

For more information about the programme and how to sign children up, see attached poster. Please share, as appropriate.

Neurodiversity and Children We Care For

For Designated Teachers (DTs), understanding the intersection between neurodiversity and the care experience is essential. Children We Care For (CWCF) are one of the most vulnerable groups in education, and evidence shows that neurodevelopmental differences such as autism, ADHD and related profiles are more common among this cohort than in the wider population - yet they are often under-identified or misunderstood.

Frequent changes of placement, school or professionals can mean there is no consistent adult who notices emerging needs or pushes for assessment. As a result, neurodivergent traits may be misinterpreted as “behaviour”, attributed solely to attachment or trauma, or missed altogether. It is important to remember that there is no diagnosis called behaviour - what we see is communication shaped by experience, neurodevelopment and environment.

This creates a double disadvantage for CWCF who are neurodivergent:

- * identification may be late or absent
- * support can be disrupted by placement or school moves
- * systems do not always connect well across education, health and care
- * trauma and neurodivergence may interact, increasing anxiety, dysregulation or disengagement

For DTs, this reinforces the importance of:

- * maintaining a curious, reflective lens when reviewing behaviour, progress and engagement
- * ensuring PEPs capture both trauma and neurodevelopmental need, and are not overly one-dimensional
- * advocating for timely assessment, appropriate adjustments and consistent strategies
- * supporting staff to move away from punitive responses towards trauma-informed, neuro-affirming practice
- * paying close attention at points of transition, where needs are most likely to be missed

By holding neurodiversity alongside care experience, DTs play a crucial role in ensuring that CWCF’s needs are recognised early, planned for effectively, and supported consistently - enabling them not just to cope in school, but to thrive.

*** BOOK ON NOW – [Click Here!](#) ***

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

Don't miss this flagship event bringing together leading experts, practitioners and the voices of children and young people for a powerful day focused on improving educational stability for vulnerable learners.

Hear from **Louise Bombèr**, renowned specialist in attachment-aware and trauma-responsive education; gain essential updates from the Virtual School Head on **national policy changes**; and get clear guidance from Linda Culling, Senior HMI, on **what Ofsted expects for vulnerable learners**. With contributions from young people and key partners - and opportunities to visit partner stalls - you'll leave equipped with practical strategies rooted in relational practice to support children facing instability, disrupted learning and trauma.

- **Early Years / Primary settings** - 1 free Designated Teacher place (first come, first served)
- **Secondary and FE settings** - up to 2 free places (first come, first served)

Secure your place now and be part of shaping brighter, more stable futures for Oxfordshire's children!

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.