



Virtual School Online Briefing for Schools and Settings

23-04-2026



Aims

- What the statutory extension of Virtual School duties from September 2026 means
 - DfE and Ofsted expectations of schools, settings and Virtual Schools
 - Support available from Oxfordshire Virtual School
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Statutory Extension of Virtual School Duties (from September 2026)

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From September 2026, the Virtual School's statutory role will extend beyond Children We Care For, Care Leavers and Previously Cared For Children to include:

- Children with a social worker
 - Children in kinship care
-



Department
for Education

Promoting the education of looked- after children and previously looked- after children

Statutory guidance for local authorities

February 2018



Department
for Education

Guidance

Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements: virtual school head role extension

Updated 2 September 2025

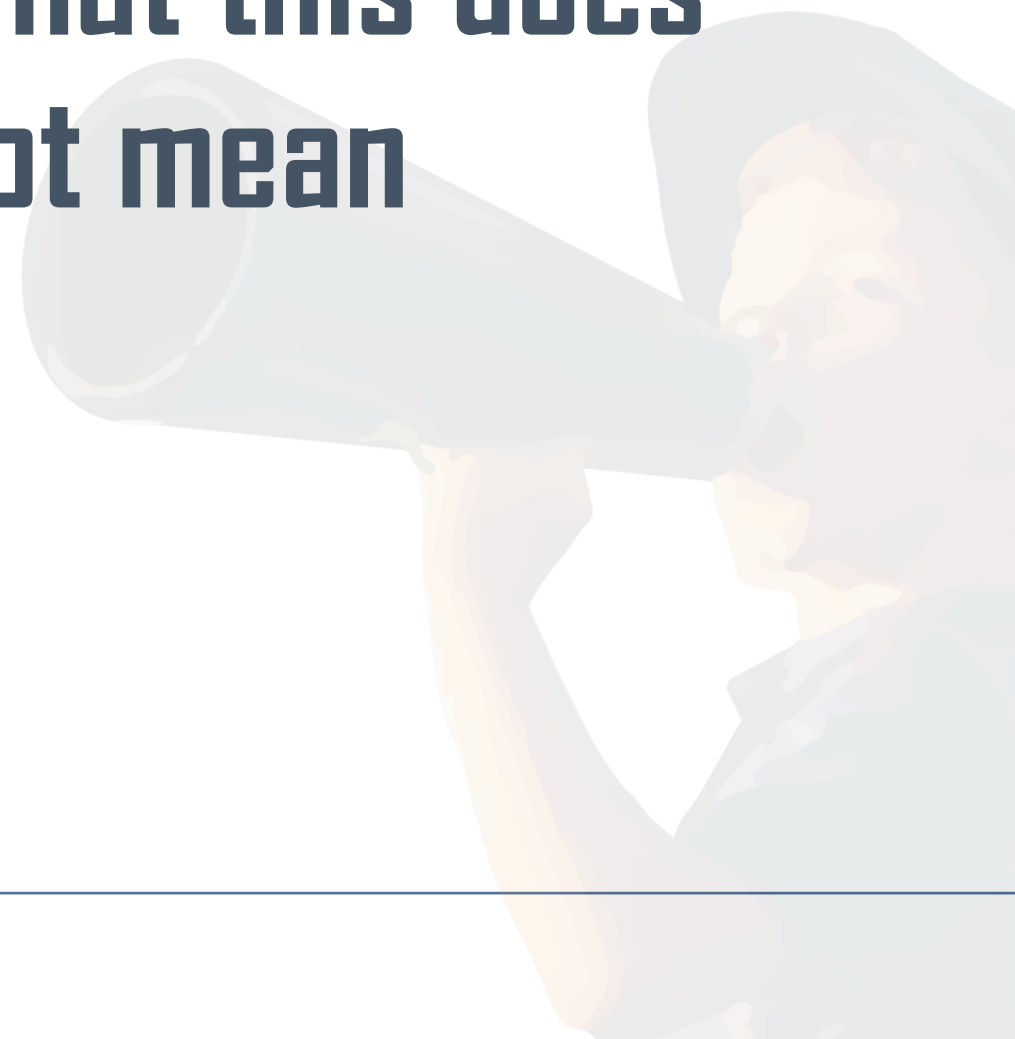
- Stronger system oversight
- Increased expectation of collaboration
- Greater focus on inclusion and belonging
- Sharpened accountability

**What this means
for schools in
practice**

A stylized illustration of a person with long hair, wearing a dark shirt, looking through a telescope. The illustration is semi-transparent and serves as a background for the text on the right side of the slide.

- The Virtual School taking over school responsibility
- A new PEP process for all children
- Additional funding
- Reduced school autonomy

**What this does
not mean**



Education is one of the strongest protective factors for vulnerable children

Earlier, joined-up intervention reduces:

- Exclusion
- Placement breakdown
- Long-term poor outcomes

The extension formalises what strong schools already do well: notice early, act quickly, and work together

Why this matters





DfE and Ofsted expectations of schools, settings and Virtual Schools

Across education and social care inspection frameworks

Ofsted's focus will increasingly be on:

- How well children with vulnerabilities **attend, belong, and achieve**
- The **impact of leadership**, not just processes
- How agencies **work together**, including with Virtual Schools
- Whether challenges are **identified early and addressed**, rather than tolerated

This applies to **all four groups**, not only children we care for.

What Ofsted Will Be Looking For

Ofsted Inspection Toolkit

What is your Inclusion Strategy?

From September 2026, schools and settings are expected to:

- Know who their vulnerable learners are
- Understand barriers to learning linked to trauma, instability or care experience
- **Put reasonable, evidence-informed support** in place early
- Work proactively with:
 - Parents and carers (including kinship carers)
 - Social workers, where involved
 - The Virtual School, as a strategic partner
- Demonstrate **inclusive practice**, strong safeguarding and high expectations

This is not about adding paperwork - it is about **strong everyday practice**.

Expectations of Schools and Settings

A stylized illustration of a person with dark hair, wearing a dark shirt, shouting into a large, light-colored megaphone. The person is shown from the chest up, in profile, facing right. The megaphone is held up to their mouth. The background is a light, neutral color.

Virtual Schools are expected to:

- **Champion educational outcomes** at a system level
- Provide **strategic advice, guidance and challenge** to schools and partners
- Use data, audit and lived experience to:
 - Identify patterns and risks
 - Promote effective practice
- Support alignment across education, social care and safeguarding systems
- Focus on **influence rather than intervention**

Virtual Schools do not replace school or social work responsibilities.

Expectations of Virtual Schools

A stylized illustration of a person with dark hair, wearing a dark shirt, shouting into a large megaphone. The person is shown from the chest up, in profile, facing right. The megaphone is large and light-colored. The background is a light, neutral color.

While schools are not corporate parents in law, expectations increasingly reflect:

- Shared responsibility
- Curiosity about children's lived experience
- Willingness to adapt practice
- Collective accountability for outcomes

For children with a social worker and those in kinship care, like care-experienced children, this means:

- Children are not expected to “carry the challenge” alone
- Systems respond, rather than wait for escalation

Corporate Parenting Beyond Children We Care For



***Would this be good
enough for my child?***

Schools remain responsible for:

- Quality of teaching and learning
- Inclusive culture and safeguarding
- Attendance and engagement

Pupil Premium Plus arrangements **do not change**

Virtual Schools continue to prioritise:

- Children We Care For
- Care Leavers
- Previously Cared For Children

This is an **extension**, not a replacement, of existing duties.

What Remains the Same

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Being clear and honest

There is no additional funding attached to the extended duties

This means:

- Greater use of existing practice
- Stronger alignment
- Smarter use of data and professional dialogue

The emphasis is on **doing fewer things well**, not doing more things poorly.

What We Know About Resources



You don't need to wait for final guidance to:

- Review how vulnerable learners are identified and supported
- Strengthen relationships with carers and professionals
- Ensure Designated Teachers / leads understand the broader groups
- Support practice that understands trauma, reduces shame and prioritises relationships
- Use Virtual School guidance and challenge constructively

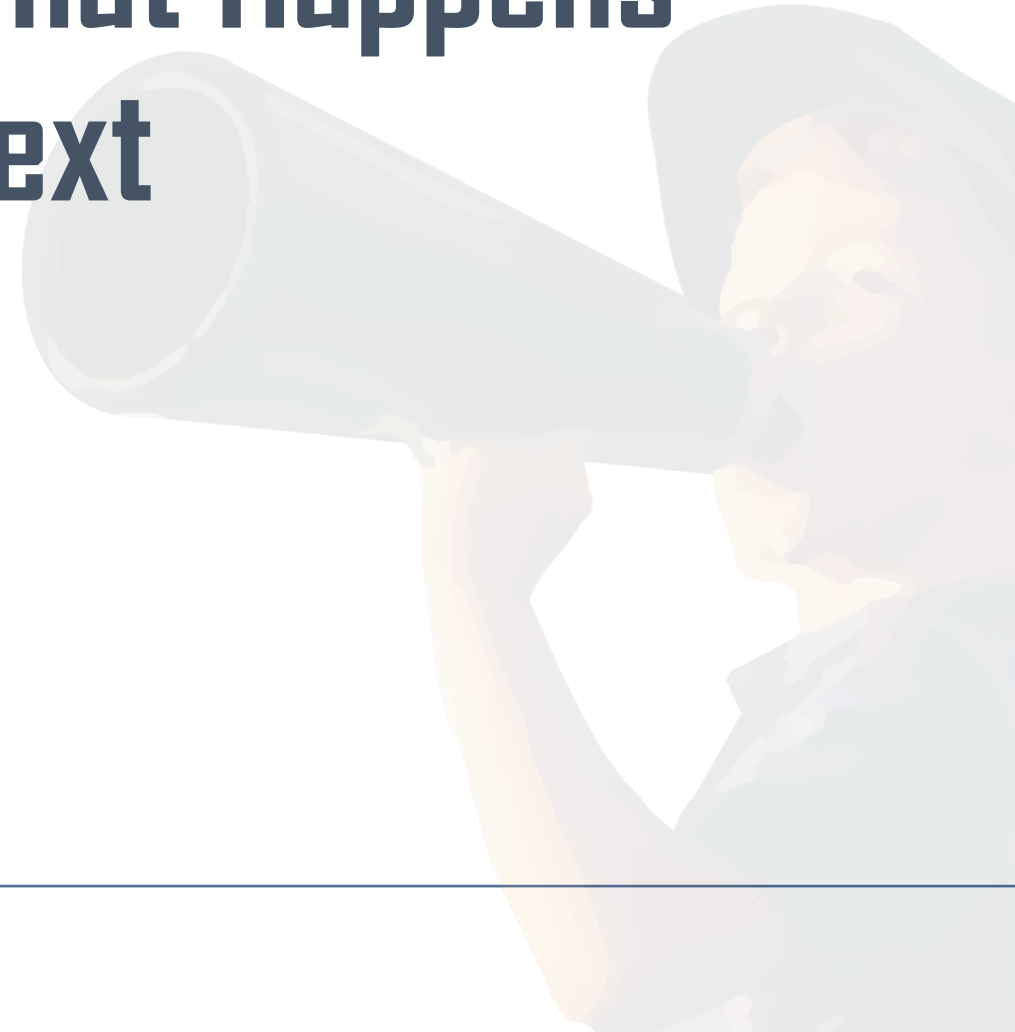
What Schools Should Be Doing Now

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- Revised statutory guidance expected from the DfE
- Further clarity on expectations will be shared once published
- Local arrangements and support will be communicated in good time

This is about doing what genuinely helps children and families, with clarity and consistency, rather than meeting requirements for their own sake.

What Happens Next





**Support available from
Oxfordshire Virtual School**

Oxfordshire Virtual School is here to provide practical, proportionate support to help improve educational outcomes for children who are vulnerable through care experience, family circumstances or social care involvement.

**What schools,
settings and
partners can
rely on**

A stylized illustration of a person with long hair, wearing a dark shirt, shouting into a large, light-colored megaphone. The illustration is semi-transparent and serves as a background for the text on the right side of the page.

- Allocated Virtual School worker
- Every Child We Care For and Care Leaver has:
 - A named Virtual School worker
 - Ongoing oversight and professional advocacy
- Support focuses on:
 - Education access, attendance, progress and attainment
 - Inclusion and placement stability
 - Strong partnership working with schools, carers and social workers
- PEP support and PPP advice / access
- Clear routes for advice, escalation and problem-solving

Dedicated Support for Children We Care For and Care Leavers



For more information, [click here](#)
to view our service offer for
CWCF and Care Leavers

Practical guidance for schools

- Comprehensive training and support offer
- Clear advice and resources via the Oxfordshire Virtual School website
- Web-hosted materials to support:
 - Designated Teachers and school leaders
 - Trauma-informed and inclusive practice
- Extended Duties Team:
 - Information and advice for professionals supporting previously cared for children, children with a social worker and children in kinship care (not cared for)
 - Focus on signposting, early help, prevention and strong everyday practice

Information, Advice and Extended Duties Support

A faint, stylized illustration in the background of the right-hand page shows a woman with dark hair, wearing a light-colored top, holding the hand of a young child. The illustration is rendered in a soft, muted color palette, blending into the white background.

Click here on the links below to view our service offer for:

[Previously Cared for Children;](#)
[Children with a Social Worker;](#) and
[Children in Kinship Care](#)



**Support available from
Oxfordshire Virtual School**

Building confident practice

A graduated training and support offer for:

- Schools and education settings (Early Years-Post-16)
- Governors and wider partners

Our offer includes:

- DT induction, annual conference and termly updates - covering statutory duties, corporate parenting and effective use of Pupil Premium Plus
- Evidence-informed practice in attachment, trauma, brain development and behaviour (including PACE and relational approaches)
- Reflective consultation to support complex thinking and planning

Designed to be:

- Practical and proportionate
- Relational and trauma-informed
- Focused on sustainable impact

Training, Professional Development and Support

A stylized illustration of a person with short hair, wearing a dark shirt, shouting into a large megaphone. The person is shown from the chest up, and the megaphone is held to their mouth. The background is a light, neutral color.

[Click here](#) for more information

Learning from expertise and best practice

Theme: Education as The Anchor: Building Stability and Futures for Every Child

Free to attend

Expert input from:

- Louise Bombèr
- Senior His Majesty's Inspector (Schools) on Inclusion
- Local practitioners delivering effective practice

A shared focus on:

- What works
- What makes the biggest difference for care-experienced and CSC-experienced children and young people
- Translating evidence into everyday school practice

Annual Virtual School Conference: Thursday 8th October

A stylized illustration of a person's head and shoulders in profile, facing right. They are holding a large, light-colored megaphone to their mouth. The illustration is semi-transparent and serves as a background for the main text on the right side of the page.

[Click here](#) to book on

NEW evaluation framework for Virtual School cohorts

Supports schools to:

- Evaluate effectiveness, not just outcomes
- Evidence inclusive leadership and culture

Aligned with Ofsted expectations across education and safeguarding

Useful for:

- Self-evaluation
- Professional dialogue
- Inspection readiness

Evaluating Impact: Ofsted-Aligned Framework

A stylized illustration of a person with long hair, wearing a dark shirt, speaking into a large megaphone. The person is shown from the chest up, and the megaphone is held to their mouth. The background is a light, neutral color.

[Click here](#) to view and
download

[What we do, who we are and how to contact us](#)

[Our Service Offer At A Glance](#)

Website:

[Oxfordshire Virtual School | Oxfordshire County Council](#)

Virtual School Switchboard

Email virtualschool@oxfordshire.gov.uk

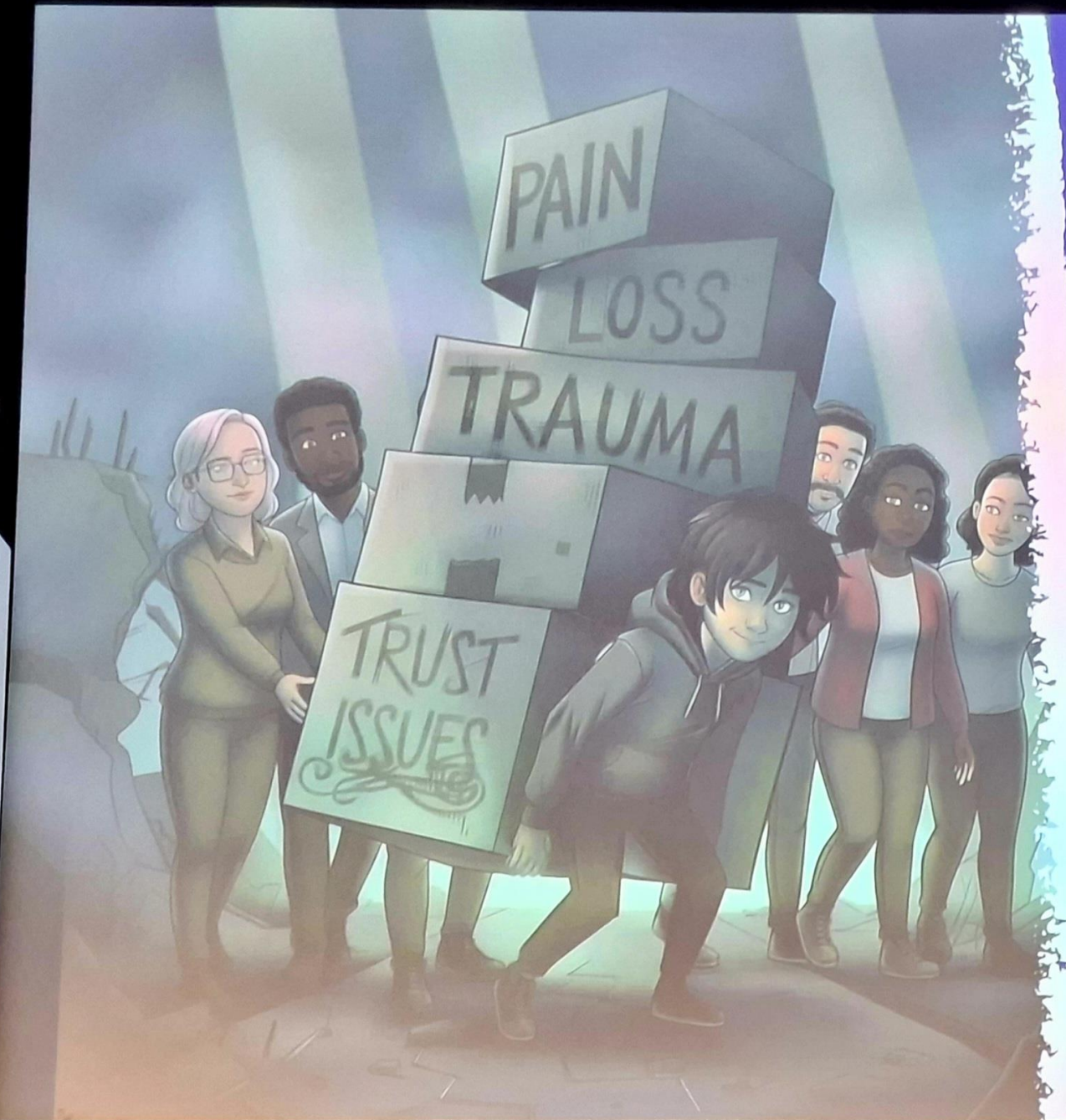
Telephone: (01865) 328550

**More
Information &
Contact**

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Any questions?





"Knowing I'm not
alone makes all
the difference."