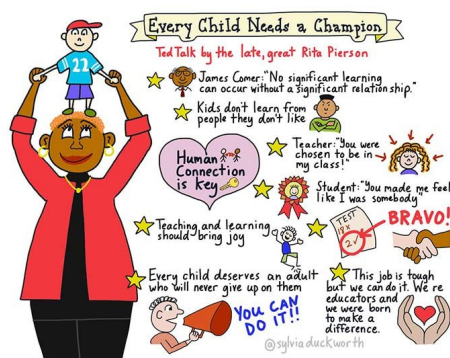




As February begins we are fast approaching the end of this half term and there have been many wonderful moments that have been shared in PEP meetings about Wokingham children.



As always, we are thankful for such dedicated professionals who work with us in ensuring that the children we care for are championed within their educational setting.



Spring term PEPs are in full swing with many already completed. May we remind you that any outstanding funding requests must be added to the PEP and submitted by **Friday 16th March** to ensure that they can be considered before the close of the financial year.

For those who missed the document shared recently via ePEP, we thought this was an opportunity to remind colleagues of the role of the Virtual School.

## What is a Virtual School?

Children in Care attend lots of different schools, but one thing that they have in common is support from your local council's "Virtual School."

The Virtual School is a team of professionals, normally employed by the local council, who promote the education achievement of Children in Care. From them, schools and carers can normally expect:

- Expert support for writing and implementing PEPs.
- A named advocate for each CIC.
- Advice on spending PP+ cash so that it has a great impact.
- Training for both schools and carers
- A website with resources and support.

Some Virtual Schools also offer useful tools on attachment needs and traumainformed practice.

Additionally, within the resource it shared the meaning of 'attachment' and 'trauma informed':

## What do 'Attachment' and 'Trauma Informed' mean?

**Attachment difficulties** happen when a child does not have the comfort and security needed from their main carer(s) in their early life. As a result, the child may struggle to form strong emotional bonds with others.

Attachment issues are common in CIC. The impact of their early life often presents in schools as social and emotional needs. Examples include fear, anger, distrust, depression or avoidance behaviours.

What makes forming healthy bonds less likely?

- Abuse, neglect and trauma in a parent or child's life.
- A parent's poor mental health.
- A parent's substance misuse.
- A child having multiple care placements.
- Parents being separated from baby at birth (e.g. if baby is receiving neonatal care).

- Stress (e.g. a low income, being a single or young parent).
- Bereavement or loss of a carer.

**Trauma informed** means that the school understands the impact of trauma on the child. Trauma can be caused by a wide range of life events, for example abuse, bereavement, inconsistent parenting or even fleeing war.

Pupils who experience trauma often find it harder to regulate their feelings or make good friends. Some behaviours that we then see feel antagonistic to an uninformed adult. Trauma informed staff understand how previous life events can lead to the behaviours we see today. These staff adjust their approach so that we deal with the behaviour even better than before.

In short, trauma informed means that adults respond in a way that sees not only the issue at hand, but also what's gone on before.

Virtual Schools were established in 2014 as teams based in councils specifically to support the education and progress of children in care. In 2021, the remit of the Virtual School was extended to include children with a social worker.



**This year, Children's Mental Health Week 2026 will take place from 9-15 February 2026!**

The theme for Children's Mental Health Week 2026 is 'This is My Place', and their aim is to support the systems around children and young people to help them feel they belong. Children's Mental Health Week takes place every February. It was started in 2015 to give a voice to all children and young people and to raise awareness of children and young people's mental health.

To support delivering sessions on this, Place2Be have a plethora of resources which can be found [here](#).

We know that our sense of belonging as individuals, in our friendships, in school, and in communities plays a vital role in our mental health and wellbeing.

To know our place and really feel part of our environment is a basic human need. It can have powerful and long-lasting impacts in lots of areas of our lives, including our physical and mental health, education, employment and relationships. When we feel that we belong, it empowers us to contribute to the world and make a real difference.



**Exploring a New Opportunity for Local Schools**

### **Oakwood Climbing Centre – An Emerging Resilience & Mentoring Initiative**

We would like to share an early-stage opportunity that is currently being explored with Oakwood Climbing Centre in Wokingham. This is aimed at supporting vulnerable children of statutory school age through physical activity and mentoring.

At present this is a developing idea rather than a fully established programme. The purpose of sharing it now is to gauge interest from local schools and to shape any future provision collaboratively based on identified need.

#### **Why climbing?**

Climbing has shown strong potential as a tool for supporting children who may benefit from opportunities to build:

- Resilience and perseverance
- Confidence and self-belief
- Emotional regulation
- Communication and teamwork





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The challenge-based nature of climbing allows young people to experience success, manage risk safely and reflect on overcoming obstacles - skills that can translate positively into school and everyday life.

Oakwood Climbing Centre offers a range of indoor climbing and bouldering facilities in a safe, supervised environment, suitable for children and young people with varying abilities. More information about the venue can be found following [this link](#).

#### **A potential mentoring element**

Alongside climbing, there is also the possibility of incorporating a mentoring approach aimed at supporting children who are on Child in Need (CIN), Child Protection (CP) or Children in Care plans.

This mentoring element is still in its formative stage but could include small-group or individual support focused on reflection, confidence-building and developing coping strategies alongside the physical activity.

#### **Shaped with schools**

Any future sessions would be designed in partnership with schools, taking into account:

- The needs of specific pupil groups
- Age and ability ranges
- Practical considerations such as timing and transport

At this stage schools are not being asked to commit to anything only to indicate whether this is something they might be interested in exploring further.



#### **Next steps**

We are keen to hear from schools who feel this emerging opportunity could be of benefit to some of their children. Expressions of interest will help determine whether and how this idea develops. To do this, we would be grateful if you would complete a short MS Form by following [this link](#) before **3pm on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> February**.

Together, we hope to explore whether this could become a positive and supportive option for some of our most vulnerable young people.



## Whats On

- ★ Tuesday 3 February 2026 Wokingham DSL Meeting
- ★ Monday 23 February 2026 – Friday 27 February 2026  
WBC Half Term
- ★ Tuesday 24 February 2026 Designated Person for  
Child Protection in Education Refresher Training
  - ★ Monday 2 March 2026 National Offer Day  
(Secondary)
  - ★ Monday 16 March 2026 PP+ deadline
  - ★ Monday 23 March 2026 PEP Deadline
- ★ Wednesday 25 March 2026 Designated Person for  
Child Protection in Education Training
  - ★ Friday 27 March 2026 WBC Last day of term
- ★ Monday 30 March 2026 – Friday 10 April 2026 WBC  
Easter Holiday

Since September we have welcomed two new members to the Virtual School team, Helen Belas who joined in September 2025 and Amanda Bickerton who joined in January 2026.

At the end of this half term we will be saying farewell to Jenny Lucas who has been instrumental in ensuring things run smoothly for all things administration, we will miss her greatly!

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.

## Here's how to **CONTACT US!**

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