

Dorset Virtual School

Toolkit for Belonging and Inclusion



Dorset
Council

Dorset Virtual School Toolkit for Belonging and Inclusion



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INTRODUCTION

Dorset Virtual School is a proud advocate of our children. Our vision for our children is that they are thriving in the right educational setting, attending, feel included and listened to so that our children become independent and resilient young people. We do not give up when one of our children hits a bump in the road; we set our sights high, in the knowledge that every child has the potential and right to a wonderful future leading from a brilliant education.



There is a mutual commitment between educational settings and Dorset Virtual School to support our children and young people to fulfil their potential and live their best lives. We do this through:

- Understanding of our specific roles and responsibilities for Children in Care and Care Leavers and demonstrating professional respect for one another
- Timely and effective intervention
- Collaborative decision making in the interests of the child or young person
- Use of strength-based language and solution focused practice
- Effective lines of communication between teams to ensure shared focus in attainment, progression, attendance and transitions

ROLES OF THE DESIGNATED TEACHER AND VIRTUAL SCHOOL LEAD

The role of the Virtual School Lead is to ensure our children have the best start to life, feel belonging in their educational setting and have ambitions.

Promote	Promote high aspirations – progress & attainment
Access	Ensure access to high quality education placements
Monitor	Monitor attendance & educational progress
Quality	Ensure PEPs are high quality
Equity	Ensure equality of opportunity to enhance the life chances of all our children looked after wherever they live.
Training	Ensure that there are appropriate arrangements in place to meet the training needs of those responsible for promoting the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children.
Advice	Provide information and advice for parents and professionals regarding children who are previously looked after

The role of the Designated Teacher or key person is to ensure that our children and young people have an advocate within their setting that supports them educationally to achieve and be successful.

- 01**
Promote a culture of high expectations and aspirations for how children looked after learn.
- 02**
Make sure the young person has a voice in setting learning targets.
- 03**
Be a source of advice for staff about teaching strategies appropriate for individual children and in making full use of assessment for learning.
- 04**
Make sure that children looked after are prioritised in one-to-one tuition arrangements and that carers understand the importance of supporting learning at home.
- 05**
Have lead responsibility for the development and implementation of the child's Personal Education Plan (PEP) within the school.

LONG TERM GOALS

Our long-term goals are underpinned by our vision to ensure that all Children in Care and Care Leavers are ambitious about education and feel they belong.



REDUCTION IN SUSPENSIONS AND PERMANENT EXCLUSIONS

The past experiences of Children in Care and children Previously Looked After can impact on their behaviour. It is important to remember this when considering how best to support the child or young person with their learning (DfE, 2018)

Our ambition is for effective inclusive practice in our schools which leads to zero suspensions and permanent exclusions of children in care. The Virtual School undertakes daily monitoring of suspensions and permanent exclusions through Welfare Call's Live Dashboard, providing dynamic and instant overview of exclusions of our young people.



Despite a focus on reducing suspensions, 14.61% of children had at least one suspension during the academic year compared to the 11.67% national benchmark. This amounted to 51 children being suspended during the year with 86% of secondary school age (75% of these were Key Stage 4). 61% of these children had further suspensions during the year.

Supportive strategies and approaches:

Dorset Council offer lots of training and development opportunities advertised and booked via [NEXUS](#). This site also contains a drop-down Resources section.

Dorset Belongings Strategy

Relational Practice

Restorative and Relational Based Practice (3x half-days) [NEXUS](#)

Therapeutic Thinking (3 days) [NEXUS](#)

Autism Awareness training

Autism Education Trust (our link partner in Autism in Schools Project) [Resources](#)

The Great Behaviour Breakdown (3x half-days) [NEXUS](#)

PACE [P.A.C.E. Training | Social Care Training Solutions](#)

PALAC and Dorset Virtual School 2022 publication [DT TEAMS](#)

Nasen Connect Magazine (all issues can be viewed online) [Nasen Connect](#)

Local provision:

Clear reintegration process for settings with the child's voice at the centre of planning with required attendance from the team around the child

Virtual School fortnightly monitoring of trends in attendance and suspensions

Provision to settings of the Speech, Language and Communication Need (SLCN) checklist to consider these as part of behaviour.

Monthly Pupil Progress monitoring with a focus on children with a suspension, low attendance or new into care

Termly CPD for Designated Teachers with a focus on alternatives to suspensions

Opportunity for settings to be part of the annual UCL PALAC/ PACL knowledge Exchange programme with a focus on promoting achievement for Children in Care

INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXTRA-CURRICULAR LEARNING

Children in Care and those previously looked after, have often missed the opportunity to establish and maintain participation in extra-curricular activities. We want to ensure we facilitate the wider development of our Children in Care through arts participation, sport, cultural and leisure activities that enable them to develop skills and interests beyond formal education. It is anticipated that participation will have a direct impact on social and emotional well-being, engagement and contribute to cognitive development.

Virtual Schools' ambition is that all Children in Care in Dorset have one target on each PEP that encourages this wider development of them as a person. Currently of the 313 Statutory School Age students that have received Pupil Premium Funding this year, 36 have funded Arts participation, 28 Sport related participation, 28 other Outdoor pursuits, but 60 students required funded support for their social, emotional and mental well-being. We strongly believe this number would reduce if we were able to facilitate active participation in extra-curricular activity.

Supportive strategies and approaches:

HAF Programme ([Holiday activities and food \(HAF\) programme - Dorset Council](#))

Links with ICN ([Home - ICN](#)) and Winchmore summer camps ([Winchmore Camps](#)) for our young people who are seeking asylum

National Citizen Service Programme ([National Citizen Service](#)) aims to help young people to boost their confidence, grow their resilience, meet new friends, be a force for good, and learn new skills for the world of work.

PALAC and Dorset Virtual School 2022 publication [DT TEAMS](#)

Princes Trust ([The Prince's Trust](#)), offers free support to develop the skills and confidence young people need to find a job or start a business.

Dorset Music ([Dorset Music Service - Dorset Council](#)) is the lead organisation for Dorset Music Hub, a community of people and organisations across Dorset and beyond who support musical journeys through inclusion and partnership.

Kenny, K (2023) The educational experiences of children in care across five decades: A new perspective on the education of looked after children in the UK Accessible on MS Teams site for Designated Teachers

Local provision:

Virtual School events programme 2023/24 – available on Dorset Virtual School Designated Teachers Teams site

Weeklong residentials for targeted children and young people focusing on team building, resilience and leadership

Creative arts workshops in collaboration with Arts University Bournemouth

Creative Writing workshops in collaboration with Dorset History Centre

Pupil Premium + funding used to support extra-curricular activities for our young people

Opportunity for settings to be part of the annual UCL PALAC/ PACL knowledge Exchange programme with a focus on promoting achievement for Children in Care

INCREASE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING

Evidence suggests that a Child in Care is nearly five times more likely to have emotional health needs in comparison to the child population as a whole. Since April 2008 all local authorities in England have been required to provide information on the emotional and behavioural health of children and young people in their care, and to report back to central government on an annual basis. Data is collected by local authorities through the completion of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) on individual children and a summary figure for each child (the total difficulties score) is the outcome measure used for tracking the emotional and behavioural difficulties of Children in Care at a national level.

A return to school post Covid has seen an increase in the number of children with unauthorised absences and persistent absences that are linked to emotional well-being.

The Virtual School ambition is to encourage and support schools:

1. To enable children and young people to come into school/ setting by
 - Encouraging a meet/greet with a trusted adult
 - Nurturing start to the day – is breakfast available?
2. To enable children to stay in school by
 - Building relationships with a trusted key adult(s)
 - Having a committed physical and emotional safe space for young people to regulate
3. To enable children to engage in learning by
 - Allowing time for preparation for and reflection of learning
 - Engage in adaptive learning activities

Supportive strategies and approaches:

PALAC and Dorset Virtual School 2022 publication available on Dorset Virtual School Designated Teachers Teams site [DT TEAMS](#)

Learning and Development opportunities are advertised and booked via [NEXUS](#) . This site also contains a drop-down Resources section.

Internal staff mentoring scheme

Whole School Relational Practice training

Local provision:

Designated Teacher Teams Site

Designated Teacher CPD held each term – dates and agenda are listed on TEAMS site.

Designated Teacher ‘New to Role’ CPD held each term

Actively use full SDQ analysis to facilitate specific intervention and encourage engagement

Opportunity for settings to be part of the annual UCL PALAC/ PACL knowledge Exchange programme with a focus on promoting achievement for Children in Care

Kenny, K (2023) The educational experiences of children in care across five decades: A new perspective on the education of looked after children in the UK Accessible on MS Teams site for Designated Teachers

INCREASE STUDENT ATTENDANCE

Our ambition is to ensure that all our children thrive and achieve through the targeted monitoring of and challenging of attendance and exclusions within the Virtual School. This includes the reduction of children missing education, a reduction in the number of persistent absentees and exclusions.

The Virtual School set an ambitious target of 95% attendance for our statutory school age children. Dorset Virtual School did not meet this target, but attendance was in line with the national average (88.57% compared to the national average of 88.7%) and above 2020/21 (85.5%). The attendance of our children was also in line with the Welfare Call average of 88.4% across 201 local authorities’ Virtual Schools.

Unauthorised absence was a concern at 2.91% compared to 2.33% in 2020/21. However, Dorset was significantly better than the Welfare Call average of 3.22% across 201 local authorities’ Virtual Schools.

Persistent absence figures are improving. 27.05% of our children have had persistent absence compared to 44.6% 2020/21 and is lower than the national average of 30.4% in 2020/21.

Supportive strategies and approaches:

Attendance and Absence: ways forward, Dr Amelia Roberts, Deputy Director, UCL Centre for Inclusive Education - publication available on Dorset Virtual School Designated Teacher’s Teams site [DT TEAMS](#)

PALAC and Dorset Virtual School 2022 publication – available on Dorset Virtual School Designated Teacher’s Teams site [DT TEAMS](#)

Kenny, K (2023) The educational experiences of children in care across five decades: A new perspective on the education of looked after children in the UK Accessible on MS Teams site for Designated Teachers

[The role of the GP in maximising school attendance – BJGP Life](#)

Local provision:

Opportunity for settings to be part of the annual UCL PALAC/ PACL knowledge Exchange programme with a focus on promoting achievement for Children in Care

IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Children in Care and children Previously Looked After start from a position of overcoming their pre-care experiences.

The attainment outcomes of Children in Care remain low compared to their peers. Only 11% of children looked after for at least 12 months as of 31st March 2022 achieved good GCSEs in English and Mathematics (grade 5 or above) in 2021/22, much lower than the 50% in the overall pupil population. The latest government data from 2022 shows that 38% of 19–21-year-old care leavers were not in education, employment, or training, compared to 11% of all other young people in the same age group (Children’s Commissioner, 2023)

We ensure that our children have aspirational ambitions and academic outcomes throughout their education and monitored at key points. This includes the development of Early Years skills, expected progress at Key Stage 1, 2 and 4 as well as increased opportunity at Key Stage 5 to allow all young people to follow their passions and interests, including progression into employment or higher education.

The Virtual School aims to deliver targeted interventions for schools and settings to support inclusion and raise aspiration for their Children in Care and Care Leavers.

Supportive strategies and approaches:

Post 16 academic calendar – available on Dorset Virtual School Designated Teacher’s Teams site [DT TEAMS](#)

PALAC and Dorset Virtual School 2022 publication - available on Dorset Virtual School Designated Teacher’s Teams site [DT TEAMS](#)

PP+ funding to support interventions – procedures available on Dorset Virtual School Designated Teacher’s Teams site [DT TEAMS](#)

Local provision:

Opportunity for settings to be part of the annual UCL PALAC/ PACL knowledge Exchange programme with a focus on promoting achievement for Children in Care

Big Bids intervention – further detail available on Dorset Virtual School Designated Teacher’s Teams site

REDUCE USE OF ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

The universal ambition for all children and young people of school age is that they receive full-time education, delivered by trained professionals with relevant skill, in a school environment, alongside their peers.

We recognise that for some of our Children and Young People in Care, there will be times when this is not possible, and an alternative provision may be required for a time.

The need for Alternative Provision should be evident in the PEP process and the requested provision, logical based on the assessed need and related to the Pupil Voice. The Virtual School aim is that Alternative Provision, if required, will take place alongside time in school with entry and exit criteria clearly identified and reinforced by a reintegration plan in place from the start. For evidenced outcomes, recognised assessments will take place initially and at a review point in provision. Regular reporting and communication between the Provider and the School will ensure there is a consistent approach across settings and opportunity for CPD.

No Child or Young Person in Care should be on a Reduced Timetable.

A Transition Plan should be up to six weeks in duration.

Supportive strategies and approaches:

PALAC and Dorset Virtual School 2022 publication [DT TEAMS](#)

Clear assessment and identification of need as part of APDR Graduated Approach Cycles [APDR Approach](#)

Reflective Practice – **What** is needed? **How** can we provide it? **Where** so we need to use adaptive teaching approaches? **Who** do we have available to help? **When** is this required – patterns of behaviour?

Pupil is consulted, their voice is heard and responded to

Use of approved providers to ensure Quality Assurance with Service Level Agreement in place [List of Alternative provision \(AP\) providers | Dorset Nexus](#)

Expectation of high-quality education delivery maintained across both settings

Local provision:

Dorset Council has an Alternative Provision Framework of OFSTED registered providers

Opportunity for settings to be part of the annual UCL PALAC/ PACL knowledge Exchange programme with a focus on promoting achievement for Children in Care

PP+ funding to support interventions – PP+ Policy is available on Dorset Virtual School Designated Teacher's Teams site [DT TEAMS](#)

LOGIC MODELS TO ACHIEVE LONG TERM GOALS

SHORT TERM GOAL 1: INCREASE IN STUDENT ATTAINMENT

Settings Input 1: Small groups with structured sessions for targeted curriculum areas, often taught by a specialist teacher

Outcome: Student engagement with work increases as students become more able to access curriculum content

Tracking and data collection:

Termly progress data and attainment data collected by the Virtual School to inform future PEP meetings.

Review of funded interventions via PP+ funding

Virtual School Input 2: Targeted work with identified children and young people (and supporting team) through the Virtual School

Outcome: Improved attainment, attendance and progress alongside reduced suspensions and exclusions

Tracking and data collection:

Fortnightly monitoring of children and young people on the CiC Inclusion Monitoring Board

Monthly monitoring at the Pupil Progress monitoring meeting

Fortnightly analysis of targeted groups (attendance, suspensions, unauthorised absence) to inform schools and teams for next PEP meeting.

Further analysis of Pupil Premium + spending linked to children with suspensions to ensure that rapid support is put in place.

Further work needs to be undertaken to respond more quickly to schools who are high suspenders from both our Virtual School Leads and leadership, using the locality leadership to respond more effectively to schools.

Further work to share the good practice in settings where suspensions are low with other schools

SHORT TERM GOAL 2: INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Settings Input 3: Small group/individual mentoring sessions

Outcome: Students have an opportunity to identify and explore emotions, leading to improved self-regulation

Tracking and data collection:

Review of funded interventions via PP+ funding

Virtual School Input 4: Small group/individual mentoring sessions

Outcome: Students have an opportunity to identify and explore emotions, leading to improved self-regulation

Tracking and data collection:

Implementation of new relationship based training for schools

Evaluation of new relationship based training for schools

Evaluation of schools in the relational Practice group

Evaluation of the impact of ARC membership for schools

Evaluation of the Therapeutic Thinking for schools

SHORT TERM GOAL 3: STUDENT MORALE AND SELF-ESTEEM IS IMPROVED

Settings and Virtual School Input 5: Therapeutic programmes (often including Art, Music, Nature or Sport, Cultural identity)

Outcome: Student engagement with school improves

Tracking and data collection:

Evaluation of PP+ funded therapeutic interventions

Evaluation of 'Arts' Children in Care holiday interventions and collection of Pupil Voice as evidence

Annual Art exhibition Space created with exhibits of published creative writing, recorded or performed music and photographic displays

SHORT TERM GOAL 4: STUDENTS RECOGNISE THEIR VALUE AND CONTRIBUTION TO THE WIDER COMMUNITY

Settings and Virtual School Input 6: Opportunities to engage in community projects

Outcome: Students feel valued and that their achievements have been recognised

Tracking and data collection:

Analysis of extra-curricular activities of children and young people within the Virtual School

Introduction of an annual programme of activities and events through the Virtual School

Evaluation of impact of each activity and event

Introduction of an annual programme of events in collaboration with the Youth Voice team to capture the child voice to inform planning

Data collection of year 11-12 involvement with college transition project and National Citizenship Service Programme

ENABLERS

- * Dedicated, timetabled staff time and appropriate physical space suitable to activity
- * A trauma-informed, compassionate approach which recognises reasons for underlying behaviours. This may include restorative approaches to managing conflict.
- * A flexible, personalised approach to individual need.
- * Programme lead/senior staff have appropriate skills, attitude, positivity, passion and drive to create and sustain warmth and trust in relationships.
- * Regular and collaborative family-school engagement.
- * Alignment with mainstream classes/intervention groups, including joint planning, curriculum bridging, relationship building. Students don't feel excluded from mainstream classes.

* Forensic and dynamic decision-making as to which students need additional support; to include clear 'entry' and 'exit' criteria. Careful consideration of group dynamics and compatibility.

* A listening ethos, whereby students views are regularly sought, heard and incorporated into planning. Regular opportunities are made available for supportive conversations as needed.

* Consistent and rigorous application of school's behaviour/relationship policy. Policy is regularly revisited to ensure that cohort needs are recognised and met; high expectations are maintained across staff and students.

Sources:

Children's Commissioner, (2023) Looked after Children who are not in school, (London)

DfE, (2018) Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children statutory guidance for local authorities.