



# Virtual School News

News and key info  
for Designated Teachers

MKCC Virtual School

Welcome to the January edition of our Designated Teacher Newsletter. As we step into a new year, it's a great time to reflect on the incredible work you have done to support care experienced children and those with a social worker as well as looking ahead at the opportunities and challenges that 2026 will bring. As a Virtual School, we have been taking time to consider what the new Ofsted Inspection Framework means for our children and we know you will be doing similar given the significant focus on Inclusion that will be a feature of inspections from November 2025. Thank you for your ongoing commitment – your role is vital in ensuring every child feels supported, valued and able to thrive.

## Making Connections update

We recently completed an evaluation of the pilot year of the Making Connections programme, our Milton Keynes programme designed to increase understanding and use of attachment and trauma informed practice in schools. The infographic below shows the impact of the project against the Key Performance Indicators set (around attendance and suspensions) and some of the qualitative feedback received from 15 of the participating pilot schools and settings.

There are now 40 MK schools participating in Making Connections, so far 12 schools have received their ARC Bronze Award and we expect this number to grow over the next few months. We'll be launching phase three of the programme to Headteachers at the end of January, with capacity for another 20 schools to join. If your setting isn't already part of Making Connections and you would like to know more about what it offers so that you can discuss it with colleagues, there is more information available on our webpage [Making Connections | Milton Keynes City Council](#) including a brochure outlining the key components of the programme and feedback from Milton Keynes school-based colleagues.

If you would like more detail or have any questions about Making Connections, please contact [louise.cooper@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:louise.cooper@milton-keynes.gov.uk) to arrange a discussion.

# MAKING CONNECTIONS



Supporting schools to become trauma-informed and attachment aware in their practice.

We evaluated the pilot year of the Making Connections project by reviewing whole-school data and project feedback forms. Here is what we found...

Across schools who achieved their ARC\* bronze award

OVERALL, SUSPENSIONS  
REDUCED BY

34%



Across schools who achieved their ARC\* bronze award

OVERALL, ON-SITE  
REDIRECTIONS\*\* REDUCED BY

31%

Across schools who achieved their ARC\* bronze award, most saw an

INCREASE IN SCHOOL  
ATTENDANCE

The majority met the national aim of  
95%

\*\*On-site redirections involve removal from lessons  
e.g. time spent in an isolation room/reflection room



Based on responses from 15 schools who took part in the project...

100% saw improved **relationships between staff and students**

80% saw an improvement in **student wellbeing**

67% saw an improved **relationships between staff and families**

47% saw an improvement in **safeguarding processes**

40% saw a reduction in **behaviour incidents**

27% saw an improvement in **staff wellbeing**

## SCHOOLS SAID...

"I think that the areas it covers, the detailed training offered and the networking with other education colleagues from across MK could be **transformational.**"

"It has been an **extremely worthwhile** journey through which we have learned a great deal and **deepened our knowledge** and understanding of trauma and attachment".

"Our staff have developed a deeper understanding... This has enabled us to respond with **empathy, consistency, and care**, ensuring that **every child feels safe, seen, and supported.**"

\*Attachment Research Centre



For more information about the project please email: [louise.cooper@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:louise.cooper@milton-keynes.gov.uk)  
OR visit [Making Connections - Milton Keynes City Council](#)

## Additional PPG Requests

The deadline for requesting additional Pupil Premium Plus funding closes today (09/01/26). The Virtual School will be working through requests over the coming weeks, and you will be advised of the outcome via email ahead of the February half term.

If you have missed the deadline but want an application to be considered, please contact the Virtual School Head to discuss – [katy.enser@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:katy.enser@milton-keynes.gov.uk).

## Preparing for the summer examination series

We are aware that you will be diligently preparing our children in examination years for upcoming summer assessments. Any exam access arrangements required should already be in place as a child's regular way of working in liaison with your setting's SENDCo. Whilst plans and progress will obviously be discussed in termly PEP meetings, please do not hesitate to contact your allocated Virtual School Officer if you require any support or resources ahead of this.

## PEPs

An important update about completing the PEP via the MKCC Professionals Portal. Following on from a recent upgrade, there have been a noted increase in the number of queries regarding forms not retaining details that have been inputted. It is believed that this is related to the new function of 'autosave' and is primarily affecting users with Milton Keynes City Council however to ensure that you do not lose any information when completed your delegated PEPs, please ensure that you are saving regularly and when you are exiting the system, that you logout to avoid the system 'waiting for a save' and then timing out.

**The deadline for completion of Spring term PEPs is 6<sup>th</sup> March 2026.** Please ensure that you have your meetings booked and paperwork is completed ahead of the meeting (if a Core PEP).

We have completed the vast majority of the quality assurance of our Autumn term PEPs and a copy of the documents should be back with you for your records and action throughout this term. If you have not received your form back or you have any queries, please do contact your allocated Virtual School Officer.

We have seen some great practice demonstrated across settings and we continue to value the immense effort of you and your teams in supporting our children. What is evident is that the highest impact is noted where settings know children really well and demonstrate understanding and accountability for supporting them to achieve agreed outcomes. High quality PEPs are plans that are shared and known across the child's team of adults, and where the targets and actions are frequently reviewed in between meetings outlining the progress that is being made and evidencing what must come next to continue this momentum or effect further change.

As part of our quality assurance, the most common reason for an amber RAG-rated PEP was noted as being due to SMART target completion. Some notes regarding setting high quality SMART targets are below:

- SMART targets need to fit the criteria of being SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant/realistic and time-bound).

- There should typically be three or more SMART targets outlined on each PEP and deviation from this should be explicitly discussed and noted in the PEP meeting.
- SMART targets will obviously be tailored to the individual circumstances of each child with holistic targets being set as appropriate, however, consideration should be paid to setting SMART targets which will specifically support academic progress – this will be linked to academic progress data provided by the setting and discussed in the PEP meeting.
- Previous SMART targets should be discussed and progress noted in the appropriate comment box when completing the 'Part 2' delegated form (via the MKCC Professionals Portal) ahead of the PEP meeting.

Guidance on writing SMART targets can be found here: [Designated teachers for looked after and previously looked after children | Milton Keynes City Council](#). SMART targets remain intrinsically linked to allocating Pupil Premium Plus funding and are an essential component of each child's PEP.

Unfortunately, there have been a small number of PEPs which following review have been noted with a red RAG-rating. This is broadly due to non-compliance with outlined PEP processes e.g. non-completion of the delegated 'Part 2' or not setting targets for the child. Individual settings have had these quality assurance outcomes flagged directly. If you have any feedback, please contact the Virtual School Head to discuss – [katy.enser@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:katy.enser@milton-keynes.gov.uk).

## Training Opportunities

A reminder that there is a variety of training opportunities available free of charge to settings supporting children looked after by Milton Keynes City Council. Our full training offer can be found on our website: [Training and support | Milton Keynes City Council \(milton-keynes.gov.uk\)](#). There is a wide variety of different options including e-learning and whole school face to face training.

Please do not hesitate to contact Katy Enser – [Katy.Enser@Milton-Keynes.gov.uk](mailto:Katy.Enser@Milton-Keynes.gov.uk) or Jenny Cooledge – [Jenny.Cooledge@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:Jenny.Cooledge@milton-keynes.gov.uk) – for further information if this would be of interest to you.

## DT Forum

Our next Designated Teacher Forum will be on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026, 3.30-5.30pm and will be hosted by Stantonbury School. We will be sending out invitations in the coming weeks to confirm attendees. It would be wonderful to see as many of you as possible join us.