



# Learn Achieve Celebrate

Information and guidance  
for Designated Teachers of Looked After and  
Previously Looked After Children in  
Northumberland  
**December 2020**

It's been quite a term, to finish what has been quite a year!

We don't just want to thank you for being extraordinary professionals and compassionate people, we want to let you know how proud we are to work with you and how lucky our looked after children are to have you in their lives.

Very best wishes for a peaceful Christmas and a different New Year from all of the Virtual School teams  
– ESLAC, Education Welfare, Admin, EOTAS Health Needs and Schools' Safeguarding

Wishing you  
a cool Yule  
from the Virtual  
School



**In 2021 we look forward to working with you to improve outcomes for our looked after children by:**

- reducing the rate of persistent absence
- improving school placement stability
- improving the ePEP completion rate
- getting progress back on track
- for pupils starting a new school in September, making arrangements so that the transition is as smooth as possible
- preparing pupils for end of year tests and exams
- making sure that 2021 school leavers have the right support and guidance to progress into education, training and employment

## **Covid and school stability**

**In and out of care** From March 2020 the Virtual School successfully supported the education of all statutory school age and post 16 Northumberland looked after children, placed both in and out of county education providers. Although the numbers of children in care figures remained consistent, averaging

265, the numbers moving in and out of care fluctuated. Between March and December a total of 115 children aged 2 - 19 became looked after and 119 returned home. Of the 115 new to care, 68 were of statutory school age, a third of these in years 6, 10, or 11.

**School moves** We currently have 285 statutory school age looked after children, 31 of whom were new to care since September. There have been 54 school moves, not including planned transitions, the majority have been due to changes in home placement but there has been a small percentage where schools have felt unable to meet needs due to the escalation in behaviours.

**School attendance** The rate of persistent absence for our looked after children has risen sharply this term. This can be explained by the impact of disruption caused by Covid 19, for example the increase in risk taking behaviours, schools closing, periods of self isolation, and now dealing with the influence of Christmas and contact with birth parents. Thank you for completing the weekly attendance returns for looked after children on schools360. We want to provide as much support to you and your looked after pupils as swiftly as possible. The live data is helping us to do that. We have listened to your feedback about the returns and are still working on a solution to capture the data when we need it in a way that doesn't create too much work for you. We'll look at this more closely with the Designated Teacher Working Group and feedback to you at the February conference.

**Exclusions** The number of sessions lost to fixed term exclusion by looked after children since September is high, and much higher than it was this time last year. Can we remind you of the support available from the Virtual School and if situations are beginning to escalate or there is a need for a fixed-term exclusion, please get in touch with us as soon as possible.



*Tara Prescott, acting Deputy Virtual School Headteacher*

## Emotional and mental health and wellbeing

There are many resources now available in Northumberland which schools can access to support the emotional and mental health and wellbeing of children, including our looked after children.



**Graduated approach** To continue to support children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing we're working collaboratively with partners in education, health and social care to support the implementation and development of the NHS Trailblazer Bee You project. The team developed a THRIVE model, not to be confused with the Thrive approach, called The Graduated Approach to Children's Wellbeing and Mental Health Provision which categories the various levels of support available for all children including looked after children.

The THRIVE model refers to the levels of accessible support as a 'graduated' approach to promote early intervention and identification of need **copng, getting help, getting more help and accessing specialist help**. The Virtual School has influence within each area.

The THRIVE model is currently being updated and the Trailblazer website is under construction, both will be shared with schools as soon as possible. In the meantime, please remember looked after children are able to access universal support for their EMHWP, but also have the additional support from the Virtual School and the Thrive approach.

**kooth** **Kooth** Online mental health and wellbeing support for 11 - 25 year olds:  
<https://www.kooth.com/>

**ChatHealth** **Chat Health** Confidential text messaging service to contact the school nurse team, for 11 - 19 year olds, call 07507 332 258



**School Health** Discussion and referral direct with school or academy school nurse.



**Mental Health Support Teams, Be You** Teams are currently in Hexham and Blyth, and are soon to be in Ashington and Bedlington. Email the Be You mailbox outlining the support required; this will be discussed within the team and contact will be made by Educational Mental Health Practitioners or Primary Mental Health Workers if appropriate: [beyou@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:beyou@northumberland.gov.uk)



**Northumbria Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

**Primary Mental Health** Any professional, parent/carer or child (over 15) can ring the consultation line. If PMH doesn't feel the referral is for their service they will signpost to the relevant professional. Please note, an appointment is needed for the consultation line and can be made direct.



01661 864588



[PMHW@northumbria-healthcare.nhs.uk](mailto:PMHW@northumbria-healthcare.nhs.uk)



**CYPS 0 – 18** Referrals can be made from those working with the child, usually the Social Worker. The Virtual School attends a monthly CYPS liaison meeting where looked after children are discussed and regular consultations between Social Workers, CYPS, and the Virtual School take place for those looked after children who require CYPS intervention.



01670 502 700 or freephone 0800 652 2862.



[NorthumberlandCYPS@cntw.nhs.org](mailto:NorthumberlandCYPS@cntw.nhs.org)



**ROAR** The Virtual School is working with Family Placement and NIES to offer ROAR training from the Friends Resilience Program to all foster carers. Hopefully the training will start in January. The hope is that foster carers will feel better equipped and more confident when dealing with the challenges faced by the children they care for in relation to mental health.



**Mind of my Own app** Looked after children are encouraged to use the Mind of My Own app as a tool to communicate with a specific member of their care team, including their IRO, Social Worker, Advocate, and the Virtual School. It helps them to have a voice that professionals can listen to.

Tara Prescott, acting Deputy Virtual School Headteacher

## Winners!



The Progress Reviews you send us every term via the ePEP are extremely useful in many ways. They tell us how many of our looked after children are working in their age related curriculum and which areas of the curriculum need more attention to accelerate progress. 2020 data, before lockdown in March, tells us that our looked after children from Year 1 to 6 make better progress in reading and maths than they do in writing. We are therefore putting a spotlight on writing, and you will be hearing from our teachers Deborah and Karen next term with more ideas for interventions which can work to accelerate progress in writing.

We have three winners of our Virtual School Writing Competition!! Well done to the children involved. The winners in the Primary and Secondary categories will each win a £25 voucher, and the overall winner will receive a £50 voucher. The children will be contacted by Virtual School teacher Deborah Aubrook before the end of term.

They don't know yet, so we don't have permission to share their names. The talented winners are in Year 7 at the Duchess's Community High School (Alnwick), Year 7 at Highfield Middle (Prudhoe) and Year 11 at the Blyth Academy.



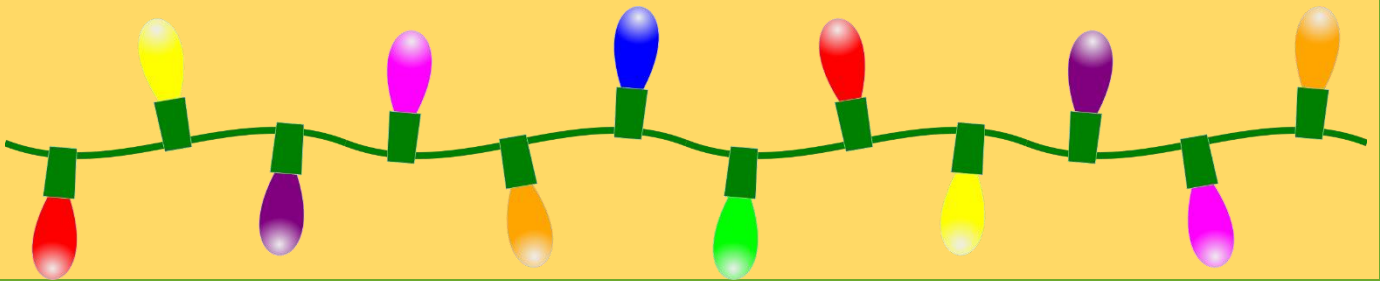
## Before you go...

- 🌲 If you haven't already done so, could you send me a copy of your Designated Teacher's Annual Report for 2019-20 (email me at [Jane.Walker@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:Jane.Walker@northumberland.gov.uk))
- 🌲 Over 90 of you joined us for the Designated Teachers' November Conference. We're looking forward to seeing you again for the Spring Conference on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2021. You will all be sent an updated Teams invitation so can join us on the day without having to book a place. The Designated Teacher Working Group has already given us some ideas for the agenda, if you have any suggestions please get in touch in the usual way.

## Contact Us

Here are contact details for teams and services that you might need when working with looked after children. Let us know if you need any others:

- OneCall 01670 536 400
- ESLAC 01670 622779
- Email: [eslac.info@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:eslac.info@northumberland.gov.uk)
- CYPS 01670 502 700
- Family Placement 01670 626 262
- IROs 01670 624888



Virtual School Headteacher:  
Jane Walker



Northumberland  
County Council

