



# Virtual School News

News and key info  
for Designated Teachers

MKCC Virtual School

As we begin a new academic year, we want to extend a warm welcome back to all of our Designated Teachers. Your unwavering commitment to supporting our children and young people, and the professionals working alongside you, continues to make a profound difference in their educational journeys. This year, we look forward to deepening our collaboration, sharing best practice and ensuring every child receives the support they need to thrive. The Virtual School is here to champion your efforts, provide guidance, and celebrate the every day 'wins'. The team are looking forward to working with you to make this year another one of growth, connection and success.

## Milton Keynes Virtual School Information to Support You

We understand that whilst your role as a Designated Teacher is underpinned by statutory guidance - [Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children - GOV.UK](#) – all virtual schools have slightly different processes and procedures when it comes to PEP meetings, allocation of Pupil Premium Grant funding and support available to settings. All of our looked after children have an allocated Virtual School Officer who is available to offer advice and guidance on processes, please do reach out to them directly. Additional information can be found in our updated Designated Teacher Handbook and on our website.

## 'New to Role of Designated Teacher' Training

A big welcome to all of our colleagues who are joining us as 'new' Designated Teachers. This role is a really important one, working to advocate for some of the most vulnerable children and young people in your settings. The needs of our children and young people may necessitate you working across teams in your own school such as safeguarding, SEND, pastoral and EAL, and will certainly involve working with professional networks including Milton Keynes Children's Social Care, foster carers and residential homes, children's families, medical professionals and advocates. You have wide ranging responsibilities in terms of policies, reporting and utilising grant funding.

The Milton Keynes Virtual School are running a training session for all settings supporting Milton Keynes children and young people who are looked after regardless of whether the setting is based in Milton Keynes or elsewhere. This will be held on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> September at 4-5pm via Teams. To book a place, please complete this MS Forms link - <https://forms.office.com/e/dkJTrhBJJe>. This training is suitable for anyone who is new to the role of Designated Teacher or wants to refresh their knowledge.

## New Term Check-in



As we begin the new term, it may be helpful to take a moment to check in—both with yourself and with the children and young people you support. Establishing a strong foundation is essential, and this includes ensuring that the right structures, relationships, and supports are in place. Taking time to reflect and reconnect can help all of us build positively and purposefully as the term progresses.

### Start of Term Check-in Checklist

#### For Yourself:

- Do I feel prepared and supported for the term ahead?
- Are there clear priorities and goals for my role this term?
- Have I identified any professional development needs or opportunities? Could I benefit from any of the free training provided by the Virtual School?

#### For the children and young people you support:

- Have I checked-in with each child/young person individually?
- Have I checked-in with parents/carers/social workers to see if anything significant has changed over the summer break?
- Am I confident that I have a clear understanding of their current needs and circumstances?
- Are the necessary supports and interventions to support success in education in place from the start of term?
- Have I reviewed their attendance, engagement and progress data from last year and planned when I will review this in the coming term?
- Are their targets and plans up to date and meaningful? Have they been shared with appropriate staff members?
- Do I have all of their required meetings scheduled for the Autumn term?

## Environment and Relationships:

- How am I ensuring that positive relationships are being built or re-established?
- Is the learning environment welcoming, safe and inclusive?
- Have routines and expectations been shared clearly and are they understood?
- Do **all** staff know enough to support? Think about a child/young person's physical journey into school – who will they meet, what will they see/here, how will they feel?

## Collaboration:

- Have I connected with key colleagues and professionals involved in each child's support?
- Is there a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities?
- Is communication open and effective?

## Recommended Resources for the New Term

The Milton Keynes SEND team have a wide variety of resources available on their Local Offer webpage and we would like to signpost you to the following documents which may be useful when considering the support you provide to our children and young people.

The ordinarily available provision resource - [Ordinarily Available Provision - School Age | Milton Keynes City Council](#) – has been written to provide a supportive reference point when planning reasonable adjustments as well as targeted support.

The Milton Keynes EBSA Guidance also provides useful guidance for schools, parents and other professionals when supporting children and young people who experience emotionally based school avoidance - [Emotionally Based School Avoidance \(EBSA\) | Milton Keynes City Council](#).

Additionally, we would like to highlight a valuable resource, 100 things To Do Before You Grow Up. This fun and practical guide is packed with activities and ideas for children to enjoy, from simple everyday adventures to creative challenges. It's a great tool for carers, teachers and families to use together, helping to spark curiosity, build memories, and encourage new experiences. This document, along with the Designated Teacher Handbook has been added as an attachment to this newsletter email.

## Alternative Provision

As a Designated Teacher, your input and advocacy for our children and young people when they require accommodations to their mainstream education plans is crucial. The Milton Keynes Virtual School are always keen to explore all options for our children to ensure that they are receiving the best experience and provision for their individual needs, sometimes this includes the use of alternative provision. Full guidance on the use of alternative provision can be found here - [Arranging Alternative Provision - guide for LAs and schools](#). This guidance includes specific considerations for looked after children, recognising their unique vulnerabilities and the statutory responsibilities of local authorities and the child's Virtual School Head. Looked after children are a priority group who require additional oversight and tailored support whilst accessing alternative provision.

Whilst each individual child's package will be discussed as part of their Personal Education Plan ahead of commissioning, Designated Teachers should be aware that alternative provision:

- Meets the child's educational and emotional needs as outlined on their plan
- Supports stability and continuity
- Is safe, legal and registered (if required)
- Delivers high quality provision tailored to individual needs
- Is monitored and reviewed regularly
- Is aware of the plan for reintegration or transition (reintegration should be a priority of all plans)

If you have any questions about the use of alternative provision to support our children and young people, please don't hesitate to get in touch with their allocated Virtual School Officer to discuss.

## Suspensions and Exclusions

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](#).

## Attendance Monitoring

Attendance for children who are looked after by Milton Keynes City Council will continue to be collected by Welfare Call this academic year. The preferred collection process for this information is by data extraction via Wonde. If one of our children is new to your setting this year, we will provide further information about how to share this information and would appreciate this being shared with the appropriate colleagues in your attendance and IT teams. This attendance data is monitored by the Virtual School and shared with social care colleagues to ensure that any patterns can be recognised and acted on swiftly, in between termly PEP meetings, if needed. If you are already sharing data with Welfare Call via Wonde, no further action is required.

For your awareness, Milton Keynes City Council also utilises Studybugs to collect the attendance for all children across the city. This is to fulfil the LA's responsibilities as laid out in [Working together to improve school attendance \(applies from 19 August 2024\)](#) and the Virtual School's specific responsibility to promote the importance of attendance of children with a social worker.

*"The data confirmed ... if a child attends every day for the first week of the school term that is a strong indicator that they will go on to attend school regularly throughout the term. For example, children who had an unauthorised absence on any day during the first week of term had an average term-level unauthorised absence rate of 25% compared to an unauthorised absence rate of 2% for pupils who didn't miss any sessions in the first week."*

Children's Commissioner, Sept 2022

## PEPs

Following reflection on the quality of PEPs at the end of the academic year 24/25, we would like to draw attention of our Designated Teachers to the following Virtual School expectations to continue to support the production of high-quality plans:

- Academic information from the most current reporting cycle must be provided at each PEP meeting. This should cover the child's full curriculum. We understand that reports may be a term out of date depending on the timing of the PEP meeting, but we ask that they are uploaded nonetheless to Core PEPs support discussion. The only exception to this expectation is for Core PEPs taking place following phase transfer in the autumn term or following a school move. For Core PEPs, it is also expected that Part 2 of the PEP should contain a comprehensive update from the child's school regarding the progress of the child from their teaching staff – it is not appropriate to only report on the child's progress in English and Maths where they are undertaking learning in a wider curriculum. You may find the MKCC Virtual School Round Robin template useful for collecting the full picture of academic progress.
- For Core PEPs, Part 2 as well as all attachments should be completed/uploaded ahead of the PEP meeting to allow for review by the Virtual School Officer. This supports high-quality discussion in the PEP meeting.
- Where a child has an EHCP, the Virtual School ask that this document is uploaded as an attachment at each Core PEP. Whilst the EHCP may not have been updated between PEPs, it remains a key document underpinning their education provision and this inclusion in the PEP documents that it is regularly referred to.
- Designated Teachers should complete an SDQ (where appropriate) at each core PEP meeting. The SDQ form will be delegated by the Virtual School Officer and Designated Teachers should look out

for this when they log into the Milton Keynes Professional Portal. Guidance is available within the Designated Teacher Handbook.

- Pupil voice should be a consideration at every PEP meeting and an invite should be extended to all children to attend their PEP meetings. Pupil voice can be collected in a variety of ways and the Virtual School recognise the need for flexibility – resources to support you can be found attached to this email and on our website.

We would also like to take the opportunity to flag a change 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.

## **PLAC and Children with Kinship Care Arrangements**

A reminder that Designated Teachers also have responsibilities towards children who are Previously Looked After (PLAC). These are children who were in care but have since left due to adoption, having a special guardianship order (SGO) or a child arrangements order. PEPs are not statutory for PLAC however many of the core responsibilities are the same as those for children looked after and include:

- Promoting their educational achievement by advocating for this cohort and ensuring their needs are reflected in school policies and practices.
- Raising awareness and ensuring appropriate staff training to ensure that staff understand the barriers that PLAC might face. This is also likely to include promoting the need for trauma-informed approaches and inclusive practices.
- Working with colleagues and parents/carers to ensure that Pupil Premium Plus funding is used effectively to secure academic progress.
- Recognise the importance of the voice of the child and ensure PLAC have opportunities to express their views with regards to education.
- Support smooth transitions and prioritise school admissions where appropriate.

Whilst this role is more focussed on working with families and carers rather than social workers, the Virtual School remain available for advice and guidance.

The Virtual School now also have a duty to promote the attainment of children with formal kinship care arrangements and ask that Designated Teachers collaborate with the Virtual School to access advice and support if needed.

## **Training Opportunities**

A reminder that there are 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.

## Dates for Your Diary

### Designated Teacher Forum

Based on feedback from last academic year, our Designated Teacher Forums will be held termly and will be held in person. Further information about content will follow but we hope you will consider attending as the sessions are always a fabulous CPD and networking opportunity with professionals who are in the same role.

**Autumn Term** - Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2025 — 0800- 09.30

**Spring Term** - Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026 — 15.30 17.00

**Summer Term** - Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2026 - 0800- 09.30

If you would like to see any topics covered during the Forums or would be interested in hosting the event at your setting, please do get in touch – [Jenny.Cooledge@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:Jenny.Cooledge@milton-keynes.gov.uk).

### PEP Deadlines

In line with our updated quality assurance processes, deadlines for termly PEP meetings to have taken place are outlined below:

**Autumn Term** – Friday 28<sup>th</sup> November

**Spring Term** – Friday 6<sup>th</sup> March

**Summer Term** - Monday 29<sup>th</sup> June

Please continue to liaise with your allocated Virtual School Officers if this causes any concern.