

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



Issue 57

Term 1
2026/27



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

Direct Line: 01865 328550

Email:

virtualschool@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Training Programme 2026/27

* BOOK HERE *

Upcoming training:

Thurs 17th Sept

Virtual School Head Online Briefing for Schools
and Settings

Thurs 24th Sept

Designated Teacher (DT) Induction

Thurs 1st October

Early Years DT Session

Thurs 8th October

Oxfordshire Virtual School Conference

Tues 3rd Nov and Weds 11th Nov

PACE for school staff (2-part)



IMPORTANT: Are you booked onto our upcoming conference?

At a time of unprecedented change across education, SEND and children's services, this is a conference not to be missed.

Join us on **Thursday 8th October at Unipart House, Oxford** for *Education as the Anchor: Building Stability and Futures for Every Child*; a unique opportunity to learn from leading national experts, hear powerful lived experience perspectives, and connect with colleagues from across Oxfordshire.

Hear from **Louise Bombèr**, internationally recognised author and expert in attachment, trauma and relational practice. We are also delighted to welcome **Linda Culling HMI**, Ofsted's National Adviser for Inclusion, who will offer national insight into inclusion, belonging and the role of schools in improving outcomes for children facing adversity.

Stay up to date with **national developments**, gain **practical strategies** and **connect with colleagues** across Oxfordshire. You'll also receive a graphic record of the day to share and revisit afterwards.

Places are filling fast, so [book now](#) and join us in shaping brighter futures for care-experienced children, children with a social worker and those in kinship care.



The Role of the Virtual School

[Click here](#) for more information on
the role of the Virtual School,
including our current service offer

Oxfordshire Virtual School Team 2026-27:

Headteacher: Clare Pike

Deputy Headteacher: Lucy Byford

Primary Lead / SENCo: Sarah Hazell

Primary and Early Years case holders: Kate Hardy, Ruth Thornburn and Verity Banbury

Secondary Lead (Acting): Lucy Byford

Secondary case holders: Georgina Trafford, Jen Tupper, Isabel Crowther and Kim Taylor

Year 11 Transition Worker: Isabel Crowther

Post-16 Lead / EET: Mark Walker

Post-16 / EET case holders: Faye Barker, Nichola Collins, Rod Noble and Sarah Kelly

Extended Duties Education Officer (Year 1 to 9): Anne Gibson-Sexton

Extended Duties Education Officer (Year 10 and 11): Susan Long

Performance Data Lead: Emma Comer

Administrator: Debbie Hewings

There is a wealth of experience in the team across all phases of education. If you need advice or support, please do get in touch –

virtualschool@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Congratulations!

We are immensely proud of our children and young people and, with your support, will do whatever we can to ensure every one of them is enabled to move closer to where they want to be. Thank you for everything you put in before and throughout the stressful assessment periods for our Year 6s, Year 11s, Year 13s and all others who sat exams.

Click on the link below for an insight into 2025-26 Virtual School successes:

[\(4\) Opening doors to bright futures: care-experienced young people celebrate post-16 success](#)



For many of our young people, simply sitting exams is a huge achievement, especially when you consider what we know from [experience and research](#).

Pupil Premium Plus for Previously Cared for Children

To secure the above Pupil Premium Grant for children subject to an Adoption Order, Special Guardianship Order or other Child Arrangement Order (where a child is not returned to their birth parents), it is the responsibility of the educational setting to prompt parents and guardians to inform them of their child's status before the January census.

For more information, visit: [Previously cared for children | Oxfordshire County Council](#) and go to 'Pupil Premium Grant'

Any Year 11s with EHCPs should have had an Annual Review towards the end of Year 10 or have one booked before the end of Term 1 to ensure the EHCP that is sent out to Post-16 providers reflects the most current, accurate picture of the young person and their needs. It is also the opportunity to capture the young person's wishes and pull together everyone's thoughts on preferred Post-16 destinations. Schools can then request that the EHCP Casework Team send out consultations to providers as soon as possible before Christmas - this allows plenty of time for places to be agreed before the end of March deadline when the destination is named on the EHCP. If the Annual Review has not yet happened or been booked, or you are concerned that things have changed significantly, please flag this up with the SENDCo, copying in their Virtual School case holder.

Year 11 Options

Please encourage your current Year 11s to start thinking and getting a bit excited about their Post-16 options. This term is the perfect time to attend the next College Open Events (see overleaf for links), especially if they have not been before or are very uncertain about what is on offer. Please let their Virtual School case holder know if they may need some extra support from our Year 11 Transition Worker, Isabel Crowther, to explore their interests and go through the different pathways with them – face to face (where possible) or online.

Ideally, they should start submitting applications as soon as October half term; it is always possible to make additional applications later as a 'Plan B' and if circumstances (or their goals!) change, but the earlier the better when it comes to starting the process. It is also never too early to encourage your **Year 10s** to attend open days to start getting some ideas!

Personal Education Plan (PEP) reminders for the new academic year

- If you have new pupils starting this term, dates for the first PEP should already have been set up. Check [ePEP Single Sign-on](#) or ask their Virtual School case worker. If no date has been set, the first PEP in a new school should take place within 20 school days.
- If you are delegating any PEPs to other staff within your team, you can add them to the [ePEP platform](#) as a designated user. Ask your Virtual School case worker to set this up.
- If you are working with Year 6 pupils, the Term 1 PEP is really important because discussion about secondary school applications need to be prioritised to meet deadlines for submission. Social workers generally make the application, so liaise early with the carer and social worker to agree which secondary school will be best suited. The Virtual School advise you only select schools where inspection outcomes and published reports indicate strong quality of education, safeguarding, inclusion and pupil support. Please get in touch with us to discuss individual circumstances.
- The invite for PEPs should be set up by the Designated Teacher, in discussion with the social worker and Virtual School, to ensure those invited are appropriate. Virtual School caseworkers cannot attend every meeting but will join as and when needed. Virtual School caseworkers are always on hand for queries, advice and guidance, so please do get in touch.

Sixth Form and College Open Days

There will be Open Days for the current Year 11s (and Year 10s if they want to get ahead!) coming up over the next couple of months. Click on the below links for more information/dates:

- [City of Oxford College](#)
- [Banbury and Bicester College](#)
- [Henley College](#)
- [Abingdon & Witney College](#)
- [Activate Learning](#)
- [New College, Swindon](#)
- [Warwickshire College Group](#)

Do contact our Year 11 Transition Worker, Isabel Crowther, if you need support with young people's Post-16 plans and applications – isabel.crowther@oxfordshire.gov.uk / 07747648494

Transition

Many pupils will be managing change this term: new school, change of cohort, new social worker or new home.

Schools must support pupils with building a sense of belonging in school.

Key actions:

- Identify a key adult and schedule meet up times.
- Get a Pupil Profile circulated early in the first term.
- Introduce pupils to important adults in school such as: canteen staff, duty staff, SLT, pastoral staff. That way, adults can start to build positive relationships early.
- Catch up with carers by phone or chat at drop off to calm worries and pick up early wobbles.
- Make sure 'hidden' routines are explained, e.g. queues for lunch. Do not assume pupils will ask.
- Make sure pupils are well equipped and have everything they need and a safe place to go in school.

Suspensions / Exclusions

It is critical that you contact your Virtual School caseworker and your allocated Exclusion and Reintegration Officer as soon as possible if a Child We Care For or Previously Cared For Child is 'bubbling' and at risk of suspension or permanent exclusion.

We are here to support!

Youth Voice – Ensuring Young People’s Voices Count



Youth Voice is Oxfordshire’s participation group for children and young people with care experience. It provides opportunities for them to share their views, experiences and ideas, helping to shape services, influence decision-making and improve support for care-experienced children and young people. Through regular meetings, projects, consultations and social activities, Youth Voice ensures that the voices of children and young people are heard and that their experiences help inform the development of services across the county.

If you know a young person who might like to join, please contact Youth.Voice@oxfordshire.gov.uk
For more information, [click here](#).

Managing School Records Before and After Adoption

Accurate and sensitive management of school records is essential to protecting the identity, privacy and wellbeing of adopted children.

To understand your responsibilities before and after adoption, ensuring records are handled appropriately and in line with statutory requirements, click here to learn more:

[Managing School Records Before and After Adoption](#)

What Your School Should Offer Children We Care For



OSCP Training Courses

[Training - Oxfordshire](#)
[Safeguarding Children](#)
[Partnership](#)

[Protocol on leave of absence](#)
[requests](#)

Free downloadable resources

[Click here](#) to view free downloadable behaviour resources from the Beacon School.

Have you any children with a parent in prison?

If so, you must [click here](#)





SEND Reform and the Virtual School

You may be aware that significant changes to the SEND system are planned nationally, with a greater focus on inclusion, earlier intervention and bringing specialist support closer to children and young people in their education setting. In Oxfordshire, the emerging Experts at Hand offer will bring together expertise from across education, health and care services to provide advice, training, coaching and practical support directly to schools and settings.



The Virtual School is expected to form part of this developing offer, helping to ensure that the educational needs of care-experienced children, children with a social worker, children in kinship care and other vulnerable learners are fully considered within a more joined-up system of support.



We will continue to keep you updated on SEND Reform and the emerging Experts at Hand offer as plans develop and further details become available.

Remembering Dolly Parton

Many of you will have been saddened to hear of the passing of Dolly Parton over the summer.

Alongside her extraordinary impact on music and popular culture, Dolly leaves a remarkable legacy through the **Imagination Library**, which has inspired a love of reading in millions of children worldwide.

We have been advised that the **Dolly Parton Imagination Library programme will continue**, ensuring that our children can keep benefiting from the gift of books and early literacy opportunities for years to come.

This is wonderful news and a fitting legacy for Dolly Parton, whose vision and generosity will continue to inspire a love of reading and learning in future generations of children.

How It Works

Once you sign up, an age appropriate book will be delivered to your child every month until their fifth birthday. The books are free for families and yours to keep forever! All titles in the Imagination Library are published by Penguin Random House and carefully selected by a panel of experts in early childhood literacy and reading.

Eligibility

This programme is for Oxfordshire Children in Care, and those previously in Care to Oxfordshire.



Contact Us

If you have any questions or comments regarding this scheme please do not hesitate to contact:

virtualschool@oxfordshire.gov.uk

We hope the children in your care enjoy the books!



OXFORDSHIRE
VIRTUAL SCHOOL
Looking After Learning



OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL



England and Wales Registered Charity Number 1121917
The Dollywood Foundation UK, 167 - 169 Great Portland Street,
5th Floor, London W1W 5PF.
General Enquiries: info@imaginationlibrary.co.uk



Inspire a Love
of Reading

Children in Kinship Care Arrangements

Did you know that kinship care is one of the most common forms of alternative care for children?

Kinship carers step in to provide stable, loving homes for children when they are unable to live with their parents, often with little time to prepare and while navigating complex emotional, practical and legal challenges.

The support available to kinship families continues to grow, including access to training, advice and peer support designed to help carers feel confident in meeting the needs of the children in their care.

To find out more about kinship care, available support and resources, visit our Kinship webpage:

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

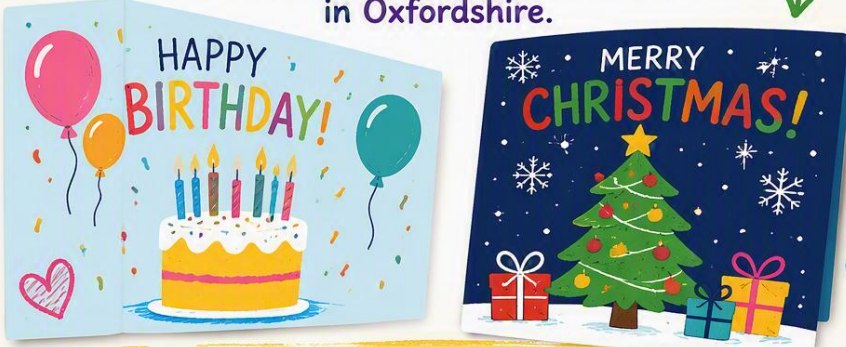
Our Extended Duties Team can help professionals, families and carers navigate educational barriers for children and young people who are not looked after and are therefore not allocated a Virtual School Worker. To access support, please contact extendedduties@oxfordshire.gov.uk and you will be connected to an adviser.

Look out for future editions of this newsletter, where we will be spotlighting kinship care and sharing updates, resources and opportunities to support kinship children and their families.

Please promote
to all children
we care for and
care leavers in
your care:

Greetings Card Competition!

Exciting opportunity to design a **birthday card** and a **christmas card** to be sent to all children in care in Oxfordshire.



£20 GIFT VOUCHER OF YOUR CHOICE

£20 gift voucher of your choice for the winner of each category.

Open to all ages of children in care or care leavers **up to 25**.

Closing date 31st October

Email your entry to Youth.Voice@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

 **OXFORDSHIRE**
COUNTY COUNCIL