



Virtual School News

News and key info
for Designated Teachers

MKCC Virtual School

This term is always a bit of a slog but we remain thankful for your continued support, both of our children and us. We've outlined a few reminders as well as signposting to resources which we hope you might find useful. As usual, please do reach out to us if you require any support as the term goes on.

Tis the season... Christmas!!!

As we step into Autumn Term 2, the countdown to Christmas has officially begun—whether we're ready or not!



The shops are already bursting with festive stock, adverts are in full swing, and it won't be long before the familiar sounds of Christmas songs are everywhere on repeat. For many, this season is indeed "the most wonderful time of the year." But for some of the children and young people we work with, it can be one of the most emotionally complex.

This period can bring up reminders of people they won't be spending time with, uncertainty around family arrangements—especially when plans aren't confirmed in advance—and feelings of difference compared to peers, particularly during conversations about gifts and celebrations.

We know that transitions at the end of term can be challenging, and the festive season tends to amplify this. Combined with the usual end-of-term fatigue (yes, we see you powering through!), we often see an increase in behavioural challenges and, unfortunately, suspensions.

To support schools in navigating this time with empathy and care, we've included resources below to help promote a trauma-informed approach to the Christmas period. These can support staff in planning for a positive end to term and a smooth return in the new year.

Let's make this season as inclusive and supportive as possible—for every child, every classroom, and every team.

It may also be worth noting whether the children / young people you are working with celebrate other key events and religious observances which may have a similar impact at different times throughout the school year and require extra support/ monitoring.

[Resources](#) – There are some great resources here under the 'Winter Resources' subheading.

[A Trauma Informed Approach to Christmas](#)

Suspensions, Exclusions and Part Time Timetables.

At the beginning of the term, we shared guidance regarding suspensions and exclusions to support you in your role as Designated Teacher. We believe it would be helpful to revisit this information – see below.

We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the importance of notifying the Virtual School as soon as possible when a decision is made to suspend or exclude a child or young person who is looked after. This also applies to any decisions involving a move to a part-time timetable.

Best practice recommends taking proactive steps to prevent such situations wherever possible and ensuring consistent communication with all members of the child or young person's support network, including the Virtual School.

If you are unsure or would benefit from a conversation, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Last academic year saw an increase in the number of suspensions for children who are looked after and whilst we acknowledge that these are for a multitude of reasons, we would like to take the opportunity to remind Designated Teachers of the key principles around any decision to suspend or exclude a child from your setting. Exclusion (whether a fixed term suspension or a permanent exclusion) should only be used when all other strategies have been exhausted. For looked after children, this threshold needs to be high due to their increased vulnerability and the potential impact on their education and wellbeing. Schools must work proactively with carers, social workers and the Virtual School to identify and address the underlying causes of behaviour. Before deciding to suspend or exclude, headteachers must consider the following:

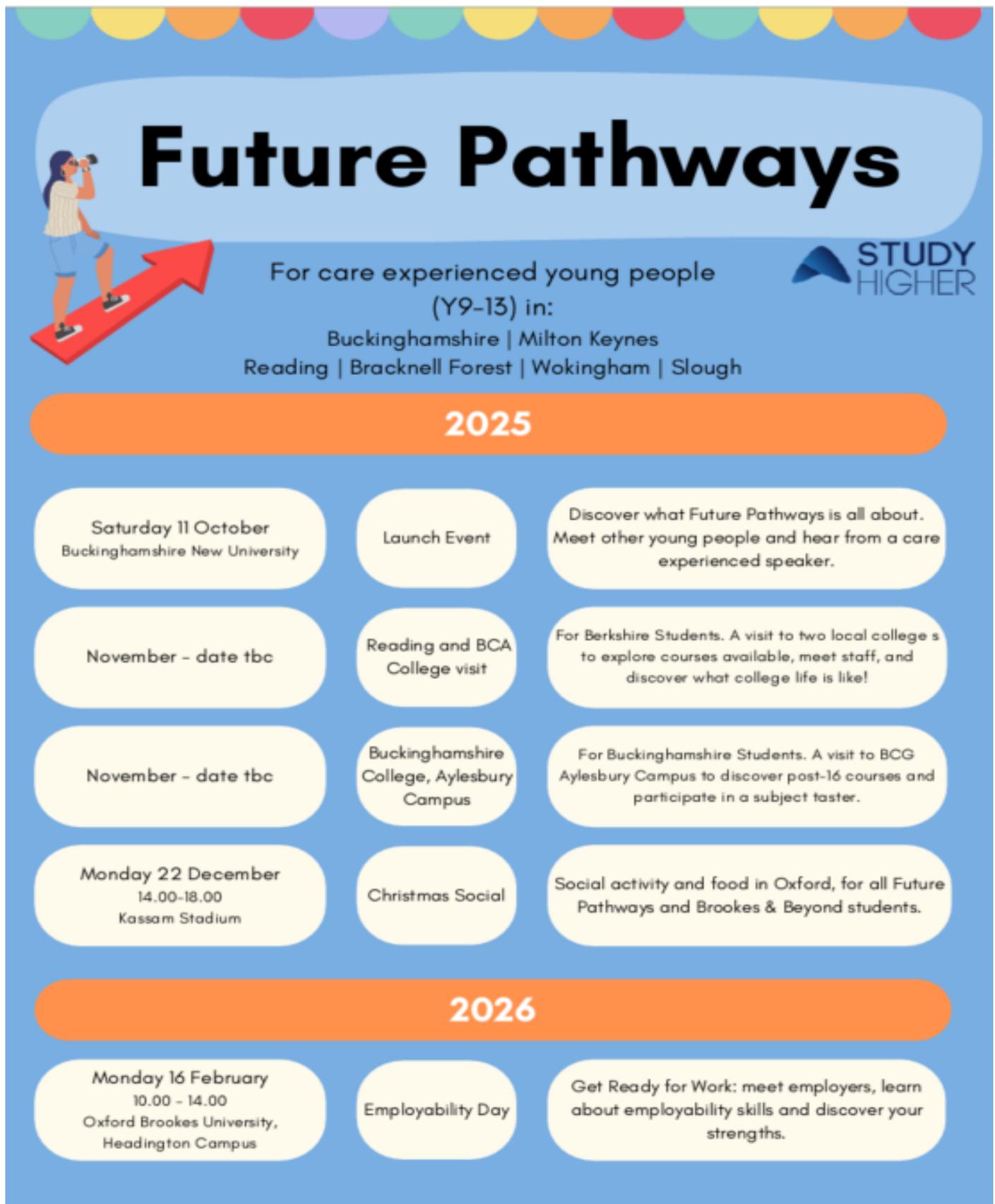
- The child's care status and history
- Any unmet special educational needs or disabilities
- The impact of trauma or attachment difficulties
- Whether the suspension or exclusion is proportionate and fair

Should a suspension or permanent exclusion be decided for a looked after child, the Virtual School Head must be informed without delay.

Designated Teachers may wish to make themselves familiar with the guidance which details the legal responsibilities for those who suspend and exclude children from educational settings - Suspension and permanent exclusion guidance

Study Higher

Study Higher is an organisation of universities in our region that support care experienced young people to investigate future pathways including employment, apprenticeships and university. Our looked after children aged year 9 to 13 can join at any time in the year and take part in events that will get them thinking. Please have a look at the information below and share with our young people. If any young people are interested please contact their Virtual School Officer to make a referral.



The graphic features a blue background with a decorative border of colorful circles at the top. On the left, an illustration shows a young woman with long dark hair, wearing a light-colored shirt and shorts, standing on a large red arrow pointing upwards and to the right. She is holding binoculars to her eyes. The main title 'Future Pathways' is written in a large, bold, black font. Below the title, text specifies the target audience and locations. The 'STUDY HIGHER' logo is in the top right corner. The events are organized into two sections: 2025 and 2026, each with a header in a rounded orange bar. Each event is presented in a three-column format within rounded white boxes.

Future Pathways

For care experienced young people (Y9-13) in:
Buckinghamshire | Milton Keynes
Reading | Bracknell Forest | Wokingham | Slough

STUDY HIGHER

2025

Saturday 11 October Buckinghamshire New University	Launch Event	Discover what Future Pathways is all about. Meet other young people and hear from a care experienced speaker.
November - date tbc	Reading and BCA College visit	For Berkshire Students. A visit to two local colleges to explore courses available, meet staff, and discover what college life is like!
November - date tbc	Buckinghamshire College, Aylesbury Campus	For Buckinghamshire Students. A visit to BCG Aylesbury Campus to discover post-16 courses and participate in a subject taster.
Monday 22 December 14.00-18.00 Kassam Stadium	Christmas Social	Social activity and food in Oxford, for all Future Pathways and Brookes & Beyond students.

2026

Monday 16 February 10.00 - 14.00 Oxford Brookes University, Headington Campus	Employability Day	Get Ready for Work: meet employers, learn about employability skills and discover your strengths.
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2026

w/c 30 March (date TBC)

Employer visit

A visit to an employer - details TBC

w/c 25 May

10.00 -16.00

University of the West of England,
Frenchay Campus

University visit

A visit to a large campus based university located near
Bristol

Saturday 13 June

11.00 - 14.00

University of Reading, London Road
Campus

Summer
Celebration!

An end of year celebration to recognise your
achievements.

Friday 26 - Sunday 28 June

Oxford Brookes University,
Headington Campus

Summer School

A chance for selected students to participate in a
weekend residential. Experiencing subject tasters, social
activities and staying in student halls.



Ask your Virtual School Officer for referral information

FREE

Attendance, food, and transport is free. We will organise individual transport for on-campus events, and coach transport for the day trips, with a central pick up point.

To sign up for this programme of events, please ask your Virtual School Officer for referral information

Please note that dates/times are subject to change. Once your young person is registered, you will be sent emails with the most up to date information prior to each trip.

Post-16 applications

The second half of the winter term usually marks the start of the post-16 application process. Lots of education providers hold their open days, and applications often need to be submitted in January. The good thing about post-16 applications is that young people can make as many as they like and then make their decision over the results period in the summer – ‘keep your options open’ and ‘always have a back-up Plan B’ are key messages to share with year 11s. Open days, prospectuses and application forms can all be found on the education providers websites, but if anyone has any questions talk to the Virtual School – jennifer.appleby@milton-keynes.gov.uk

Welfare Call Data Collection

Autumn Term Teacher Assessments – Data Collection Notification

An introductory email from Welfare Call will be sent to schools on **Wednesday, 26th November 2025**, to advise of the upcoming data collection for Autumn term teacher assessments. The formal data collection request will be issued on **Wednesday, 3rd December 2025**.

This approach enables us to gather data at a consistent point in time, allowing for a comprehensive review of the full Virtual School cohort. We kindly ask all schools to respond to the request in a timely manner.

Below is the schedule for the termly data collection periods:

- **Autumn Term** – 3rd December 2025
- **Spring Term** – 25th March 2026
- **Summer Term** – 1st July 2026

We understand that some data may not be fully available at the start of each collection window. Therefore, each collection period will remain open for one month from the commencement date to allow sufficient time for submissions.

The final submission deadline for each term will be confirmed in the introductory email to ensure clarity. Once the collection period concludes, all data will be collated and returned to us for analysis.

PEPs

Autumn Term PEP Deadline is **Friday 28th November**. Please work with your child /young person’s Virtual School Officer and networks to ensure meetings are scheduled before this date.

For those PEPs you have already undertaken you will see we have been working with you in line with our changes to the quality assurance process for PEP documents which is intended to speed up the process of returning PEPs to settings.

For all Core PEP documents, the allocated Virtual School Officer will submit these for quality assurance review and finalisation 15 working days after the PEP meeting has taken place. This change should afford a faster turnaround of both the plan but also any requested and approved Pupil Premium Plus funding. In order to ensure that the plan is graded 'Green' and funding is distributed, please ensure that Part 2 and all expected documents are attached before this 15 working day period passes.

Upon receipt of the PEP following the QA process please take time to review the QA section and note any identified actions and feedback.

We will continue to work with schools to support the setting of good quality, SMART targets and urge careful reviews of targets prior to submission. If you require any support regarding target setting, please speak to the child/young person's Virtual School Officer.

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 \(milton-keynes.gov.uk\)](https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/training-and-support). 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 or Jenny Cooledge – Jenny.Cooledge@milton-keynes.gov.uk – for further information if this would be of interest to you.

DT Forum

We held our first Designated Teacher Forum of the 2025/26 academic year on Thursday, 23rd October. Thank you to everyone who joined us despite the cold, wet and dark start to the day. A special thank you to Oakgrove for hosting us so warmly and ensuring we were well looked after.

It was a positive and engaging session, with updates shared around support for Previously Looked After Children. We explored ways to strengthen the voice of our children and young people, both within their Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and more broadly across school life.

The group also took part in a Solutions Circle, where an anonymous case was presented by one of our members. Feedback on this activity was very encouraging, and we discussed incorporating it into future forums to foster peer support and generate practical next steps for schools.

Please keep an eye out for further developments and potential sessions focused on Solution Circles.

The next DT Forum is scheduled for Thursday 5th February 2026 15.30 - 17.00, Stantonbury School have kindly agreed to host this session. We will send out invitations nearer the time but please do save the date, it would be lovely to see as many of you as possible.

Kinship Care

Do you know if any of your children are living with kinship carers?

Kinship Care is a type of caregiving arrangement where a child is looked after by relatives or close family friends. Kinship carers are family or friends who step up, often during an unexpected crisis, to care for a child when their parents aren't able to. This may be because their parent has died, is unwell, has gone to prison, is experiencing problems with drugs and alcohol, or is neglectful or abusive.

Kinship Care is also known as Connected Persons Care, which is the idea of keeping children within their family when they cannot be cared for by birth parents. This includes Kinship Foster Care, Special Guardianship Orders, Child Arrangement Orders, and informal care arrangements.

Research shows that children in kinship care generally show better academic and overall outcomes than those in foster care, but worse outcomes than the general population.

Data from a recent survey, helps to highlight the challenges faced by our kinship families:

- 69% are grandparents – down from 86% 2 years ago. Numbers of aunts, uncles and older siblings are increasing.
- 24% of carers are finding it difficult to cope financially.
- 11% are skipping meals.
- 7% are using food banks.
- 20% have given up their own bed to provide a bed for their child.
- Only 13% have seen their Kinship Local Offer.

Do you know how to support your Kinship carers?

Kinship.org is a helpful website to signpost your kinship carers to. They are the leading kinship care charity in England and Wales. They are made up by and for, a community of Kinship carers.



1. Signpost the kinship families you support to MKCC's Kinship offer found here: [Kinship Care Information Pack August 25.pdf](#)
2. Kinship.org offer free workshops, events and peer support groups covering a range of topics relevant to kinship carers, available online or in person. Encourage the kinship families you support to access and sign up for support here: [Free training and events for kinship carers | Kinship](#)
[Find your nearest peer support group | Kinship](#)
3. Signpost the kinship families you support to a local group that meets weekly at Morrisons in Westcroft, every Thursday 9.30-11am. Email the chairperson here: patsyalicemccarthy@googlemail.com or signpost them to their Facebook page Family and Friends Kinship carers.

Sometimes schools are a kinship carers' only support mechanism, so please make attempts to get to know who these families are, signpost them to the local offer, local groups and to the national Kinship.org organisation.