



**ESSEX VIRTUAL SCHOOL**

Guide for Foster Carers

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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 brochure for professionals 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***

We look forward to working with you.

John Edgar

**Headteacher Essex Virtual School**

**Meet the Team**

**Essex Virtual School**

**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 a school improvement programme 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.

*Christina’s contact details:* *Christina.Addenbrooke@essex.gov.uk**, 03330 320999*

**Clare Davis- Lead Inclusion Officer**

Clare leads the Virtual School inclusion team. They work in partnership with schools and colleges across the Local Authority to improve attendance, reduce exclusion, facilitate transition arrangements related to school moves, and improve engagement with learning.

Clare is also responsible for the management of the Children Missing Education list, provision for separated migrant children, and providing support and guidance regarding school admissions.

The Inclusion Team also organise a variety of projects for young people, carers, and Designated Teachers, including E safety, exam preparation, literacy workshops, and training for Carers.

*Clare’s contact details- email:* *clare.davis4@essex.gov.uk* *Tel: 033301 31092*

**John Edgar**  - **Headteacher**

John qualified as a history teacher in 1985 teaching in schools 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 the Education Safeguarding Lead, Head of Educational Welfare Services (Inclusion), and as a Headteacher Virtual School.

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

*John’s contact details- email:* *john.edgar@essex.gov.uk* *Tel: 07751 921432*

**Leanora Engers – Advisor (SENDCO)**

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

*Leanora’s contact details: email:* *Leanora.Engels@essex.gov.uk* *Tel: 07740180340*

**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.

*Sharon’s contact details – email* *sharon.halsey@essex.gov.uk* *Tel: 033303 21200*

**France Howarth - Advisor**

Frances has been a Secondary Adviser for the Virtual school for the last four and a half years.

Frances is a highly experienced education professional. She was Headteacher of an 11-18 mixed secondary school in Essex for 17 years, having served as a Deputy Headteacher in Essex for 6 years.

*Frances’s contact details:* *Frances.Howarth@essex.gov.uk*

**Susan Kelly – Advisor**

Susan began her teaching career in 2000, moving on to be the Headteacher of a PRU in Havering from 2006-2010. From 2006-2010 Susan was additionally recruited by the DfE to support leadership in alternative provision across London. From 2010-2015 Susan was the Headteacher for Looked After Children in Tower Hamlets. Susan is an Ofsted Inspector

*Susan’s contact details:* *susan.kelly@essex.gov.uk*

**Jane Mills – Advisor**

Jane Mills​ is an established and experienced Deputy Head Teacher/Adviser in Essex. She works with school leaders in Primary Schools, providing support and advice.  She aims to accelerate the academic progress and achievement of children in care and to enhance the impact of school leadership in the primary sector.

*Jane’s contact details:* *Jane.Mills@essex.gov.uk*

**David Mirzai – 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’.

*David’s contact details:* *David.Mirzai@essex.gov.uk* *Tel: 077409 01706*

**Hedda Wright – Inclusion Officer**

Hedda is one of the longest serving members of the Virtual School. Hedda is a highly experienced in providing advice, guidance, and challenge in regard to inclusion. In addition Hedda organises training for carers to equip them to provide support for children and young people.

*Hedda’s contact details:* *Hedda.Wright@essex.gov.uk*

**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.

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 looked after by the LA are prioritised within all education services, in line with our shared corporate parent duty.

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)

**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)** 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, 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?**

Personal Education Plans or PEPs are an integral part of each child’s Care Plan and as such, part of a statutory document.

* The PEP is a ‘living document’ which captures the child’s journey through learning and ‘responds’ to their changing needs.
* It enables a child in care 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.
* It identifies how Pupil Premium Plus and other funding will be used to support the targets set, and how any interventions put in place will make a difference to the child’s learning and achievement.
* It provides a snapshot that enables the Virtual School to track educational attainment, progress, and engagement with learning for every looked-after child. Each PEP and review is quality assured by the Virtual School.
* This allows 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.
* It supports 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+)?**

Key information:

PP+ is not a personal budget for individual children and Essex Virtual School does not currently receive this grant for young people beyond Year 11.

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.

Spending should provide **additional** interventions, resources, activities, or support to that which is received from other services. In particular, PP+ funding allocated through schools should **not** be used to replace:

* The support set out in an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC) or those attached to a school-based plan for additional special educational needs.
* Interventions that have no additional cost and where the Early Years setting, or school’s own funding covers the cost
* Resources that a Local Authority provides for through its allowances to foster carers or children’s home fees. Carers have an allocation for clothing, uniform, out of school activities and residential or trips abroad within reason.
* Trips and visits organised by the school as part of the curriculum. If these are part of the curriculum or specifically related to exam coursework, schools can only request a donation. It is expected that Social Care or carer should provide resources for these activities.
* Basic equipment that the child or young person needs to participate or for lessons including school uniform, school lunches, or equipment for physical education lessons this would also include access to a computer and the internet for completion of homework or private study.
* Alternative education for children in care subject to fixed term or permanent exclusion.
* Before or after school childcare clubs.

In addition, it should not be used to fund transport to or from education settings.

* 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.
* For Essex looked after children, 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.

**How do schools claim PP+?**

The school or Early Years provider will identify the child’s learning objectives in the PEP. The objectives and spending plan will be assessed by the Virtual School and the funding will be sent out. On occasions there is a moderation process to clarify or reassess the plan if necessary.

Payments will be released by the Virtual School and processed by the Finance hub of ECC. Payments from the virtual school will be referenced ‘PP+ CiC (term Year, payment run)

Schools can request additional funding by submitting **Exceptional Pupil Premium Plus Grant Request form**.

**What is the role of 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 looked after children’s PEP (Personal Education Plan) 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.

The Headteacher and Governing Body will want to ensure that ‘the DT has the professional experience to provide leadership, training, information, challenge and advice to others that will influence decisions about the teaching and learning needs of looked-after and previously looked-after 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 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 that looks after the child and the school. Social workers, carers, Virtual School teams designated teachers and, as appropriate, other relevant professionals will therefore need to 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 our 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.

Our children are admitted to schools in the same way as other children of statutory school age, 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** a child on the basis of challenging behaviour or refer a looked after child for action under the Fair Access Protocol on the basis of challenging behaviour.
* Our children 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.
* We do 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 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. 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.

**Who makes an Admission request?**

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 Headteacher Virtual School is responsible for discharging the *local authority’s duty to promote the educational achievement* of its children in care, wherever they live or are educated.

* 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) 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.
* The child’s wishes and feelings are taken into account, and the suitability of the education setting tested by arranging an informal visit with the child where possible.

**Social workers should be guided by the following principles when making an application:**

* Always minimise disruption to young people’s/children’s education.
* Educational provision means a full-time place in schools judged by Ofsted to be ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’.
* 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.
* Seek support from the Virtual School their views should be given appropriate weight during the placement planning process.
* **KS4 students should not be moved schools after term 1 of their Year 10.** In exceptional circumstances where it is necessary to move a KS4 student, the Virtual School Inclusion Team will work with social workers to plan transition.
* Contact the Virtual School Inclusion team immediately so that suitable education arrangements can be made whilst full time education is being arranged.

**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.

If EAL is a particular barrier to learning, **students of statutory school age should be placed in a school** with experience of providing specific EAL.

**Only Post 16 students should be placed in a Post 16 setting** as these do not have the appropriate safeguarding arrangements for statutory school age students. A Post 16 setting for Year 11 students in term 3 of Year 11 may be considered, but social workers **must** consult with the Virtual School prior to making any such arrangement.

Virtual school has excellent links with colleges and schools who are best placed to meet the needs of young people 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 and will challenge schools where attendance is below 95%.

The following types of absence may be marked as authorised:

* **Leave of absence authorised by the headteacher**(such as time off due to [bereavement](https://www.theschoolrun.com/how-help-your-child-cope-bereavement)).
* **Illness:** you must notify your child’s school on the morning of their first day of absence. If your child has coronavirus, you MUST keep them at home from at least 10 days from the day after they developed symptoms or had a positive test.
* **Medical or dental appointments**, although you should try to arrange these outside school hours if possible.
* **Religious observance.**
* **Offsite educational activities:** this could include music, dance or drama exams, or participation in a sporting event. Approval is at the school’s discretion.

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.

Since September 2013, legislation concerning term-time holidays has changed.

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

**Key points:**

* **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, this can result in fines and/or prosecution.
* 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 should take lead responsibility for 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 the child’s 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 they can help the school decide how to support the child to improve their behaviour and avoid 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’.

Therefore, Designated Teachers should ensure that schools consult with the Virtual School prior to using Fixed Term or Permanent Exclusion.

**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.

**Virtual School Training and Projects**

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

Training includes:

* Attachment Aware Training delivered by the EP Service.
* PEP/role of DT.
* TPP Foster carers.
* Education Matters – Foster Carers

**CSS Training project**

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

Many training opportunities for Essex schools that have Essex looked after children, previously looked after children and children with a social worker attending.

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

Training offered includes the following:

• 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 provides guidance documents for social workers and Foster Carers:

**Foster Carer Training**

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

*You can expect to learn the following from attending this workshop:*

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

2. Support their child/young person in a non-confrontational manner

3. Use verbal and coaching tools to raise their child's/young person’s motivation and commitment

4. Use condensing techniques to transform information

5. Create effective revision and review schedules

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

*This session will focus on the different routes your child/young person can take when they finish secondary education. This includes, college, sixth form, apprenticeships, T Levels and beyond, including higher education. We will touch on 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. You will be equipped with information that will help you support your child/young person in making an informed decision regarding their futures.*

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

1. Laptops for all students
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.  Your child/ren will be able to 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**

Reading Solutions UK is the home of Reading Plus, 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. All Essex Looked after and Previously looked after children attending Essex schools.

Music workshops- Our music workshops are open to applications from schools that have LAC, PLAC 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-dates/details to follow

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 that have looked after children attending their setting 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. All of 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 looked after children, Previously looked after children, 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**

Pilot scheme run for this project for our youngest children.

1. **Learn how to Vehicle wrap- years 10,11 and 12**

25 of our young people completed the level 1 and level 2 Wrapping course in 2021, the feedback from the young people has been very positive and they have continued to commit to the Saturday sessions.

The sessions for the spring term are fully booked however, we are holding a number of taster sessions in the summer term that will run over a 3 week period. It is a chance for young people to come along and see what the level 1 course will include and then sign up for the full course for the Autumn term.

For more details visit- [https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/Essex\_Virtual\_School/Reports\_Publications/Pages/Opportunites-and-Activates.aspx](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fschools.essex.gov.uk%2Fpupils%2FEssex_Virtual_School%2FReports_Publications%2FPages%2FOpportunites-and-Activates.aspx&data=04%7C01%7C%7C19946e89150647a7a12e08d9c5eff8c3%7Ca8b4324f155c4215a0f17ed8cc9a992f%7C0%7C0%7C637758456855978690%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=zveRqmRI%2B4lkLoGyXqoRaxXaexbPTD2v3tf1RQTBWPA%3D&reserved=0)

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 looked after children, previously looked after 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:-

* 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
* 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) and therefore well placed to facilitate contact with professionals in other parts of the country.
* 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.
* 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 or through the children in care council or Virtual School Council.