

OCTOBER 2035 ISSUE #5

Autumn Term 2

We hope the first half of the autumn term has gone well and you have had a good break to refresh ready for this next stretch of Autumn 2. We know how busy this point in the year can be, so this update brings together some key reminders, resources and opportunities to support your work with children in care, previously looked-after children and other children supported by the Virtual School.
Thank you, as always, for the important role you play in ensuring our children and young people feel safe, included and supported to achieve.



Autumn is a gentle reminder
that changes can be beautiful

Kinship care: an update for schools

Schools have an important role in recognising and supporting children living in kinship care and their carers. The update below highlights changes to the Department for Education's guidance and key points for DSLs and DTs to be aware of, including identifying kinship arrangements, understanding children's experiences and signposting families to support.

The Department for Education updated its statutory guidance on kinship care on Friday 2nd October 2026. It is written for local authorities in England and took effect on publication.
The guidance now includes six National Kinship Standards for councils. One of them says the voice of kinship children and young people must be at the heart of decision making.

There are several key points for schools:

- From the autumn 2026 term, schools can record all children in kinship care, including informal arrangements, through the school census.
- The guidance says many of these children have experienced trauma. It says the disruption can affect attainment, attendance and behaviour.
- It names education settings among the first people to meet a child living with kinship carers. They are expected to understand the challenges and signpost carers to support.
- From September 2027, councils will have a duty to promote the educational achievement of children in kinship care. That includes children on special guardianship or child arrangements orders who were never in care.
- Some kinship arrangements are also private fostering, which carries a legal duty to notify the local authority. This applies when a child under 16, or 18 if disabled, lives for 28 days or more with someone who is not a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt or step-parent. Most kinship care, such as a grandparent raising a child, is not private fostering.



I hope that everyone had a restful and enjoyable half term break and was able to take some well-deserved time to recharge after what felt like an exceptionally long and busy first half of the autumn term.



Last half term was particularly significant for the Local Authority as we underwent our ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) inspection. As many of you will know, this is a rigorous process that takes place over three weeks and examines the experiences and outcomes of children and young people across a wide range of services.

While we must wait until the report is formally published on 10 November, I am delighted to share that we are extremely pleased with the outcome and the feedback received throughout the inspection process.

On behalf of the Virtual School, I would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to the inspection. This includes our schools, colleges, early years settings, alternative provisions, partner agencies, carers and professionals who gave their time, shared their expertise and demonstrated their commitment to improving the lives of the children and young people we collectively serve.

Most importantly, thank you for your continued dedication, advocacy and support for our children in care, care leavers and other vulnerable learners. The positive relationships, high aspirations and unwavering commitment shown across our partnership make a real difference every day, and the inspection provided an opportunity to showcase the strength of that collective effort.

We look forward to sharing more once the report is published and to continuing our work together to achieve the very best outcomes for our children and young people.

From
Ruth
Headteacher, Wokingham Virtual School



DON'T FORGET

Don't miss our upcoming training sessions

Contact Virtual School if you have any questions or requests regarding training.

5th Nov	**e-PEP training**
11th Nov	**Adoption based practice in edcuation**
19th Nov	**Positive masculinities in mental health**
27th Nov	**Attachment and trauma in the classroom**
9th Dec	**Supporting a child struggling with anxiety**



Child Criminal Exploitation Awareness for Schools

Thursday 3rd December, 3:30pm to 4:30pm (via MS Teams)
Friday 4th December, 2:00pm to 4:00pm (in-person at Odyssey House School, RG40 1PA)

Course Link: Learn | CSC Child Criminal Exploitation Awareness for Schools

The Violence Prevention Partnership are offering two Child Criminal Exploitation Awareness training sessions for Designated Safeguarding Leads and education colleagues.
The sessions are free to Wokingham schools.

The courses cover emerging issues, local context, and trends, exploring child sexual exploitation, county drugs lines, modern slavery, and online harm. Early intervention, vulnerable groups, and primary-aged children's exposure to inappropriate content, online bullying, and grooming mean these sessions are useful for professionals working in all education settings.



There is still lots happening before the end of term, but Christmas is beginning to appear on the horizon. For many, it is a time of excitement, but we also know it can feel difficult or unsettled for some of our children and young people, bringing changes to routines, mixed emotions or worries about what the holiday period may look like. A little extra kindness, reassurance and consistency can make a real difference in helping them feel safe and supported over the coming weeks.

A trauma-informed approach to Christmas

A practical guide for school staff

Christmas can bring excitement — but also anxiety, loss and uncertainty. Stay curious, keep routines predictable and prioritise connection.

What might be behind the behaviour?

Separation from family, difficult memories, financial pressures, loneliness, unfamiliar celebrations and changes to routine can make this period challenging. Increased distress, withdrawal, clinginess, refusal or constant Christmas talk may signal anxiety rather than excitement.

1 Notice and stay curious

Look for changes in engagement or behaviour. Consider what a child may be communicating rather than assuming they are being difficult.

2 Prioritise trusted relationships

Make time for check-ins with a key adult. Offer quiet spaces, a walk, art or music, and structured alternatives to busy celebrations.

3 Make room for mixed feelings

Acknowledge that Christmas and transitions can feel difficult. Discuss ways to manage stress and social situations. Reassure children that support is available.

4 Plan support before the break

Give children and parents or carers opportunities to share concerns. Share holiday support options, such as Childline and Shout, where appropriate.

5 Choose inclusive language

Avoid: "What do you want for Christmas?" On return, try: "It's lovely to see you, welcome back." Do not assume children want to discuss their holiday.

6 Keep routines predictable

Use visual timetables, explain changes and avoid surprises. Maintain familiar start-of-day, lunchtime and end-of-day routines wherever possible.

7 Offer a familiar connection

Where appropriate, let a child borrow a familiar school item — a book, class teddy or game — to help reassure them they will return.

8 Help children feel held in mind

Where possible, a short message or postcard from a key adult can reassure a child that their familiar school connection remains.

9 Prepare for a supported return

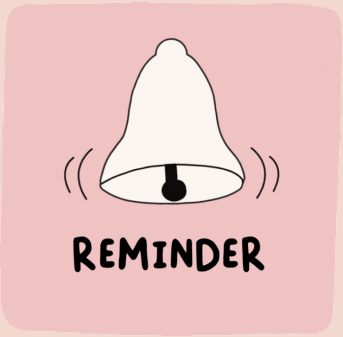
Expect that some children may need extra reassurance after the break. Separation anxiety or earlier difficulties may reappear; allow time to settle.

Staff wellbeing matters too

Notice your own stress and emotional responses. A calm, supported adult is better placed to support a child.

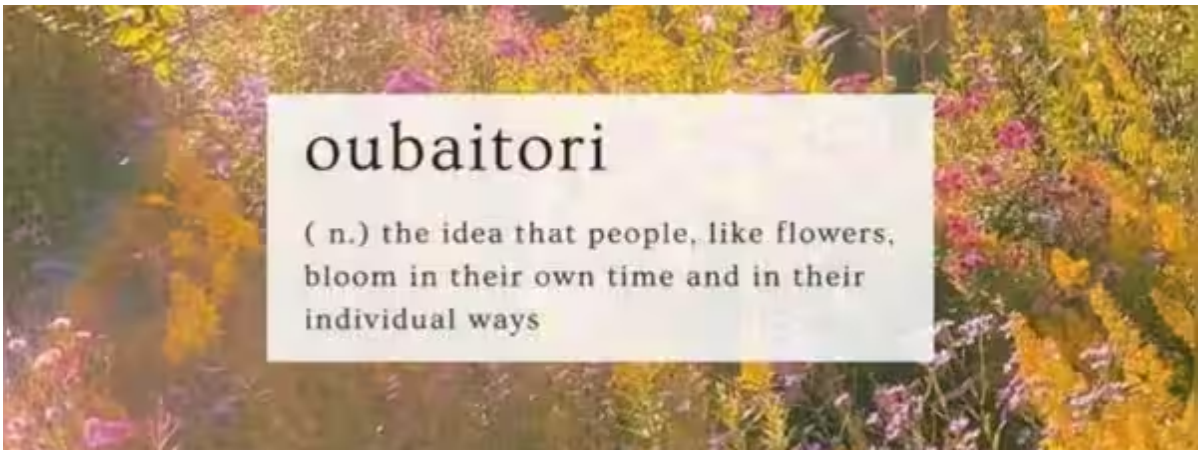
Adapted from: Dr Adele Thacker, Staffordshire Virtual School, December 2021.





Please remember to contact the Virtual School if:

- a child in care is at risk of suspension or permanent exclusion
- attendance is becoming a significant concern
- there is a change of school or placement affecting education
- there are concerns about whether needs are being met
- support or advice is needed around the PEP





Don't forget the virtual school are here to assist you should you require any support.
You can email us at the following addresses and we promise we will respond within 24 hours.

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