

Briefing note

Supporting parents and carers to understand the work of the MKCC Virtual School

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What is the Virtual School?

The Virtual School is not a school, it is a council service working under both statutory and non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education. The statutory duty of the Virtual School is to promote the educational achievement of looked after children and previously looked after children but there have been recent role extensions to include support for children with social workers and children in kinship care arrangements.

We know that the children we support may have been disadvantaged due to the disruption and events that will have happened when they were younger. The role of the Virtual School is to maximise these children's full educational potential.

All of the work of the Virtual School is undertaken in line to support with the following principles and ethos for children and young people:

- Promoting their health (physical and mental health).
- Ensuring that they can express themselves and that their views are considered.
- Ensuring that they can access and make best use of the services provided.
- Promoting high aspirations for their future.
- Securing safe and stable lives.
- Preparing for adulthood and independent living.

The Virtual School does not provide education for children (outside of commissioning tuition packages for children who are between educational placements). As such, we work closely with the educational settings that children attend to ensure a joined-up approach to education.

What does the Virtual School do to support children who are looked after by Milton Keynes local authority?

For children who are looked after, the Virtual School need to be the educational advocates that parents are for their non-looked after peers. As part of the local authority's duty in terms of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of looked after children, the Virtual School have a key role in ensuring that the educational implications of decisions made are always considered.

The main roles of the Virtual School with regard to looked after children can be summarised as follows:

- To ensure arrangements are in place to improve their educational experiences and outcomes.
- To monitor their attainment and progress in education.
- To maintain an up-to-date roll of the children it is responsible for.
- To ensure that information is provided to education settings to allow for effective support to be provided.
- To support professionals (MKCC colleagues and those in education settings) to understand their roles and responsibilities as part of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process.
- To facilitate the PEP meetings and ensure that appropriate views and information is collected from the child and all of the adults supporting them.
- To ensure that high quality PEPs are produced and noted on a child's file.
- To avoid drift and delay when providing suitable education provision and to avoid unplanned termination of educational arrangements through working closely with the professional team around each child.
- To report on the work of the Virtual School as outlined above regularly.
- To oversee the effective use of Pupil Premium Plus funding to maximise impact for eligible children.
- To provide appropriate training opportunities for professionals working with children who are looked after.

What does the Virtual School do to support other children?

The Virtual School also have a responsibility to support the following children:

- Previously looked after children
- Children with a social worker and those who have previously had a social worker who are aged from 0-18
- Children in kinship care arrangements

For children who have been previously looked after, the Virtual School are a source of advice and guidance to support parents and carers advocate for these children as effectively as possible. The Virtual School also provide appropriate training opportunities for school settings to support their work with children who were previously looked after.

For children who have a social worker or who have previously had a social worker, the Virtual School should seek to enhance the partnerships between educational settings and Milton Keynes local authority, to identify the needs of this cohort to address barriers to poor educational outcomes to

ensure children make educational progress and to offer advice and support to key professionals within Milton Keynes local authority social care and education settings.

For children in kinship care arrangements, the Virtual School should bring greater focus and visibility to the distinct needs of this group through raising awareness, supporting appropriate training, promoting practice that supports attendance and engagement of kinship children in education and promoting practice that improves the educational attainment of children in kinship care.

For clarification, the Virtual School is not expected to:

- Work directly with individual children and their families.
- Track or monitor individual educational progress, or provide academic or other interventions.
- Respond to requests from parents or carers to offer advice, intervention and support in relation to individual children.

Where can you find further information from the Virtual School?

The Virtual School Duty Line – 01908 254779 – is open daily 9am-3pm weekdays. Our staff will be able to support with queries or direct you to a team member who will be able to provide information.

The Virtual School also has a wide variety of information available on the website - [Virtual School | Milton Keynes City Council \(milton-keynes.gov.uk\)](https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/virtual-school).