



Mount McKinley
Shrewsbury Business Park
Anchorage Avenue
Shrewsbury
SY2 6FG
01743 250124
virtualschool@shropshire.gov.uk

Date: 5.01.21

Our ref: Virtual School COVID-19

Dear Foster Carers/Parents & Social Care Colleagues

COVID-19 and looked after children

Firstly, Happy New Year, we hope you had a restful break

The Virtual School is a statutory function of each local authority to ensure that looked after children receive the education they need. I am writing to you as the Head of Shropshire's Virtual School.

As a Virtual School we very much appreciate schools are working exceptionally hard in unprecedented circumstances to try to find solutions to the latest Government announcements in relation to education and opening of schools.

Following the government announcement late on 4.01.21 please find guidance that has been published. [NationalLockdownGuidance.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#). Some information is provided about schools, colleges and childcare providers on page 15 to 17 which states:

National guidance -

Going to school, college and university Colleges, primary (reception onwards) and secondary schools will remain open for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. All other children will learn remotely until February half term. In the circumstances, we do not think it is possible for all exams in the summer to go ahead as planned. We will accordingly be working with Ofqual to consult rapidly to put in place alternative arrangements that will allow students to progress fairly.

We have checked out with regional colleagues and the guidance states that Early Years provision will remain open to all children. Schools including reception will therefore be open for **vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. The Government is very specific that looked after children are 'vulnerable children' and must be offered on-site education.**

We anticipate further guidance to be published from the DfE in due course.

Firstly, I wanted to reiterate to you all that the Virtual School Team (VST) is here to support you all during this challenging time, in any way we can.

The Government is clear that schools should be providing on-site education for vulnerable children, therefore as corporate parents we are expecting our Looked After Children to attend. This is currently mandatory guidance and differs from the last 'lockdown'.

However, in some circumstances and on a case-by-case basis in discussion with carers, parents, social care, school and the Virtual School the decision for home education will be agreed if the risk is deemed too high. Safeguarding remains the key priority within the context of access and support for home learning, wellbeing and placement stability. We understand the impact and anxiety that this lockdown is having on all sections of our community and are working with all who support our children.

There will be only 2 criteria for agreement from Shropshire Council as a corporate parent for home education:

- Risk due to the child or someone in their household having a letter advising they need to be shielded;
- Risk due to the child having a positive COVID test, or COVID symptoms or needing to self-isolate due to being in contact with someone with COVID.

All other reasons must be discussed between the carer, parent, school and social worker before alternative arrangements are made, and the Virtual School, representing Shropshire Council as corporate parents, must have assurance that the child educational needs will be met if they are not in an education setting.

We have an overview of all Looked After Children through consultation with Virtual School and Social Care colleagues which also includes reviewing progress and attendance

Schools are to continue to provide educational resources which will support the learning of young people at home, if they need to self-isolate. Social workers and the Virtual School Team (VST) will continue to be in contact with schools directly to ensure timely updates are received. We also request that Supervising Social Workers inform the Virtual School directly if they are aware of any changes. The VST will always work closely with all stakeholders to ensure that we all have a true picture of the current situation for all our Looked After Children to ensure an early intervention is available.

It is paramount that other vulnerable children and the children of key workers, on whom we depend through this crisis, are given the security and support that the school can offer in this ever-changing and challenging times.

Updates

The Virtual School Team have been liaising closely with Designated Teachers in terms of updates, and in some cases daily updates to the Virtual School Head (VSH) for more complex cases.

Regular updates and reviewing of all Looked After Children are completed with the VSH and relevant Social Care Team Managers. We thank you all for this close working relationship, these updates feed into the bigger picture ensuring that our Looked After Children are safe, well and accessing learning in whatever form that currently is. We request that any questions, advice or concerns are continued to be raised through close liaison with the VST- virtualschool@shropshire.gov.uk

PEPS

In accordance with the latest government guidance, the Virtual School expects that the Spring Term PEPs to be completed virtually, via Microsoft Teams in the same way as in the Autumn term. It is paramount that all Looked After Children are tracked termly as this information is fed into the wider Looked After Children Care Plan and reviewed by Education, Social Care and Independent Reviewing Officers.

Targets and general education, including SEMH and SEND, will be discussed via the 'Virtual ePEP'. PEPs will continue to be completed by the Designated Teacher and social worker dates for most PEPS will have been set for the spring Term. The Virtual School Specialist Teacher / Education Welfare officer will continue to apply the Quality Assurance process in relation to PEP completion. **Completed PEPs are uploaded at the end of every term but can be accessed by the allocated Social worker at any time required**

As always, colleagues can telephone or email the Virtual School Team or Virtual School Headteacher for further advice and support if required.

Attendance

The Virtual School requests that schools continue to record and submit attendance for our Looked After Children. This can be accessed via ePEP. We continue to analyse attendance reports and follow up any discrepancies to collectively ensure our children are safe.

Looked after children Self isolating

Schools are required to inform the Virtual School **on the first day of a Looked after children self-isolating** due to either (i) showing signs/ symptoms of COV-19 or (ii) members of their household showing signs/ symptoms. We request that parents/ carers also inform the virtual school via our mailbox virtualschool@telford.gov.uk

This will enable us to continue to track these pupils and liaise with the relevant professionals.

Previously Looked After Children

*The latest DFE guidance issued 3.04.2020 COVID-19 guidance for LEAs on Children's social care draws attention to the following: **Are adopted children entitled to attend education?***

Places in educational settings are reserved for children of critical workers and vulnerable children. Vulnerable children include children who are supported by social care, and those with safeguarding and welfare needs. Full guidance on eligibility can be found in [maintaining](#)

[education provision](#). Leaders of educational settings and local authorities know who their most vulnerable children are and will have the flexibility to offer a place to those on the edges of receiving children's social care support. This could include adopted children or children subject to special guardianship orders or wider kinship placements. For some of these children, attending education would best meet their needs and may stop a placement breakdown. Local authorities and education settings should therefore sympathetically consider requests from adoptive parents and special guardians. These should be assessed on a case by case basis, considering the additional needs of many of these children and advice from local authority Virtual School Heads.

Therefore, in the first instance, I would request that contact is made to the VSH for further support/ advice and guidance in relation to Previously Looked After Children.

Resources to support Looked After Children

In collaboration with the West Midlands Virtual School Heads and Arts Connect a website has been launched, please share widely and let's get the gallery going with pictures from this week's challenge!

<https://www.artslinkwm.org.uk/>

Latest DFE guidance - Where can I go to get support to help keep my child safe online?

There is support available to keep children/ young people safe online. Below are some useful links to help parents and carers:

- [Thinkyouknow](#) (advice from the National Crime Agency to stay safe online)
- [Internet matters](#) (support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online)
- [Parent info](#) (support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online)
- [LGfL](#) (support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online)
- [Net-aware](#) (support for parents and carers from the NSPCC)

Rosemary Hooper

Head of Shropshire Virtual School for Looked After Children