



Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest
to create a better borough

Virtual School Handbook for Social Workers, Foster Carers, Parents, Independent Reviewing Officers, Key Workers and Supervising Social Workers



2023-2024

Contents

Contents	Page
Introduction	3
What is a Virtual School?	4
Meet the Team	5
Corporate Parenting	6-7
Working Together	8
Admissions	9
Suspensions, Exclusions and Modified Timetables	10
Virtual School Events	11

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Introduction

The role of the **Virtual School for Children in Care** is to champion the needs of Telford and Wrekin's looked after children and previously looked after children, wherever they may be placed. This is achieved through support, guidance and challenge to schools and other education providers, the local authority, and any other relevant partners to ensure these children have the best possible education. In addition, as from September 2021, additional duties for the Virtual School Head Teacher (VSHT) include Children with a Social Worker (CWSW) - the VSHT/dedicated CWSW Team based within the VST provide further advice, support, guidance & challenge to further promote positive educational outcomes.

Telford and Wrekin Local Authority Virtual School is located within the Education & Skills Directorate and is part of the wider Children's Services. We are the Corporate Parent, meaning we advocate in the best interests of our young people, ensuring they are cared for and cared about as highlighted in the most recent Ofsted ILAC Inspection (Children's Services Outstanding, January 2020). We work as part of the team around a young person and work closely with many multi-agency key stakeholders. We provide a variety of training to support education establishments further, including termly network meetings and an annual VS Conference which focuses on improving outcomes for our Children in Care, Previously Looked After and Children with a Social Worker.

We provide termly CPD/ updates to Telford & Wrekin Foster Carers with a specific focus.

In addition, we also provide a variety of training to key stakeholders - please contact us directly for further information. virtualschool@telford.gov.uk

We want to ensure you have support and advice when needed; the partnership between the Virtual School for Children in Care and yourselves is crucial to improving outcomes. As part of this, the handbook is designed to give you a quick reference to key information that you will need in your role. However, we will always respond promptly if you need information which is not contained within this document - our contact details are on the previous page. We look forward to working with you all closely, as we continue to ensure our children are cared for and cared about.

Virtual School Head Teacher, Michelle Salter



What is a Virtual School?

**A statutory duty in accordance with Children & YP Act
VSHT appointed to oversee the education and outcomes of
children in care (LAC).**

Monitored through termly Personal Education Plans (PEPS).

**Strategic advice
support & guidance
for Previously
Looked After
Children (PLAC).**

**The Virtual School
works across early
years settings,
schools and
colleges, mainly
with children and
young people aged
2-18.**

**Strategic
responsibility for
Children with a
Social worker**

Telford & Wrekin Virtual School is a source of advice and information for carers and parents of previously looked-after children and those working with previously looked-after children. It is part of Telford & Wrekin's corporate parenting role. The Virtual School Head Teacher oversees an education team who promote educational attainment and achievement, and works with schools, services and other virtual schools. **The Virtual School does not replace the school or setting attended by Children in Care and previously looked-after children** but provides challenge and support to promote the best possible educational outcomes. We could not do this alone and that is why it is paramount we have effective positive working relationships with you all. You are all a team around our young person, encouraging them to be the best they can be.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require any further advice, guidance and support.

Meet The Team:

VS Team	Role
Michelle Salter	VS Head Teacher Strategic Lead SEMH Lead
Amanda Price	Senior Education Adviser Sports Lead
VS Team	Role
Sarah Summers	PEP Lead Education Officer In Borough compulsory school age
Kerriann Hughes	PEP Coordinator Arts Lead
Sharron Jones	Education Officer Out of Borough compulsory school age Events Lead
Anita Farrant	Education Adviser Early Years (2 years old upwards)
Joe Leppington	Education Adviser In Borough compulsory school age CPD Lead
Nick Cunliffe	Education Adviser Post 16 Lead
Mark Charlton	Education, Employment, Training Officer Post 16 Team
Zoe McLaughlin	Education Adviser CWSW Primary
Rebecca Best	Education Adviser CWSW Secondary
Suzy Rogers	Education Adviser CWSW all pupils Tracking
Tony Milovsorov	Casual Education Adviser
Suzanne Ellams	Engagement Officer
Joanne Whitmore	Engagement Officer
Ann-Marie Lacey	VS Business Support Officer
Vacant from Sept 23	VS Educational Psychologist

Corporate Parenting

All children need love and stability in order to thrive. A strong corporate parenting ethos means that everyone from the Chief Executive down to front line staff, as well as elected council members, are concerned about those children and care leavers as if they were their own. This is evidenced by an embedded culture where council officers do all that is reasonably possible to ensure the council is the best 'parent' it can be to the child or young person.

Corporate Parenting Principles (The Children and Social Work Act 2017)

The corporate parenting principles set out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to children in care, as follows:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
- to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

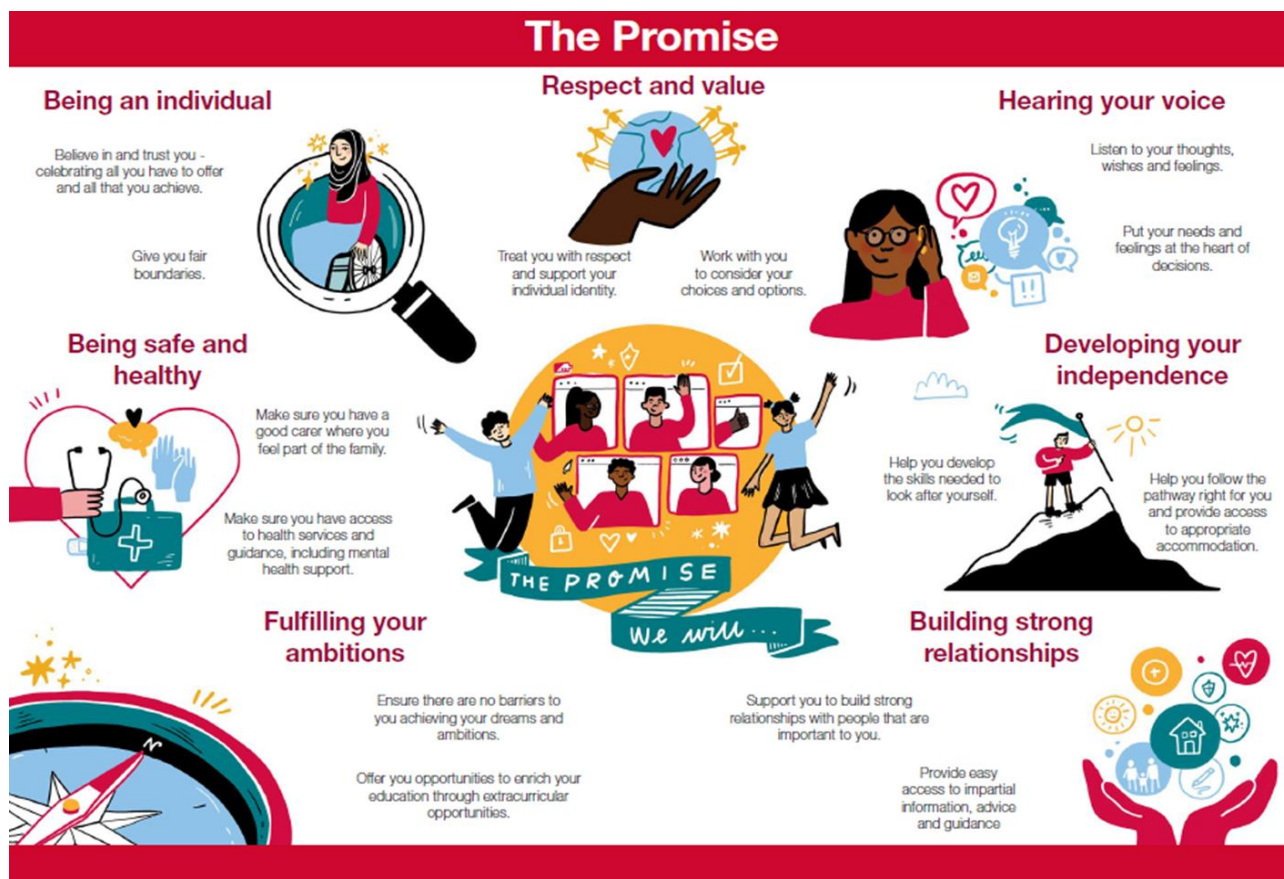


Our promise to you:

- 3 year Corporate Parenting Strategy, entitled 'Our promise to you' which runs from 2022-2025

Find the Corporate Parenting Strategy here:

[Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025 \(telford.gov.uk\)](https://www.telford.gov.uk/corporate-parenting-strategy-2022-2025)



Young Persons Panel- In addition we have a young person’s panel that has representation from a wider range of groups including: Voice (T&W children in care advocacy group) Care Leavers, care experienced young people who also present with special educational needs (SEND), other young people who have accessed Peer Mentoring from Smash life and a wider range of representation from other groups to ensure equality and diversity for all. The panel meets regularly to explore each area of the promise and feedback to the Corporate Parenting Strategic Board (CPSG) which is represented by the Virtual School Head Teacher and chaired by the Executive Director of Children’s Services. Feedback is twofold thus ensuring that the young people recognise that information is shared and action taken.

Our Virtual School Team has hosted the brilliant Young Person’s conferences, with a range of workshops (arts, music, sports, peer mentoring) for our young people in care. On the day, young people also had the chance to ‘takeover’ the job of one of our council’s officers or partner organisations. The Chief Executive commented that ‘Having a young person shadowing me was really amazing and inspirational, I am sure all my colleagues who took part felt the same. We, too, have so much to learn from these young people!

To give you a flavour of how the day went, [watch this video](#) from the Communications Team with the young person they have mentored on the day. Another recent video created by some of the young people with the support of the Virtual School Team showcases the thoughts and feelings of our young people in care and why it’s important for us to continue to listen to them, learn from them and support them to get the very best in life. [Watch this video](#)

Working together to promote good outcomes

- **The Virtual School Lead on Education** as such we have a dedicated post holder who coordinates all of the statutory requirements re Personal Education Plan (PEPS). We expect all of our young people to have termly PEPS from 2- 18-year-olds and expect all stakeholders to attend- **The PEP Co-ordinator organises all PEPS** so any questions, advice and guidance she can be contacted directly kerriann.hughes@telford.gov.uk
- **Any requests for school changes/ modified timetables must be authorised by the Virtual School Headteacher. We expect all our young people to attend education, employment and training and we recognise through research that education is a stability.**
- Both the **PEP Coordinator & PEP Lead deliver regular training** to schools re the PEP portal and also offer training to Social Workers. **It is strongly recommended as part of T&W employees Induction for Social Care Colleagues** - new to role/council that they attend a VS CPD session by either contacting kerriann.hughes@telford.gov.uk or VS PEP Lead: sarah.summers@telford.gov.uk
- We continue to provide termly PEPS up to the end of Yr. 13 academic year summer term. We pride ourselves as a team and through effective multi agency working- PEP completion rates are consistently 100% term on term for all our young people and PEP quality remains consistently high above 90%.
- **It is the young persons Social Workers responsibility to ensure once the PEP has been quality assured and signed off by the VS caseworker that they share the PEP with relevant stakeholders including foster carers- PEPS are seen as a live working document to ensure all our young people continue to thrive.**
- Ensure that all parties have **high expectations** of the young person, encouraging achievement and ambition, and ensuring that the child makes accelerated and rapid progress.
- Ensure children and young people are included in **school-based interventions**, even if they may not appear to meet the criteria, and actively promote their best interests.
- **Challenge suggestions** that a child's emotional needs are greater than their learning needs and that they 'just need time', as this results in poor outcomes for children in care, previously looked-after children and children with a Social Worker.
- **Challenge any suspensions / exclusions for our young people – link with the Virtual school immediately.**
- If a child is not making progress or they are concerns then we strongly urge the school/foster carers and social workers to **use the local referral system** to access advice, support and contact the Case Worker within the Virtual School- **swift timely intervention is key.**
- Promote and **celebrate the achievements of children and young people**, sharing positives with school (particularly at times of transition)
- **Actively encourage and support the engagement** in 'leisure and cultural' activities- the Virtual School offer considerable amount of variety of out of term activities open to all and we also offer accredited Arts Awards.
- **Attend and champion our young people at our annual Celebration awards evening (which is held in the summer term)**
- **Maintain contact** with the school/Virtual School between PEP meetings to ensure that the PEP targets are being implemented and that all staff maintain high expectations.
- Ensure our young people have access to **appropriate space and resources** to engage in education activities including computers, technology, books and study spaces. **Refer to Pupil Premium Plus policy 23-24 located on VS website.**

Admissions:

Schools should give children in care and previously looked-after children the highest priority on their admission arrangements. “Such children must take precedence over those on a waiting list and cannot be refused a place because of challenging behaviour.”

The 2021 School Admissions Code requires children who appear (to the admission authority) to have been in state care outside of England, and who have ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted, to be given equal first priority in admission arrangements alongside looked after children (LAC) and children who were previously looked after by English local authorities (PLAC). The advice refers to these children as internationally adopted previously looked after children – “IAPLAC”.

[School admissions code 2021 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Local authorities may issue a direction to a maintained school and ask the Secretary of State to direct academies to admit looked-after children. Guidance: School Admissions Code. Statutory guidance for admission authorities, governing bodies, local authorities, schools adjudicators and admission appeals panels (December 2014, revised September 2021, updated March 2022).

Things to consider before applying for a new school place:

- Consult Virtual School at the point of considering any placement changes and before approaching your local school.
- Children in care should be placed in schools which have been judged by Ofsted to be “Outstanding” or “Good”. In exceptional circumstances, if a school is inspected and the Ofsted grade is below good and the young person is already on roll, then a meeting is called with all stakeholders to discuss next steps.
- The Ofsted rating for Telford & Wrekin schools can be found on school finder at www.gov.uk/school-performance-tables

In-Year Admissions:

The School Admissions Team co-ordinates all in-year admissions into Telford & Wrekin schools. More information can be found www.telford.gov.uk/admissions To apply for a Telford & Wrekin school place at any time other than the point of transfer to a school, an In-Year Admission application must be completed online. **This must be completed by the social worker in consultation with the Virtual School.** The School Admissions Team will then aim to notify of the application outcome within 15 school days & consult with the VSHT & SW.

Out of county placements:

Admissions to schools that are not in Telford & Wrekin will either be coordinated by the local authority area in which the school is based or will be processed by the schools themselves. The website for the relevant local authority should have information on the process, but if there are any queries please contact the School Admissions Team and T&W VS.

Refused applications:

If an application to a Telford & Wrekin school is refused, refer to the Virtual School for advice. The responsible Local Authority for CiC can take enforcement action to require a school to admit by using the direction process. This process will differ depending on which type of school it is, and advice will always need to be sought from the admissions team when considering taking enforcement action. The enforcement process is not a quick solution and can take several months to conclude.

Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions:

All our young people are allocated a VST case worker, and we review weekly the level of support required for all our young people. Our expectations are very clear, in that schools communicate with the Virtual School in the first instance if any of our young people are experiencing any difficulties, as there is a variety of support, training and interventions which are available to prevent exclusions, linked to our Belonging Strategy and Rarely Exclusion policy.

An exclusion must be lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate and must be in accordance with the school's published behaviour policy and the statutory guidance on exclusion. The 2022 DfE guidance states that, 'In the case of a looked-after child or child with a social worker, the school and the local authority should work together to arrange alternative provision from the first day following the suspension or permanent exclusion.' (Part 6 paragraph 92).

If a school is considering issuing to a care experienced young person, previously looked after or a young person who has a social worker we expect the Designated Teacher/ School to contact the Virtual School to discuss. If issued, there is an expectation that the local authority is informed immediately. A copy of the letter must be sent to accessandinclusion@telford.gov.uk the virtual school caseworker copied in, as well as sending to virtualschool@telford.gov.uk. We also expect the social worker/ carers to be informed and link with the Virtual School

The VS also needs to be informed to ensure that they are aware and will attend any re-integration meeting with the school following any suspensions.

A school can only permanently exclude:

In response to serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy; and where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others in the school. Exclusion Statutory Guidance September 2022 - [School suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/112222/School_suspensions_and_permanent_exclusions_-_GOV.UK.pdf)

Modified Timetables: (MTTs)

We expect all our young people to have a full-time offer; it is their legal right to an education and to attend. **In exceptional circumstances**, as per Telford & Wrekin Guidance distributed to schools in relation to MMTs, modified timetables for our Children in Care should be created through co production in consultation with the Virtual School, young person and Social Worker reviewed every 6 weeks. All modified timetables require a parental signature. For Children in Care, this would normally be the Social Worker, but there is an **expectation that the Virtual School agrees any MTT prior to a Social Worker signing. The VSHT has complete oversight of any MTT and any care experienced young person who is placed on a MTT is reviewed regularly and is seen as a short term measure.** It is the responsibility of school at which the child is on roll to liaise with the VS regarding number of hours the child is receiving. We review all MMTs weekly and expect to see an increase in the number of hours of education.

Virtual School Events and our wider educational entitlement cultural offer

At Telford & Wrekin Virtual School, we offer a range of events and activities including Year 6 Transition Residential activity based events for our young people to come and attend. These offer a chance to try something new, meet other young people in care in the country and spend time with the Virtual School Team.

We are part of a wider West Midlands Children in Care Foundation [Welcome to WMVS Children In Care Foundation | WMVS Children In Care Foundation \(wmvscifoundation.org.uk\)](https://www.wmvscifoundation.org.uk)

Telford & Wrekin Virtual School is a registered with Trinity College London as an Arts accreditation centre and our Arts Lead is a qualified Arts assessor.

What are Arts Awards?

This is a creative journey, exploring the arts world, discovering your potential as artists, developing leadership skills – and gaining a recognised qualification along the way. Open to anyone aged 25 or under, this unique set of arts qualifications builds skills essential for success in the 21st century: Creativity and communication, along with problem-solving, reflective-thinking and confidence. Our young people can achieve Arts Award in any art form, from music to mime, poetry to pottery, dance to drumming. Through the five levels – **Discover, Explore, Bronze, Silver and Gold!** To date, over eighty young people have already achieved Arts awards.

Collectively as region have established my Creative Track which is embedded in all termly PEPS. [My Creative Track | WMVS Children In Care Foundation \(wmvscifoundation.org.uk\)](https://www.wmvscifoundation.org.uk)

Check out our Virtual School Website

https://www.telford.gov.uk/info/20642/virtual_school_for_children_in_care

[Galleries: Virtual school for children in care - Telford & Wrekin Council](#)

If you would like to submit anything to be showcased on our gallery, please send to: virtualschool@telford.gov.uk

Our calendar for events can be found here:

https://www.telford.gov.uk/info/20642/virtual_school_for_children_in_care/3980/events_useful_links_and_latest_news/2