

## **Information for carers and foster carers**

### **Background to virtual schools**

The Virtual School Headteacher is a statutory post within every local authority in England. They are the officer responsible for the education of children in care. Looked after children keep the same Virtual School throughout their time in care providing continuity and enabling consistent tracking of pupil progress.

As a consequence of the Children and Social Worker Act (April 2017) from 1 September 2018 the Virtual School Headteacher is now responsible for supporting the education of previously looked after children. In addition, our cohorts have expanded to include young people up to the age of 25.

### **What we do**

AfC Virtual School monitors pupil attainment, progress, attendance, exclusion and all other aspects associated with education. We provide transition support for our young people throughout their education as they move from school to school and stage to stage. As well as our direct work with young people, we also work with the team around the child. We attend meetings within the local authority and ensure that education of children looked after is kept high on the agenda. We provide training for Designated Teachers, social workers, school governors, Independent Reviewing Officers and foster carers on a range of educational issues.

We oversee the Pupil Premium Plus Grant, delegating funds to schools and managing strategic interventions to raise attainment and improve wellbeing. Finally, we administer the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process. The PEP is a key tool to raise attainment and support pupil progress. It is our responsibility to ensure that high quality PEP meetings take place termly.

### **Who we are**

Suzanne Parrott is the Headteacher of AfC Virtual School, providing overall strategic leadership and accountability across Richmond, Kingston and Windsor and Maidenhead Virtual School cohorts. The Headteacher is supported by a team of teachers and administrative staff.

Alex Colclough is the Deputy Headteacher for AfC Virtual School with case load responsibility for Richmond. There are two Assistant Head Teachers: Kerry Crombie for Kingston and Clare Farley for Windsor and Maidenhead. Alex, Kerry and Clare provide operational leadership, support and advice to our partners to champion the education of children in care.

In addition, we have Educational Psychologists and Outreach Learning Mentors in each

cohort supplying time-bonded strategic interventions to close gaps in learning. The Performance Analysis Manager is in charge of communication and IT and leads on performance data for the Virtual School. The Pupil Premium Coordinator is the operational lead on Pupil Premium Strategic Projects and school delegated funding responsible for monitoring the impact of this grant on learning and wellbeing. Our Business Support Apprentice provides the school with administrative support.

You can contact AfC Virtual School team to access our services in the following ways:  
Tel: 020 8831 6037 [www.afcvirtuelschool.org.uk](http://www.afcvirtuelschool.org.uk)

## **What is a PEP?**

The challenges around the education of children in care are well documented. In order to raise outcomes the government introduced Personal Education Plans to drive forward educational improvements and provide enriched life chances.

It is a statutory requirement for virtual schools, schools and social workers to provide school age students in care with three Personal Education Plan reviews a year and for these to include SMART, educationally focused targets demonstrating the impact of Pupil Premium funding.

AfC Virtual School oversees the administration and quality assurance of electronic Personal Education Plans (ePEPs) to pupils from pre-school to the end of Year 13.

## **Who should attend a PEP meeting?**

The PEP meeting is arranged by the social worker as they are best placed to know who can be invited. The following parties must always attend an PEP:

- Designated Teacher (chairs the meeting)
- Social Worker
- Carer /Foster carer

There is a strong expectation that the young person attends their PEP and can lead the PEP if appropriate. This meeting is an opportunity to celebrate achievement and praise the young person for their educational progress. It is important the young person's voice is heard and remains central to the PEP and decision making.

## **Role of the Designated Teacher**

As a statutory requirement, all schools are required to have a nominated Designated Teacher. Details of the role of the Designated Teacher are set out in Promoting the Education of Looked After Children and Previously Looked after Children (February 2018) and in The Designated Teacher of Looked After Children and Previously Looked after Children (February 2018).

The member of staff who is appointed as the Designated Teacher must be a qualified teacher or Headteacher. The requirements of the role are\*:

- to have a leadership role in promoting the educational achievement of every looked after and previously looked after child on the school's roll
- to have high expectations of looked after and previously looked after children's learning and set targets to accelerate educational progress;
- to be aware of the emotional, psychological and social effects of loss and separation eg. attachment awareness
- to appreciate the central importance of the looked after child's PEP in driving forward successful educational outcomes
- to understand the role of social workers, virtual schools and carers, parents and guardians,
- to contribute to the development and review of whole school policies and procedures

\*Guidance taken from The Designated Teacher of Looked After Children and Previously Looked after Children (February 2018)

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

Headteachers of Virtual Schools are responsible for administration of the Pupil Premium Plus budget. This fund comes directly from the government to the headteacher and has strict conditions of use. It is the decision of the headteacher how to apportion this fund.

### **How does AfC Virtual School administer the Pupil Premium Plus funding?**

A portion of the Pupil Premium Plus allocation is automatically delegated to schools and the remainder is retained for strategic school projects to improve educational outcomes. Designated Teachers should contact their contact Assistant Headteacher in AfC Virtual School to discuss any requests for additional funding.

### **Use of Strategic Pupil Premium Plus Funding within AfC Virtual School**

Recent projects have included research with London University into best practice around the education of unaccompanied asylum seeking children; literacy with attachment; equine therapy; Aim Higher mentoring; TLC Live 1:1 tuition; Chelsea's Choice theatre production to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation; Radio Aspire Youth – student voice project; Letterbox; training and educational Psychology services. In 2018-19 we are working with Achievement for All and developing our training with schools on attachment.

### **What should schools spend Pupil Premium Plus on?**

The most common use of Pupil Premium is on 1:1 tuition. Your choice of intervention must support the PEP targets and be focused on education however, you may direct funding

towards addressing an aspect of well-being that is a barrier to progress.

Pupil Premium Interventions should be supported by research for example through studying articles on the Education Endowment Foundation or Sutton Trust websites. Impact of interventions is required to be monitored via the PEP document.

## **What advice can we offer foster carers?**

- Admissions: AfC Virtual School is responsible for the admission of looked after pupils and we have a strict policy to place in Good and Outstanding schools.
- Information about education establishments including pre-schools, schools, academies, colleges and alternative provisions
- Transition from one establishment to another, eg. in Year 6 or Year 11
- Attendance: all students and carers should aim for 100% attendance
- Exclusions: we strongly recommend that schools look for alternatives to excluding looked after children
- Behaviour: we can work with home and school to support positive behaviour outcomes.
- PEPs, SMART targets, attainment and progress
- Pupil Premium Plus
- Special education needs and disabilities
- Resources on attachment, trauma, emotional issues, bereavement

## **Training for foster carers**

**AfC Virtual School** provides training to foster carers and carers to enable them to better support the educational progress of their young person. There are three face-to-face training sessions per academic year.

We are at the end of the phone for ad hoc enquiries; attend meetings in Fostering on request and we organise an annual foster carer conference.

Our training covers a range of issues including PEPs, Pupil Premium Plus, strategies to promote and support learning, updates on national research and details outlining AfC Virtual School services. We invite guest speakers to give insights into different aspects of the education of children looked after and work closely on our training offer with educational psychologists to ensure we provide practical strategies to support foster carers in their work.

***“Excellent, I will recommend to my colleagues. Everything was lovely, the people... friendly, AfC Virtual School Team were very professional...” Foster carer***

## Communication

AfC Virtual School information is shared with carers and foster carers via the fostering newsletter and through our own communication channels which include newsletters, a dedicated website, Twitter and regular emails.

We encourage care experienced children to take part in AfC Virtual School's unique radio station for children in care; Radio Aspire Youth (RAY!). RAY is produced in collaboration with the Children in Care Council and Radio Jackie presenter, Neil Long. If your child/children would like to be involved in the programmes or learn more about the technical side of radio production, we encourage you to contact Sam Connor on [sam.connor@achievingforchildren.org.uk](mailto:sam.connor@achievingforchildren.org.uk)

## How you can help your foster child do well in their education?

- Through proactive and professional parenting build up a positive relationship with the school's Designated Teacher and any other key staff e.g. class teacher, key worker, so that any issues can be explored quickly and collaboratively
- Attend PEP and other school meetings and act on any interventions agreed at meetings
- Contribute to the PEP and encourage your foster child to contribute to his/her section
- Seek advice quickly from the school and AfC Virtual School if you have any concerns e.g. about attainment, attendance, behaviour, exclusion, bullying etc
- Support the child with his transition to a new school by attending meetings and talking positively about the experience
- Attend school celebratory events e.g. assemblies, plays
- Support reading, homework and preparation for lessons e.g. food technology
- Ensure educational equipment including access to IT is available for your child
- Promote a good school attendance culture
- Take the child on educational experiences and encourage attendance on school trips
- Encourage your child to take up extra-curricular activities e.g. sport, music, art, either outside of school or through school opportunities
- Discuss school reports with your child and regularly praise achievements

**Do not hesitate to contact AfC Virtual School if you are concerned about your young person's educational progress; achievement, attendance, behaviour or relationships.**

### Contact us

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Tel: 020 8831 6037

[www.afcvirtualschool.org.uk](http://www.afcvirtualschool.org.uk)