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



Issue 58

Term 2
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:

Tues 10th November
De-escalation and Sensory Inputs

Weds 25th November
Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Challenging Behaviour

Thurs 1st October
Formulation – Planning Interventions for Complex Children

Tues 12th January
An Introduction to Making Sense of Brain Development and the Impact of Trauma

Tues 14th January
Designated Teacher Induction

A message from the Virtual School Head

As we begin Term 2, we know this can be a particularly tough time of year. Thank you for all that you do to support our children and young people. Your care, commitment and advocacy make a real difference.

Important guidance updates

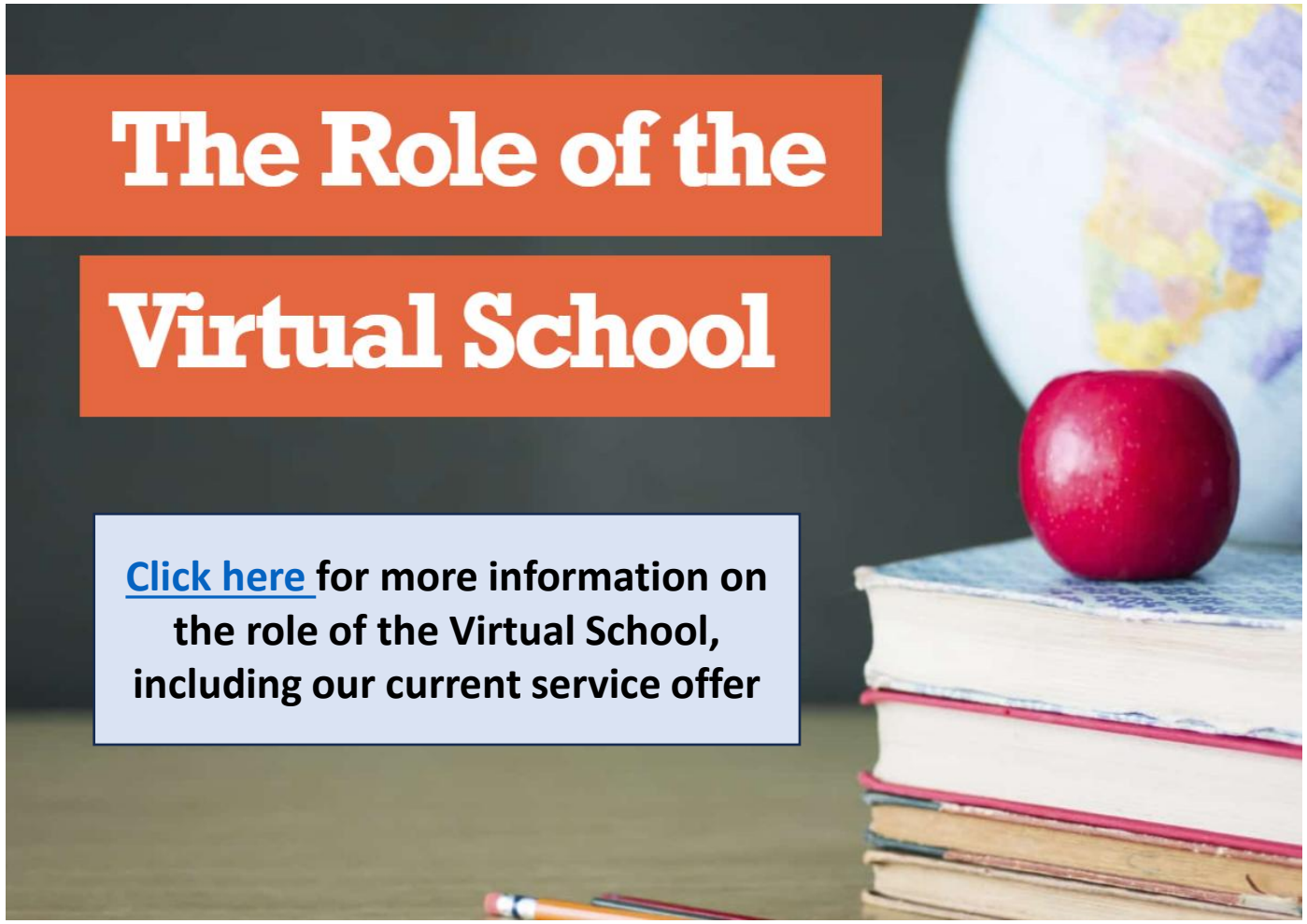
Updated Designated Teacher guidance, which has not changed significantly since 2018, is expected in draft before Christmas, followed by a consultation early in the new year. Final guidance is expected around Easter, becoming statutory from 1st September 2027. The DfE has also confirmed that new guidance on the role of schools and education settings as corporate parents will be published soon, as part of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill rollout, and is also expected to become statutory from 1st September 2027. Please look out for further updates from us.

Our team

We have welcomed some colleagues into new roles this term. Lucy Byford was appointed Deputy Headteacher of the Virtual School in June and took up the role on 1st September. Jess Jackson has now joined us as Secondary Phase Lead. Jess is an experienced secondary teacher and SENDCo and comes to us from OCC's Behaviour Inclusion Team. Sophie Winwright has also joined our Extended Duties Team as an Education Adviser, working alongside Anne Gibson-Sexton and Susan Long to provide advice and information regarding children with Children's Social Care experience and children living in kinship care who are not in our care. You can find more about the cohorts we support and the help available through our current service offer. You may also find our Ofsted-aligned framework for evaluating effectiveness for Virtual School cohorts useful when undertaking self-evaluation.

Again, thank you again for everything you do for our care-experienced, Children's Social Care-experienced and kinship care children and young people.

Clare Pike, Head of the Virtual School



Oxfordshire Virtual School Team 2026-27:

Headteacher: Clare Pike
Deputy Headteacher: Lucy Byford
Primary Phase Lead / SENDCo: Sarah Hazell
Primary and Early Years Advisory Teachers: Kate Hardy, Ruth Thornburn and Verity Banbury
Secondary Phase Lead: Jessica Jackson
Secondary Advisory Teachers: Georgina Trafford, Jen Tupper, Isabel Crowther and Kim Taylor
Year 11 Transition Coordinator: Isabel Crowther
Post-16 Phase Lead: Mark Walker
Post-16 Education and Pathways Advisors: Faye Barker, Nichola Collins, Rod Noble and Sarah Kelly
Extended Duties Advisory Team (CSC-Experienced / Kinship): Anne Gibson-Sexton, Susan Long and Sophie Winwright
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

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 2022 and 31st August 2022 need to apply for an infant or primary school place for September 2027.

The deadline for completed applications is 15th January 2027.

Applications received by this date will be processed for National Offer Day on 16th April 2027. 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 allocated worker to ensure the best outcome.

Post 16 Transition

Remember that some of your Year 11s may need additional support with the process of applying to colleges.

Ideas to support children we care for:

- DT call carer to explain the process (especially for carers who have not had a Year 11 before).
- Time in school researching courses, talking to ex-students and support with application form.
- Flag up open events and identify a member of staff to meet them at college to facilitate the visit.
- Ask college course leader to come in and talk to a group in school.

What is the SDQ for?

The strengths and difficulties questionnaire is an important tool to help professionals identify emotional and behaviour concerns and to flag up the need for further assessment. It supports discussion in PEP meetings and enables professionals to see specific areas which may need targeted intervention. Tracking SDQ data is important as unmet SEMH needs are one of the key reasons for educational underachievement in children we care for (CWCF) and previously cared for children. For more on strategies to support in meeting SEMH needs in your setting, view the **SEND Ordinarily available toolkit (oxfordshire.gov.uk)**

Preventing suspensions and exclusions is critical. The SDQ can be part of the identification of needs, as often this is missed. **Vulnerable and SEND pupils are more likely to be excluded** and there is an understanding that more compassionate schooling is needed. See this thought-provoking trailer **'Excluded'.**

All local authorities are required to provide information on the emotional and behavioural health of CWCF. This data is collected through the SDQ and a summary score for each child issued for tracking the emotional and behavioural difficulties of CWCF at a national level.

Click here to access a copy of the SDQ and for guidance on how to use it – go to 'Assessment' section.

PACE at Christmas

Christmas time can also be a difficult time with lots of feelings flying around.

Click here for a Beacon House resource which explores how to **use PACE at Christmas time.**

PEP Reminder

When a PEP has been held, remember to log back in and complete the relevant ePEP sections on **eGov** and submit for review by your Virtual School case worker.

Please check email addresses of the following key adults are correct:

- DT email
- Social Worker email
- Carer email
- Finance contact email

We use these emails to contact settings with information about Pupil Premium Plus payments and other important information.

Reminder that DTs are responsible for the PEP and liaising with different parties involved to ensure it is completed promptly for quality assurance by the Virtual School Allocated Worker.

Thank you.







2026 Oxfordshire Virtual School Conference

Oxfordshire Virtual School: Driving Relational Practice

On Thursday 8th October, 160 delegates came together for Oxfordshire Virtual School's annual conference. The theme was: **Education as The Anchor: Building Stability and Futures for Every Child.**

The day brought together national expertise, inspection insight, lived experience and frontline practice, with a clear shared message: relationships, belonging and stability matter profoundly for children and young people.

The focus throughout was on how education can act as an anchor, particularly for care-experienced children and children with a social worker, and how relational, connection-focused practice can create the safety children need to learn, belong and thrive.

And the work does not stop with the conference. Between now and the end of November, the Virtual School team will be undertaking training in Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP).

DDP is a therapeutic approach based on the principle that the wounds created by early relational failure can only be healed through new relational experience. This approach is particularly effective for children and adolescents with histories of complex trauma and disordered attachment.

At its heart, DDP is about approaching children with playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy (PACE), recognising that connection and relational safety are not an optional extra, but fundamental to helping children experience stability, inclusion and hope.

If your school is keen to further develop relational practice, please send a member of staff on our PACE for School Staff training

This year's conference promoted curiosity in approach, empathy in leadership, belonging as protection, play as connection, inclusion as non-negotiable and relational safety as the bedrock.

Find out more about Oxfordshire Virtual School's conference.

Thank you for your support and continued efforts to improve the lives of our most vulnerable children.

Funding for Previously Cared For Children

School funding is based on census data, so it's vital to ensure that information about your previously cared for children cohort is up-to-date.

Previously cared for children - referred to by the Department for Education (DfE) as previously looked after children or PLAC - are children no longer in local authority care because they are the subject of an Adoption, Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Order. Children who have gone back to live at home with no Child Arrangement Order are unfortunately not eligible for this funding. Since 1st April 2024, Pupil Premium Plus funding has also been available for pupils who have been adopted from care or have left care from outside of England and Wales.

Pupil Premium Plus funding is overseen by the Department for Education. For the financial year 2025 to 2026, the Pupil Premium Grant equates to £2,690 per Previously Cared For Child per annum.

To secure the Pupil Premium Grant, it is the responsibility of the educational setting to prompt parents and guardians who need to inform the setting about their child's circumstances (along with evidence) in time for the setting to record the child's status on their census. We suggest that you include a question regarding previously in care status both on your admissions form and at regular intervals when requesting information regarding Ever 6 FSM eligibility. A letter can be sent out regarding previously cared for status – to preview an editable example letter (and for more information), go to the 'Pupil Premium Grant' section of this page:
Previously cared for children | Oxfordshire County Council

Protocol on leave of absence requests

In exceptional circumstances, requests may need to be made for a leave of absence during term-time for children we care for (CWCF).

If this is the case, approval must be sought from both the Head of Service for CWCF and the Virtual School Head.

Schools / educational settings should not be approached directly by carers or social workers with such a request.

Carers and social workers must not apply for holiday in term time.

To view the policy, click here: **Protocol for term-time leave of absence applications**

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 your SENDCo, copying in their Virtual School allocated worker.

Oxfordshire's commitment to children we care for and care experienced young people

A corporate parent is the name given to an organisation or person who has special responsibilities to children we care for and care experienced young people.

A corporate parent is intended to carry out many of the roles a parent should. While you or your organisation may not be able to provide everything a parent can, you should still be able to provide the children and young people you're responsible for with the best possible support and care.

Corporate parent responsibilities are intended to encourage people and organisations to do as much as they can towards improving the lives of children we care for and care experienced young people, so they feel in control of their lives and are able to overcome the barriers they may face.

As corporate parents in Oxfordshire we are ambitious for our children we care for and care experienced young people. We are committed to working together to help children, young people, and families to thrive.

We want Oxfordshire to be a great place to grow up and for any Oxfordshire child or young person to have the opportunity to become everything they want to be.

To achieve this vision for children and young people we have a focus on all children and young people being successful, safe, healthy, and supported.

Some of our children we care for and care experienced young people have told us what they need from their corporate parents and how we can best support them to help them thrive.

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

YOUTH VOICES OXFORDSHIRE

CARE FOR THE FUTURE

Youth Voices is the forum for children we care for (CWCF) and care leavers. Youth Voices help the council achieve our commitment to care-experienced young people in Oxfordshire. Youth Voices have regular meetings, run surveys and access a range of enrichment activities that support us in working alongside them to better understand their needs and aspirations. Youth Voices hold their corporate parents to account against their responsibilities.

Should you know a child or young person who might like to join Youth Voices, please contact the Participation and Engagement Team via youth.voice@oxfordshire.gov.uk or visit Children in Care Council | OXME.INFO

What Your School Should Offer Children We Care For

