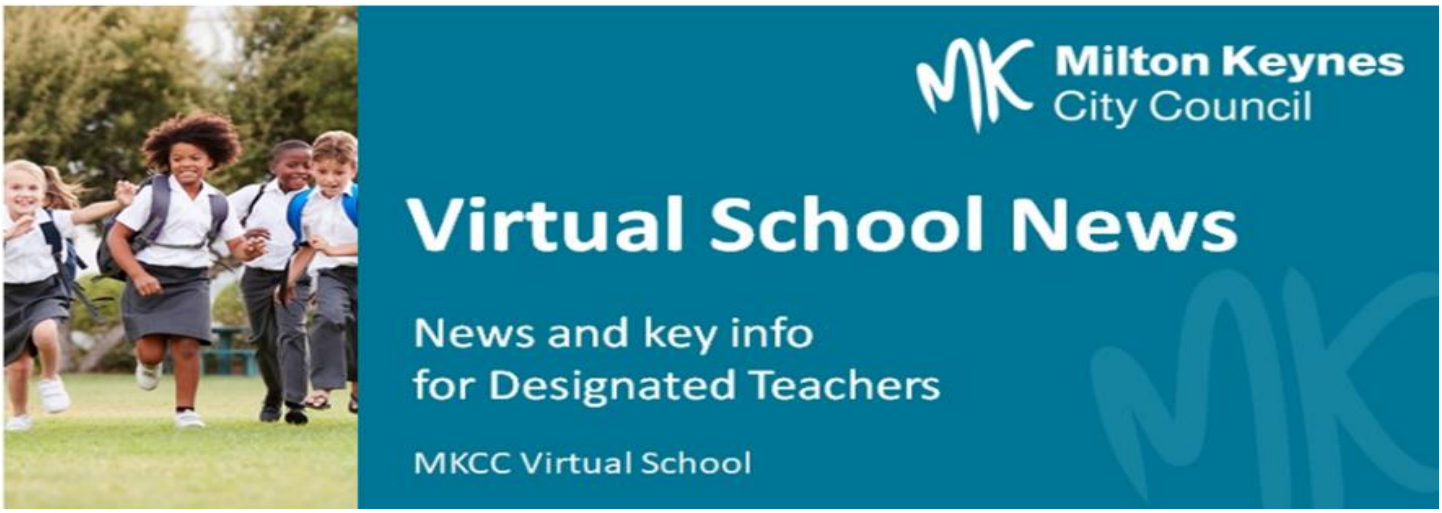


We would like to extend a warm welcome back to all Designated Teachers following the half-term break. We hope that you have had an opportunity to rest, recharge and spend time with family and friends.

As we begin the second half of the autumn term, we would like to thank you for your continued commitment to supporting our children in care and previously looked-after children. We know that this term can be particularly busy, with end-of-year activities, assessments, celebrations and transition planning all taking place alongside your wider responsibilities. Your dedication to ensuring that care-experienced children remain visible, supported and ambitious in their educational journeys is hugely valued.

The weeks ahead provide opportunities to celebrate progress, strengthen partnerships and continue to promote the highest aspirations for our children and young people. As always, the Virtual School team is here to support you, and we look forward to working alongside you throughout the remainder of the term.

Pupil Premium Plus Additional Grant Requests for Financial Year 2026/27

As we begin to prepare for the end of the financial year, we are again predicting a small underspend of Pupil Premium Plus funding, and we are keen to ensure that this funding is utilised by education settings to support Milton Keynes Children Looked After on their roll. As ever, the funding must be used in line with the Pupil Premium Plus grant conditions but may be requested for initiatives/projects which will take place later in the 2026/27 academic year. For clarity, this funding is **in addition** to the funding available as part of the Core PEP process (£950 per Core PEP twice per year).

The Virtual School is welcoming applications for **additional** funding and will seek to prioritise applications for children in Years 2, 6, 10 and 11. Applications should directly relate to the following criteria:

- Promoting academic outcomes
- Developing enrichment and engagement opportunities
- Supporting wellbeing

Settings can apply for up to £600 per Milton Keynes looked after child on their roll (in Year R-11 only). The deadline for applications is 8th January 2027 and all applications must be submitted via MS Forms: Milton Keynes Virtual School Application for Additional Pupil Premium Plus Funding 2026/27 – Fill in form. The final decision on whether the application is approved will be made by the Virtual School Head in line with available funding and grant conditions.

Please speak to your Virtual School Officer if you want further information or to discuss an application before submission.

Encryption Update

Accessing Shared Files from Milton Keynes City Council

MKCC are now using SharePoint links to send all confidential documents externally. You do not need a Microsoft Account.

1. What has changed?

   Microsoft has introduced new security measures for accessing shared files. These changes help keep our children and young people's information safe and secure.

2. First time access

- A guest account will be created automatically for you
- You will be asked to set up multi-factor authentication (MFA)

3. What is MFA?

- An extra security step to confirm it is really you
- Usually involves using an authenticator app on your mobile phone
- You will be guided through setup step-by-step
- You only need to do this once per email address

4. Using phones or tablets

Access on mobile devices (iPhones, iPads, Android) may not always work reliably.

- Use a Windows laptop or computer for the best experience
- If a link does not work on your phone, try a computer instead
- If you have problems:

    1. Try another device (ideally a computer)
    2. Complete MFA steps when prompted
    3. Contact us if you still need help

Autumn Term 2 - Supporting Care-Experienced Children During Seasonal Celebrations

With Halloween now behind us, many schools and communities will begin turning their attention towards Christmas and other seasonal celebrations. While this can be an exciting time of year for many children and young people, it is important to recognise that festive periods and cultural celebrations can evoke a wide range of emotions for care-experienced children.

Schools often adapt routines to incorporate seasonal activities, performances and celebrations. Whilst these opportunities can help foster inclusion and enjoyment, we encourage schools to consider each child's individual circumstances and experiences when planning activities. For some care-experienced children, occasions such as Christmas may highlight feelings of loss, separation from family members, changes in traditions, or uncertainty about where and how celebrations will take place.

It is also important to recognise and celebrate the diverse range of religious festivals, cultural events and observances that take place throughout the year. These can provide valuable opportunities for learning, inclusion and cultural understanding. However, children and young people may experience mixed emotions during such occasions, particularly when family relationships, traditions or experiences differ from those of their peers. Feelings associated with missing loved ones, changes in family customs, or a sense of "missing out" can emerge at different points throughout the year and may not always be immediately visible.

Taking a trauma-informed and relationship-based approach can help schools create supportive environments where all children feel understood and valued. Small adjustments, open conversations and sensitivity to individual circumstances can make a significant difference in ensuring that seasonal celebrations remain positive, inclusive and meaningful experiences for everyone.

As always, thank you for your continued commitment to supporting the wellbeing, belonging and educational success of our care-experienced children and young people.

Virtual School Padlet

This MKCC Virtual School Padlet has been created as a central online resource hub for Designated Teachers (DTs) supporting our care-experienced children and young people. The Padlet is a simple, interactive digital noticeboard that allows information, resources, documents, links, videos, and guidance to be organised and accessed in one place. DTs can use this Padlet to quickly find statutory guidance, training materials, templates, local authority resources, best practice advice, and information about support services, helping them to effectively meet the needs of your vulnerable children, young people, carers and families.

For any regular users of the Padlet, any new resources will be added under 'Latest News' and moved to their appropriate sections at the end of every month, allowing quick and easy access to new material, without trawling through previously loaded content.

We would welcome your feedback and suggestions to help us develop this resource. As the Padlet is intended to support your role as a Designated Teacher, please let us know what information, resources, templates, training opportunities, guidance, or services you would find most useful. Your feedback will help ensure the Padlet remains relevant, practical, and responsive to the needs of schools and the children and young people you support. Please access the Padlet via the links here:

https://padlet.com/MKCC_Virtual_School/mkcc-virtual-school-padlet-s0239d31ru9opqf9l03k

East of England Mental Health Crisis Text Service

Free, confidential, 24/7 mental health support by text, WhatsApp and webchat for anyone in Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes, Cambridgeshire, Peterborough, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk or Essex. For people of all ages experiencing anxiety, low mood, stress, loneliness, self-harm urges or suicidal thoughts.

Messages are answered by registered mental health professionals. No referral needed.

Conversations are confidential. We would only share information if we were worried about someone's safety.

- Text: SOS to 80899
- WhatsApp: 0800 884 0655
- Webchat: nxgthrive.co.uk/crisis-text-service

SMS Shortcode not delivering? Check your device settings or try us on WhatsApp!

Commissioned by NHS Central East, NHS Norfolk and Suffolk and NHS Essex ICBs.

Delivered by NXG Thrive.

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 999.

Can you support a trainee educational psychologist with their thesis?

Holly Goddard is a trainee educational psychologist who is currently undertaking a thesis research project. She is seeking participants from secondary mainstream settings and secondary pupil referral units to complete a survey.

This research has been approved by the University of Southampton Research Ethics Committee and consists of a survey to explore how school staff understand and respond to pupil behaviour in educational settings. Participants will also complete additional measures within the survey, related to their personal characteristics and general ways of thinking. All answers and results from the research are anonymous and kept strictly confidential, and the results will be reported in a research paper available to all participants on completion. All survey data will be stored securely and it should take approximately 20 minutes to complete - https://southampton.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8k9xcJNEKe9KtSK. Thank you for considering.

PEP Deadlines

PEP deadlines are set to ensure that all documentation and information can be reviewed by the Virtual School before school holiday periods, when colleagues may be less readily available. All PEPs completed during the term should be finalised and submitted in accordance with the timescales provided by the child's Virtual School Officer. The dates outlined below represent the final submission deadlines for the term. If you anticipate any difficulties in meeting these deadlines, or have any concerns, please contact the Virtual School Officer at the earliest opportunity.

Autumn – Monday 14th December 2026

Spring – Friday 19th March 2027

Please note: *Most Spring Term PEPs will be completed as Review PEPs. However, where a Pupil Premium (PP) funding request is being submitted, financial timescales and funding deadlines may require an earlier completion and submission date. Please refer to the guidance provided by the child's Virtual School Officer.*

Summer – Monday 12th July 2027

Training Opportunities

Virtual School is able to deliver bespoke training sessions including whole school training. Additionally, we can also consider requests for training on a case-by-case basis – this may include e-learning, externally commissioned resources and in-person opportunities.

Please complete this form to provide information about your training need and context and a Virtual School representative will be in touch to discuss next steps: Virtual School Training Request Form – Fill in form.

DT Forum

We were delighted to welcome 25 Designated Teachers to our latest DT Forum, held at Oakgrove School on 22 October. Thank you to everyone who joined us and braved the chilly October morning ahead of the half-term break.

The forum provided an opportunity to share key Virtual School updates, including the launch of our new Virtual School Padlet, which will act as a central hub for resources, guidance and information. We were also pleased to welcome an external speaker who delivered an informative session on the Study Higher programme and the opportunities available to care-experienced young people progressing into higher education and employment.

Our DT Forums are designed to bring Designated Teachers together to share good practice, discuss challenges and seek advice from colleagues across Milton Keynes. We recognise that the Designated Teacher role can often be a unique and sometimes isolated position within a school, and we hope these forums provide a valuable professional network and source of support.

Whilst the forums are facilitated by the Virtual School, we are keen to ensure they remain relevant and responsive to the needs of Designated Teachers. We therefore welcome suggestions for future agenda items and discussion topics.

If there is a particular issue, theme or area of practice you would like us to cover at a future forum, please do not hesitate to contact Jenny Cooledge at **Jenny.Cooledge@milton-keynes.gov.uk**. We look forward to continuing to work together to support the educational outcomes of our children in care and previously looked-after children.

Our Designated Teacher Forum dates for the coming academic year are:

Spring: Wednesday 24th February 2027 at 3:30pm – Venue TBC

Summer: Thursday 24th June 2027 at 8am at Oakgrove School