



**ESSEX VIRTUAL SCHOOL**

Corporate Parenting Panel Guide to Virtual School

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*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”*

**Nelson Mandela**

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**Introduction and Welcome**

Welcome to Essex Virtual School. We very much hope you will find this Guide helpful and informative.

This Guide aims to clarify the ways in which the Virtual School works, the range of support we provide and the challenge we bring to raise expectations, aspirations and improve the educational outcomes of our children and young people.

Integral to success is the partnership we have with carers, schools, and social care. Designated Teachers for children in care - a statutory role in every school, play a key role in supporting our children and young people in schools and colleges.

The Virtual School sits within ‘Essex Specialist Education Services’ and is therefore ideally placed to be able to work with social workers, carers, and the many teams and services who all contribute in different ways to ensuring that children enjoy and achieve in their education and beyond.

Essex Virtual School are fully committed to being ‘educational advocates’ for our children and young people. We aim to deliver this not only with determination and energy, but also with care and compassion.

***Our mission is to place our children and young people at the very heart of everything we do. Championing their interests, celebrating their successes, and constantly striving to ensure that all those working around them share the highest aspirations for their achievements. We want our children and young people to feel happy, safe, and secure in settings where they receive an outstanding educational experience that enable them to grow into confident, resilient citizens***

John Edgar

**Headteacher Essex Virtual School**

**Meet the Team**

The Inclusion Team provides support, guidance, and challenge around all aspects of children’s engagement – this includes attendance (collected daily), transition, exclusion, Part Time Timetables, Alternative Provision, etc.

The education advisers in the Virtual School work strategically with all schools with Essex Children in Care on roll to facilitate students’ attainment and progress.  They will also work on a casework basis with teams working with children in care, where there are concerns regarding meeting a student’s educational needs, offering advice guidance, training, and support.

Both teams work closely together and provide elements of the VS Training Offer to schools, carers, and social workers.

**Christina Addenbrooke – Lead for PLAC and children with a Social Worker**

Christina began her career as an English teacher in Islington. She also taught Humanities, with a specialism in History, and led school improvement programmes as Head of PSHE and Citizenship. She retrained as a social worker in Essex in 2017 and was a Senior Practitioner in the West Essex Assessment and Intervention team until joining the Virtual School team in January 2022.

As Lead for Previously Looked After Children and Children with a Social Worker, Christina’s role is to work in partnership with education, social care, and other services to improve the educational outcomes and aspirations for children known to social care and children previously in care.

**John Edgar**  - **Headteacher Essex Virtual School**

John qualified as a secondary history teacher in 1985 and went on to teach in Gloucestershire, Kent, and Essex. As a senior leader he was also the Associate Tutor for History NQT induction in Essex, provided advisory support to schools in category, and served as an Ofsted Inspector, qualifying as a Lead Inspector.

More recently John has worked in Local Authority settings as an advisor, Education Safeguarding Lead, Head of Educational Welfare Services (Inclusion), and as a Headteacher Virtual School.

Currently he is the Safeguarding Trustee for a Multi Academy Trust, and a National History Mark Assessor for the Historical Association.

*John’s contact details- email:* [*john.edgar@essex.gov.uk*](mailto:john.edgar@essex.gov.uk) *Tel: 07751 921432*

**Leanora Engers – Lead Education Advisor (SENDCO)**

Leanora joined the Virtual School as an Education Advisor in January 2022 and is currently leading our team of education advisors.  Leanora is a qualified social worker and teacher.  She has over eighteen years’ experience as a teacher and has held several leadership positions in both mainstream and specialist schools, specialising in teaching students with social, emotional, and mental health needs.  She is also the Virtual School’s qualified SENDCo.

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**Sharon Halsey – PEP and Virtual School Operational Lead**

As the PEP and Virtual School Operational Lead Sharon connects the Virtual Schools strategic priorities to operational outcomes and is a member of its Governing Body.

Sharon’s work supports the Virtual School’s key priority, to ensure that every child in care has a high-quality Personal Education Plan (PEP). She works with Designated Teachers to ensure that each learner’s PEP is ‘an evolving record of what needs to happen for looked-after children to enable them to make at least expected progress and fulfil their potential’.

Sharon coordinates Pupil Premium Plus funding so that PEPs ‘reflect the importance of a personalised approach to learning that meets the child’s identified educational needs, raises aspirations and builds life chances.’

Sharon works closely with the Virtual School Advisor and Inclusion Teams, Designated Teachers, and Social Workers to ensure a consistent approach to PEPs. In addition, she coordinates all PP+ payments, budgets, training opportunities and works closely with the Virtual School Headteacher to support the school’s improvement plan.

Sharon has a particular interest in several highly successful projects supported by the Virtual School.

**David Mirzai – Acting Lead Inclusion Officer**

David joined the Virtual School in September 2020 having worked for Essex Youth Services for over 4 and a half years supporting a wide range of young people across the County. David works with Schools and Education settings to ensure that Looked After Children are supported throughout their education journey’.

**What is the Virtual School?**

Virtual Schools for children exist throughout the country to improve the educational outcomes of children and young people:

* In the care of the Local Authority.
* Previously in the care of a local authority and resident in Essex.
* Who have, or have had, a social worker.

A ‘Virtual School’ is a way of:

* Bringing together the educational information about children and young people who are cared for by the local authority as if they were a single school – no matter where in the country they may be placed.
* Providing advice and guidance to schools and parents/carers of children previously looked after by any authority who attend Essex schools.
* providing a strategic lead for improving educational outcomes for children with a social worker.

Virtual Schools provide leadership to the local authority around the education of care experienced children providing support and challenge to schools, tracking their progress and attendance, and ensuring that they receive the help they need to achieve as well as possible.

The Virtual School also provides strategic leadership for the attendance, attainment, and progress of the cohort of children who have been assessed as being in need under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and currently have a social worker and those who have previously had a social worker.

Children placed in Essex but looked after by another local authority remain that authority’s Virtual School - although the Essex Virtual School will support colleagues with local information and signposting.

You can find details of the Essex Virtual School on our website. [Essex Virtual School - Essex Virtual School home page](https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/Essex_Virtual_School/Pages/default.aspx)

**Each Virtual School has a Headteacher** - a statutory post within every local authority – who can support and challenge across departments, schools, and other agencies so that children and young people in the care are prioritised within all education services, in line with our shared corporate parent duty.

The Headteacher’s statutory duty is to:

* Act as the lead responsible officer for ensuring that arrangements are in place to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of children in care, including those placed out-of-authority.
* Be responsible for discharging the *local authority’s duty to promote the educational achievement* of its children in care, wherever they live or are educated.
* Be responsible for *discharging the local authority’s duty to provide suitable advice and information for the purpose of promoting the educational achievement of previously looked-after children*. They can also undertake ***any activity*** *they consider appropriate where that activity will promote the educational achievement of such children in their area.*
* Ensure that the *educational attainment and progress of children looked after by the local authority are monitored and evaluated* as if those children attend a single school.
* Be the *strategic lead* for promoting the education of children with a social worker. (Definedas: *children who have been assessed as being in need under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and currently have a social worker and those who have previously had a social worker, 0 up to 18 in all education settings.)*
* *Ensures effective systems* are in place to:

1. Maintain an up-to-date roll of children in care who are in school or college settings
2. Gather information about their education placement, attendance, and educational progress, ensuring sufficient information about a *child’s mental health, SEN or disability* is available to their education setting so that appropriate support can be provided.
3. Inform head teachers and designated teachers in schools if they have a child on roll who is cared for by Essex.

* Ensure *social workers, designated teachers and schools, carers and IROs understand their role and responsibilities* in initiating, developing, reviewing, and updating the child’s PEP and how they help meet the needs identified in that PEP.
* Ensure all children and young people in care, wherever they are placed, have an up-to-date, *effective, and high-quality PEP* that focus’ on educational outcomes.
* *Intervene to avoid drift or delay in providing suitable educational provision*, including special educational provision, and unplanned termination of educational arrangements through proactive, multi-agency co-operation. Where this requires negotiation with other authorities this should be completed in a timely manner and with the best interest of the child as paramount. They will use their *powers of direction in a timely way* rather than delay issuing a direction as a result of protracted negotiation.
* Ensure the educational achievement of children looked after by the authority is seen as a *priority by everyone* who has responsibilities for promoting their welfare and report regularly on the attainment, progress, and school attendance of looked-after children through the authority’s corporate parenting structures.

The Headteacher Virtual School must consider how to apply *the seven principles* set out below to their role for children in care*. In particular, how to work with social workers and others in the local authority to ensure principles 5) and 6) are central to the authority’s ethos, and work:*

1. To act in the *best interest and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing* of children and young people.
2. To encourage children and young people to *express their views, wishes and feelings.*
3. To *take into account the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people.* To promote a culture that takes account of the child’s views *according to age and understanding*, identifying and meeting their educational needs; and help others, especially IROs, social workers, carers and schools to understand the importance of listening to and taking account of the child’s wishes and feelings *about education* and the PEP process, and how the Headteacher Virtual School can help facilitate that process.
4. To help children and young people *gain access to*, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
5. To promote *high aspirations* and seek to *secure the best outcomes* for children and young people.
6. For children and young people to be *safe, and for stability* in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
7. To *prepare* those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

**Which children and young people are part of the Virtual School?**

The Virtual School’s statutory responsibilities extend to every looked after child, whatever their age. All children and young people in the care of the local authority have a personal education plan, reviewed on a termly basis.

“Let us pick up our books and our pens. They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world.”

**― Malala Yousafzai**

Essex VS works very closely with early years providers as well as those teams and services with responsibility for the transition of children into the foundation stage.

All children and young people of statutory school age are supported by Essex Virtual School.

Those above statutory school age (ie. above Year 11) remain part of the Virtual School as a Post-16 student. This is in line with government requirements that all young people in England must continue in education or employment with training until the age of 18, and/or the end of Year 13.

Post-16 students will require a PEP meeting still on a termly basis through Year 12 and Year 13. The PEP/Pathway Plan is required for all young people either in education, employment, or training, as well as for those who are NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training).

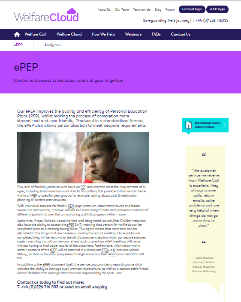
Some pupils may decide to continue to study after further education and move onto Higher Education, such as university.

Care Leavers (who are eligible) are offered additional support by the Virtual School and by universities themselves. This can include advice, financial support, reduced fees, year-round accommodation, and mentoring.

**What is the role of the Virtual School?**

**To:**

* Work across the ‘whole system’ for children to raise aspirations and improve educational outcomes of care experienced children and young people.
* Build capacity through specialist professional development for Designated Teachers, school governors, social workers, carers, and a range of partner agencies.
* Provide advice, information, and guidance on all aspects of the education of looked after, previously looked, and children with a social worker.
* Act as a ‘link’ between different services.
* Help secure suitable education provision for looked after children, particularly those who experience the greatest difficulty in accessing and engaging with education and those who need a personalised approach or the support of specialist services.
* Promote and foster a culture that takes account of the child’s views according to age and understanding, identifying, and meeting their educational needs.
* Link with carers to provide the information, advice and training needed to assist them to support the education of the children and young people in their care.
* Work with Designated Teachers and social workers to ensure that each child has a current and high-quality Personal Education Plan (PEP) which meets their individual needs.

**Personal Education Plans (PEPs)**

These provide an evolving record of what needs to happen for children and young people to enable them to make at least expected progress and fulfil their potential.

It should be a ‘living’, evolving, comprehensive and enduring record of the child’s experience, progress, and achievement (academic and otherwise), and inform any discussion about education during statutory reviews of the child’s wider care plan. As such it is a legal document that forms an integral part of the care plan.

The PEP should reflect the importance of a personalised approach to learning that meets identified educational needs, raises aspirations, and builds life chances.

The school, other professionals and carers should use the PEP to ensure:

* The **views of the young person** are at the heart of the PEP process, helping to shape the plan, do, and review cycle.
* The **views of carers and social worker** are considered.
* That everyone has **High Expectations for educational achievement**.
* That an **appropriate curriculum** is provided to meet individual need.
* Support and guidance, SMART targets and funding are directed **precisely** to **overcome barriers to learning**.
* All issues impacting on progress: attendance, prior learning, Emotional wellbeing, behaviour, and attainment & progress are considered. **Statutory Guidance 2018**

**The PEP Meeting**

*Personal Education Plan meetings to review PEPs are held* ***‘each school term’****, at least three times a year. ‘This is to ensure that the story of the child’s educational progress is current and continues to meet the child’s educational needs.’.* ***Statutory Guidance 2018***

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**Why are Personal Education Plans (PEPs) so important?**

The PEP is a ‘living document’ which captures the child’s journey through learning and ‘responds’ to their changing needs by:

* Enabling children and young people to have a strong voice around their education, and for their social worker, carer, Designated Teacher, and other professionals to jointly plan how best their needs can be met to secure good progress and outcomes.
* Identifying how Pupil Premium Plus and other funding will be used to support the targets set, and measure how any interventions put in place have made a difference to the child’s learning and achievement.
* Providing a snapshot that enables the Virtual School to track educational attainment, progress, and engagement with learning for every looked-after child. Every PEP and review are quality assured by the Virtual School.
* Allowing the Virtual School to monitor the impact of interventions put in place by the school/college and the use of the Pupil Premium Plus, making sure that children and young people in care receive the help and support they need to enjoy and achieve in their learning.
* Supporting transitions – for example supporting young people to move into sustainable post 16 education, employment and training opportunities which meet their needs.

**What is Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)?**

Children in care are one of the groups of pupils that attract PP+ funding. This is additional funding provided to help improve their attainment and close the attainment gap between them and their peers. Essex Virtual School does not currently receive this grant for young people beyond Year 11

PP+ is not a personal budget for individual children, The Headteacher Virtual School has considerable flexibility in the use of PP+ funding to maximise its impact for individuals as well as the whole cohort. The Virtual School has a published PP+ policy which is updated annually. This sets out local arrangements in place at the current time and may be viewed on the Essex Virtual School website.

The Pupil Premium Plus provides an opportunity to address the learning needs of children in care through the provision of **additional** interventions and learning resources tailored to the individual child’s need.

It is **not** intended to replace services, support, or resources that the Local Authority, schools, Early Years providers, carers or other agencies working with children in care already provide, **or** that is provided to all children in the area as universal services as part of the education offer.

Pupil Premium Plus funding is allocated on a termly basis through completion of the PEP and should reflect the child’s learning needs and targets, as recorded on their PEP.

**Who are the Designated Teachers for children in care and Previously Looked After Children?**

Designated Teachers (DTs) are the central point of contact within the school for carers, social workers and all the teams and services who form the support network around care experienced children.

The DT is a statutory role in every school – they have lead responsibility for the development and implementation of care experienced children’s and lead the PEP process in partnership with social workers, carers, and other key professionals.

Whilst DTs have a key role in linking with a wide range of professionals and services, DFE statutory guidance also highlights that the most effective DTs have a crucial leadership role in promoting the educational achievement of every looked after and previously looked-after child on the school’s roll.

Headteachers and Governors should ensure that ‘the DT has appropriate seniority, skills and the professional experience to provide leadership, training, information, challenge and advice to others that will influence decisions about the teaching and learning needs of care experienced children.’ ***Statutory Guidance 2018***

**How does the Virtual School support Designated Teachers?**

* By providing specialist training and ongoing professional development that supports their statutory role.
* By supporting DTs in their leadership role to improve educational outcomes of this group of children and young people, promoting a whole school culture where their academic, learning and emotional needs are prioritised.
* By working with school governors to support them in their specific role around care experienced children, in line with DFE statutory guidance.
* By advocating for, supporting, and challenging around the progress and outcomes of care experienced children.
* By promoting, sharing, and facilitating good practice and resources to support the DTs role.
* By providing specific feedback following termly quality assurance of PEPs so that we work as partners in improving the quality of personal education planning around each child.
* By providing direct support where needed around school admissions, attendance, and inclusion. Supporting access to post 16 education and providing specialist advice in relation to separated migrant children.
* By providing information, advice and guidance to support the education of children previously looked after. Supporting access to key services including those in other local authorities including Virtual Schools.

**What is the role of the carer?**

The Virtual School recognises the vital role that carers play in making sure that children and young people attend school regularly, make progress in their education and enjoy their learning.

Carers support children and young people’s education by:

* Raising the profile of education within the home, talking and extending ideas.
* Practical day to day support e.g., helping the child/young person to organise and prioritise their time, supporting homework tasks.
* Ensuring that the home environment is conducive to learning, monitoring screen time, focusing on plenty of sleep and exercise.
* Developing good relationships with schools and colleges where children and young people are on roll.
* Supporting school events.
* Talking to the child/young person about their ambitions and career aspirations.
* Role modelling - family members sharing their experiences of education and career choices.
* Ensuring the child/young person has quality leisure time away from the classroom – e.g. encouraging time in the outdoors, exploring, playing games, being with nature, learning other important skills from these experiences as well as relaxation.
* Supporting with developing friendships, having playdates, encouraging creativity.
* Encouraging a growth mindset, extending ideas, thoughts, and broadening horizons.

**How does the Virtual School support carers?**

* By developing an annual programme of training based on feedback from carers around their needs and how they can make a difference
* By contributing to training for carers provided by other services.
* Through attending carer groups and meetings at different points through the year.
* By sharing and developing resources.
* By supporting carers and social workers with school applications particularly where a child has additional needs, or where several agencies are involved.
* Through attendance at key meetings where needed, to advocate for the child/young person. (Please note that it is not possible for the Virtual School to attend every PEP/CLA review, however please contact the VSS for further help and support).
* Through the Virtual School Operations Team as a first point of contact (Please see structure chart) for queries around any aspect of children’s education and learning.
* By seeking carer views and feedback, ensuring this informs the ongoing development and improvement of the services and support we (and other services) offer.

**What is the role of the social worker?**

Social workers have a key role to play in promoting high aspirations and working with others to secure the best educational outcomes for each care experienced child and young person.

Together with the Virtual School and other services, they are crucial in supporting children and young people to have the stability they need in their home lives and education so that they can feel safe, secure, and begin to thrive. Stability and continuity in education is important at all stages, but particularly so at Key Stage 4.

Working with the Virtual School team and other local authority staff, where appropriate, social workers have responsibility for ensuring timely provision of a suitable education placement that is best suited to a child’s needs.

Social workers also have statutory responsibilities in relation to children and young people’s Personal Education Plans or PEPs – since this is the education part of the care plan.

The quality of the PEP is the joint responsibility of the local authority and the school. Social workers, carers, Virtual Schools, designated teachers and as appropriate, other relevant professionals work closely together to secure this.

**How does the Virtual School support social workers?**

* The Virtual School Operations Lead acts as a first point of contact for social workers for all education related queries. Either the Inclusion team or Advisor Team will then provide advice and signposting.
* The Virtual School maintains regular dialogue with Essex Quadrant SEND and Education as well as YOS, Education Access, and others such as the EP Service, to ensure that there is joint work around barriers to attendance, progress, and attainment.
* The Virtual School provides an annual programme of training for social workers to support them with the education related statutory elements of their role and ensure that there is high aspiration around care experienced children.
* VS website provides guidance on the roles and responsibilities of social workers around PEPs, admissions, SEND, Post 16, attainment and progress measures, transition, and other aspects of education.
* Where it is not possible to maintain the child/ young person’s existing education placement, the Virtual School will support the social worker to identify a new placement which will best support their needs. Social workers need to proactively consult with the Virtual School team so that education and care placements can be planned at the same time, and advice provided to avoid choosing a school that is unlikely to meet the child’s needs.

**Securing appropriate education**

The admission requirements for children are set out in the School Admissions Code. This Code applies to maintained schools and academies, including free schools. It does not apply to Special Schools or Post 16 settings.

Children are admitted to schools through the admissions code. Some schools organise their own admissions process, others use their Local Authority Admissions department. Details of admissions process must be included on schools’ websites.

The Statutory Guidance places a clear expectation that our children **are placed in schools with a ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ Ofsted rating.**

Admissions authorities must give **the highest priority** in their oversubscription criteria to our children, as defined in the School Admission Code.

* Schools **cannot refuse to admit** on the basis of challenging behaviour or refer a child in care for action under the Fair Access Protocol on the basis of challenging behaviour.
* Children in care can be admitted **as ‘excepted pupils’ in relation to the infant class size limit**, if they are admitted outside the normal admission round.
* Schools and Admissions Authorities **must** notify their decision in writing within 15 school days.
* Virtual School does not accept **drift and delay** in the admissions process and will ‘direct’ schools if necessary. The Headteacher Virtual School will **use powers of direction in a timely way** rather than delay issuing a direction as a result of protracted negotiation.

**Admission of children with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP)**

Where a child has an EHCP, it is the Local Authority SEND team (the LA ***where the child resides***) who are responsible for finding a suitable school and reviewing the Plan. This means that if a LAC with an EHCP is placed out of county, it is the SEND department in that county who are responsible for placing a young person. In some complex cases Essex SEND team retain ownership of an EHCP.

**The admissions process**

A child’s social worker is responsible for applying for a school place. They should consult with the Virtual School, carer, young person/child, and the appropriate SEND team where the child has an EHCP.

* The timeframe for organising a suitable new education placement is 20 school days.
* Social workers (working with the Virtual School and other local authority staff, where appropriate) are to seek a school or other education setting that is best suited to the child’s needs.
* Educational provision is a full-time place in a school judged by Ofsted to be ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’.
* Unless there are exceptional *evidence-based reasons*, looked-after children should *never* be placed in a school judged by Ofsted to be ‘inadequate’.
* When consideration is given to schools judged ‘Requiring Improvement’, the Virtual School and social worker should have *evidence* that *the school is providing high quality support to its vulnerable pupils and will enable a looked-after child to make maximum progress* before placing them in that school. (The threshold is therefore based *entirely and explicitly* upon the quality of the school’s provision. Evidence should be from independent sources who have a duty to judge school effectiveness, Ofsted/Local Authority.). The Headteacher Virtual School is responsible for deciding whether a school meets this threshold. In circumstances where a ‘less than good’ school is being considered an Education Adviser from the VS will assess the evidence in order to support the Virtual School Head’s decision making.
* The child’s wishes and feelings should be taken into account, and the suitability of the education setting tested by arranging an informal visit with the child where possible.
* Whilst an education setting is being arranged the social worker should contact the Virtual School Inclusion team so that suitable temporary education arrangements can be made.

**Placing separated migrant children**

Separated migrant children are entitled to the same local authority support as any other child in our care.

Some of these children may never have had access to education before or their education has been interrupted. Appropriate education may include a period in a setting where their educational needs can be assessed and integrated into the PEP.

They may need time to be prepared for and then become used to formal education, and their initial educational outcomes may include cultural orientation and life skills appropriate to their age.

Social Workers, Virtual School Heads, Independent Reviewing Officers, school admission officers and Special Educational Needs departments work together to ensure that appropriate education provision for the child is arranged **at the same time as a placement.**

**Virtual School will provide guidance regarding the most appropriate settings.** This includes seeking out the best EAL and or ESOL provision in the area.

Virtual school has excellent links with colleges and schools who are best placed to meet the needs of separated migrant children and will support admissions including into specific provision commissioned by the Virtual School.

**Attendance**

It is particularly important that our children and young people attend school regularly and are punctual. Many have missed some schooling prior to being placed in care, and the Virtual School and Designated Teachers work together to provide additional support to address this.

An attendance rate above 95% is generally considered good; this allows for children to miss 9.5 days across the school year.

Persistent absence (PA) is defined as an attendance rate of 90% or below. The Virtual School monitors children and young people’s attendance closely (EYFS & Post 16 weekly, Statutory School Age daily), and will challenge schools where attendance is below 95%.

Sometimes children and young people must move school or placement. For most making a prompt start at school is very important. This enables carers to set routines and good habits from the outset.

However, in some cases it may be appropriate for a longer transition period. This should always be carefully planned with the social worker, Virtual School, and School, so that disruption to learning is minimised. These decisions by their nature are made on a case-by-case basis.

Head teachers can’t grant any authorised absence during term-time, unless in **exceptional circumstances**. Those circumstances are up to the head, but essentially,

* **Only** the Headteacher has the legal authority to give permission.
* For children in care not on a school roll the Headteacher Virtual School can give permission.
* It is illegal for children and young people to be withdrawn from school without the Headteacher’s permission.
* Carers should consult with social care prior to seeking permission from the school’s Headteacher.

**Behaviour, Exclusion, Part Time Timetables and Alternative Provision**

The past experiences of looked after and previously looked after children can have an impact on their behaviour in school. It is important to remember this when considering how best to support the child or young person with their learning and the design and application of school’s behaviour policies.

Care experienced children and young people are more likely to experience the challenge of social, emotional, and mental health issues than their peers. For example, they may struggle with executive functioning skills, forming trusting relationships, social skills, managing strong feelings (e.g. shame, sadness, anxiety and anger), sensory processing difficulties, foetal alcohol syndrome and coping with transitions and change. This can impact on their behaviour and education.

We know that exposure to childhood trauma impacts on working memory performance and attentional processes. These are key elements that underpin learning and impact on the ability to engage in the classroom.

We also know that some children with unresolved trauma and/or unmet attachment needs may show behaviours in school that include disengagement, self-harm, depression risk-taking and oppositional behaviour. They may also struggle with focussing on and taking pleasure in learning.

Designated teachers have a role in ensuring school staff understand the emotional, psychological, and social effects of loss and separation (attachment awareness) from birth families and that some children may find it difficult to build relationships of trust with adults because of their experiences, and how this might affect behaviour.

The DT should ensure that school’s adjust policy and practice to meet the specific needs of care experienced children. Part Time Timetables and Alternative Provision should always be planned with carers and social workers as part of the PEP and be aimed at meeting specific need. These plans must be recorded in the PEP and reviewed every half term.

The DT and Headteacher should always ensure the school fulfil its statutory duty to consult with the Virtual School at the earliest opportunity *where there is a concern about a child’s behaviour* so that the Virtual School can help the school develop the most effective ways of improving behaviour and thus avoiding exclusion.

Headteachers have a statutory duty ‘as far as possible, to avoid permanently excluding any pupil with an EHC plan or a looked after child’ and cooperate proactively with the virtual school’. Designated Teachers should ensure that schools consult with the Virtual School prior to using Fixed Term or Permanent Exclusion.

The Virtual School monitors Fixed Term Exclusions (FTE) closely and will intervene with schools to seek alternatives. Permanent Exclusion (PEX) is very rare and Virtual School works hard to ensure children in care are not the subject of PEX.

**Supporting Post 16 and transitions from care**

Those above statutory school age (ie. above Year 11) remain part of the Virtual School as a Post-16 student. This is in line with government requirements that all young people in England must continue in education or employment with training until the age of 18, and/or the end of Year 13.

Post-16 students require a PEP meeting still on a termly basis through Year 12 and Year 13. The PEP/Pathway Plan is required for all young people either in education, employment, or training, as well as for those who are NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training).

The Virtual School and social workers should work with care leaving teams to ensure the education of those transitioning from care is supported at both a strategic and individual level.

The Virtual School does not receive PP+ funding for Post 16 students but will provide advice and guidance on the best use of the Post 16 Bursary.

The Virtual School works with Personal Advisers, Targeted Youth Advisors, and other professionals to help them understand young people’s educational goals and support needs.

**Children and Young People in Custody**

If a young person in care is remanded in custody, they remain in the care of the Local Authority. All children remanded to youth detention accommodation become cared for by the Local Authority.

The Virtual School:

* Has procedures in place to know where young people are placed and how long they are likely to be held.
* Knows where a child is placed in secure accommodation for their own welfare, liaises directly with the secure unit to ensure that they meet their statutory responsibilities to promote the educational achievement of the child.
* Works with Secure Children’s Home (SCH), Secure Training Centre (STC) or Youth Offending Institute (YOI), in partnership with the Youth Offending Team (YOT) supervising officer.
* Ensures access to education and training is consistent with statutory entitlements.
* Ensures a PEP is in place to monitor and record educational progress and is shared with STC/ SCH or YOI.
* Facilitates access to education while the young person is detained and ensure that the learning needs of the individual are being met.
* Works with Secure Children’s Home (SCH), Secure Training Centre (STC) or Youth Offending Institute (YOI), to ensure that an assessment of the s educational needs is undertaken and ensure the PEP is revised as part of the new care/pathway plan prior to release.
* Works with social care and the Youth Offending Service to plan for suitable educational or training placement following release from custody.

**Virtual School Training and Projects**

The Virtual School commissions a variety of training programmes to support Designated Teachers and staff in schools, Foster Carers, and Social Workers. All training is funded by The Virtual School and is thus free of charge. The current offer can be found on the VS website.

**Our Training Offer includes:**

* Attachment Aware Training delivered by the EP Service.
* PEP/role of DT.
* DT Network.
* DT training.
* TPP Foster carers.
* Education Matters – Foster Carers
* Bespoke training for individual schools and MATs.

**CSS Training project**

Essex Virtual School are working with CSS (Children's Support Service) to offer funded training opportunities.

Schools that are out of county can still make an application however, the training may only be able to be offered virtually.

CSS Training offered includes:

• Mental Health

* Positive Behaviour Management
* Attachment Theory into Practice
* Effective Communication
* Identify and responding to behaviour
* Coaching Pupils
* Stress Analysis
* Co-regulation Self-Regulation

Virtual School also provides guidance documents for social workers and Foster Carers:

**Annual Conference for Headteachers and Designated Teachers**

Virtual School organises an annual conference. This year the focus is upon mental health and wellbeing and will include guest speakers, workshops, and presentations by schools and young people.

**Foster Carer Training**

**MADE Training - KS4 (Year 10 – 11)**

*this workshop provides guidance upon:*

Monitoring the effectiveness of their child's/young person’s revision.

How to provide support in a non-confrontational manner.

How to use verbal and coaching tools to raise motivation and commitment.

How to condense techniques to transform information.

How to create effective revision and review schedules.

**Make Happen – Education routes Post-16**

*This session focusses on the different routes open to young people when they finish secondary education. This includes, college, sixth form, apprenticeships, T Levels and beyond, including higher education.*

*It provides guidance around the cost of going to university and what support is available to students who are in care or have experience of being in care if they choose to study at university.*

**VS Foster Carer Training**

Includes:

* Role of the Essex Virtual School
* Attendance
* Admissions
* Exclusion
* Special Educational Needs
* Attainment
* Personal Education Plans
* Early Years Provision
* Regular carer drop in.

**Virtual School Projects for our children include:**

1. **Laptops for all students** – We have ensured all our children and young people have a laptop or equivalent device to access online learning.
2. **Additional Funding**-

Covid recovery funding- £150 (to be claimed on the Spring PEP)

10 hours tuition (to be claimed in the summer term)

Spring book offer- every looked after child can claim £25 to purchase books of their choice. Schools to claim the £25 on spring PEP, target page- wording-**VS spring book offer £25.** Schools to purchase the books.

Post 16- a £20 book voucher will be sent directly- applied via social worker

1. **Maths Whizz-KS1 and KS2**

Essex Virtual School are pleased to be working in partnership with Whizz Education.

Maths-Whizz, is an award-winning virtual online tutor, proven to build confidence and accelerate progress in maths. It supports children’s learning with engaging, interactive maths lessons tailored to their unique learning needs and provides scaffolded support to ensure understanding.

The tutor will also work to fill any knowledge gaps by replaying exercises and refreshing knowledge. The continuous assessment ensures that children are presented with the right topics at the right time and enables you to easily monitor progress.

Children can access Maths-Whizz both at home and at school on any device that has an internet connection.

From Spring 2022 all KS1 and KS2 Essex looked after children can request to have an online Maths Whizz account. See link for more information

[https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/Essex\_Virtual\_School/Pages/Interventions.aspx](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fschools.essex.gov.uk%2Fpupils%2FEssex_Virtual_School%2FPages%2FInterventions.aspx&data=04%7C01%7C%7C19946e89150647a7a12e08d9c5eff8c3%7Ca8b4324f155c4215a0f17ed8cc9a992f%7C0%7C0%7C637758456855928718%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=rx4TVzZrx6K5WQPiR6m%2FFC5%2FluIWBBxkF8raJXN5lhk%3D&reserved=0)

1. **Reading Plus KS2-4**

Essex Virtual School are pleased to be working in partnership with Reading Solutions UK. Reading Plus is the only online reading programme which develops silent reading fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and motivation.

Reading Plus can be used in school and at home for pupils in KS2, KS3 and KS4. It begins with an adaptive assessment that provides the data-driven starting point for the personalised instruction and practice pupils need to become independent readers.

Adaptive instruction is complemented by easily accessible resources that enable teachers to meet the needs of every pupil.

1. **Music services**

Essex Virtual School and Essex Music service are working together to offer free 15-minute music lessons and a variety of music workshops to all Essex care experienced children attending Essex schools.

Music workshops- Our music workshops are open to applications from schools that have care experienced children and children with a social worker or have had a social worker.

1. **Author Workshops -working in partnership with an array of authors**

Following the success of the workshops with Michael Rosen, we will be holding further sessions with an array of authors throughout 2022 to support Essex year of reading. Cliff McNish, Lucy Strange, Clare Luther and Michael Rosen.

1. **Mental health and well-being workshops with Ignition Arts**

We all know the effects this year has had on our young people’s mental health, in response to this Essex Virtual School are delighted to be working in partnership with Ignition Arts, offering Essex schools with children in care on roll to apply for Ignition Arts to provide their mental health and well-being programme ‘Me Myself and I’.

Ignition Arts Theatre Company are offering a selection of powerful workshops in which students can develop awareness of their own mental health and that of others.

The workshops can range from one, three and 6 sessions. These sessions are now fully booked for the spring term however, we are taking bookings for the summer term, if you would like to be placed on the waiting list please complete and return the attached.

1. **Britannica**-

Essex Virtual School has invested in resources from Britannica Digital Learning to help support the challenges that many young people face when online.

The service is free for all Essex care experienced children and children with a social worker, carers and teachers.

For more information on Britannica , visit [https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/Essex\_Virtual\_School/Pages/Britannica.aspx](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fschools.essex.gov.uk%2Fpupils%2FEssex_Virtual_School%2FPages%2FBritannica.aspx&data=04%7C01%7C%7C19946e89150647a7a12e08d9c5eff8c3%7Ca8b4324f155c4215a0f17ed8cc9a992f%7C0%7C0%7C637758456855968701%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=400EplEgQdUL9m1vFgCIa7s04sNw6s4D4kJpyOXfXQg%3D&reserved=0)

1. **Dollywood Foundation**

Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library is a book gifting programme devoted to inspiring a love of reading in the hearts of children everywhere. Each month, enrolled children from birth to age five, receive a high quality, age-appropriate book in the post, free of charge. We work with local partners – our affiliates – to register children and contribute to the costs.

We are investigating the best way of getting these resources to our children

1. **Letterbox Reading Scheme**

A Pilot scheme has run for this project for our youngest children and will be extended later in the year.

1. **SPEC Holiday program – Sports and Wellbeing project**

Essex Virtual School are delighted to be working in partnership with Spec Training.

Spec training are offering 2 sports programs to support children with their fitness and wellbeing during the schools holidays. Young people will experience a variety of activites in both programs.

Schools that have care experienced children and children with a social worker can apply for one of these fully funded programs. As the sessions are fully funded, availability is limited.

Option 1) Multi-sports Holiday program

This is aimed at children aged 6-11 years old (Primary School). However, a tailored program can be put together for 12- 16-year-olds (secondary schools).

This program provides a diverse multi-sport that most have not experienced before, here is a sample of activities this program will provide:

**What is the Essex Virtual School’s approach?**

We work in partnership with schools, carers, social workers and a wide range of other stakeholders and professionals to: -

* Student Voice
* Adopt an evidence-based approach to supporting the progress and attainment of Children in Care. The Advisory Teams reviews data about students’ individual progress, schools’ educational provision and evidence from experts to underpin their work with students, professionals and schools. This includes but is not limited to; the Educational Endowment Fund, The What Works Centre for Childrens Social Care,’ Ofsted, Department for Education and the Rees Centre (University of Oxford) amongst others. This informs the strategic reviews completed by advisers with schools.
* Remove barriers and inequalities in educational outcomes for our care experienced children and young people, and children with a social worker.
* Champion the education of children and young people, raise expectations and aspirations for each child and young person, and what they can achieve.
* Ensure each child and young person has access to the best possible education which meets their individual needs and receives the help and support they need to be a successful learner.
* Prioritise schools judged by OFSTED to be ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ for children who need a new school, in line with DFE statutory guidance https://www.gov.uk/government/ publications/promoting-the-education of-looked-after children.
* Where children are already attending schools judged to be less than ‘good,’ advisors work intensively with those schools to monitor the progress, attainment and quality of educational provision. They provide training, advice, guidance and challenge as appropriate.
* Provide specialist training, advice and guidance for Designated Teachers, social workers, carers, and other stakeholders so that they have the skills and knowledge to deliver and support the highest quality education, interventions and support for each child and young person.
* Ensure there is effective communication and joint working between professionals around the education of children in care.
* Assist by linking up with their counterparts in other local authorities. The VS is a member of the Eastern Region network of Virtual School Heads and the National Association of Virtual School, Heads (NAVSH) to facilitate contact with professionals in other parts of the country. Members of the Senior Leadership team of the Virtual School meet on a termly basis with their counterparts in the Eastern region to facilitate joint working.
* Provide advice, guidance and information to parents, carers, and professionals to raise achievement of children previously looked after (PLAC) and subsequently adopted, subject to Special Guardianships (SGO) or Child Arrangement Orders.

**How do you contact Essex VS?**

* Through the Virtual School website – this has dedicated areas providing information for schools and colleges, parents and carers, young people, social workers as well as other professionals.
* The team section on our website includes contact information and key areas of responsibility. Please contact the Headteacher who will direct you to the appropriate team within the Virtual School.
* Through directing a query to the VS Inbox –where it will be received by a member of our team and directed to the right team member for reply.
* There is regular contact for Designated Teachers with the VS team via the termly Network Meetings that support them with their role.
* Through the termly PEP (Personal Education Plan) meetings held for each child/ young person. Although the VS team do not routinely attend every PEP meeting, this can be requested where support is needed.
* Children and young people can get in touch with the VS via their social worker, through the children in care council or Virtual School Council.