



## VSK AT Newsletter for Education Settings

### Issue 1 January 2022.

This is the first newsletter from the Virtual School Kent Advisory Team, which is aimed at updating education providers on the work we are doing to champion the needs of the 'children with a social worker cohort'. We hope you find it a useful document to show you some of the work that we are doing.

As you are aware, the new responsibilities for VSK only began in September 2021. As we develop our offer and respond to the needs of this cohort, we would like the opportunity to keep you all updated.

If you are unaware of the changes, this short video explains why this new cohort of children are so important to schools, education settings and all professionals working with them and their families.  
<https://vimeo.com/595327272/8f332f60ce>

**There are items in this newsletter that we would like some support with. If you have any queries regarding anything, please do get in contact with us:**

[VSKAdvisoryTeam@kent.gov.uk](mailto:VSKAdvisoryTeam@kent.gov.uk)

#### **Key Dates (For more information on these events please see below.)**

<b>DSL VSK update online meeting for West Kent</b> (Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Malling, Sevenoaks Maidstone and Ashford)	<b>11<sup>th</sup> January 3.30-4.30pm</b>
<b>DSL VSK update online meeting for East Kent</b> (Thanet, Canterbury Coastal)	<b>12<sup>th</sup> January 3.30-4.30pm</b>
<b>DSL VSK update online meeting for North Kent</b> (Gravesham, Dartford and Swale)	<b>13<sup>th</sup> January 3.30 – 4.30pm</b>
<b>DSL VSK update online meeting for South Kent</b> (Canterbury Central, Dover, Folkestone and Hythe)	<b>17<sup>th</sup> January 3.30 – 4.30pm</b>
<b>School Based Review consultations with KEPS and VSK</b>	<b>20<sup>th</sup> January 1-4pm</b>

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The VSK Advisory Team



The VSK Advisory Team has been formed to combine the work of the Previously Looked After Children Team (PLAC team) with the new workstream encompassing children with a social worker. The team consists of seven members of VSK staff led by Emma Wills as Assistant Head. Emma is supported by two Senior Education Support Officers – Abby Higgins covering South and East Kent and Angela Courtney covering North and West Kent. There are four Education support Officers, Holly Carter, Mindher Vincent, April Martin and Sam Sennett.

The team are available for pre-arranged phone consultations and advice on educational issues for any child who is previously looked after (has left care under an Adoption, Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order) and can offer advice to schools and social workers working with the 'children with a social worker' cohort. Please note, we cannot offer direct individual advice to schools without parental consent.

## DSL Updates

VSK have developed relationships with Designated Teachers, through their joint responsibilities with Children in Care and Previously Looked After Children. We are now looking to develop good working relationships with the Designated Safeguarding Leads within schools, so that we can better understand our new Children with a Social Worker cohort and how best our service can strategically support them to achieve their full educational potential.

We would like to invite you all along to some virtual meetings in January; where we would like share with you, in more detail, the work we are doing and to listen to your ideas, practices and worries you may have around this cohort of vulnerable young people.

The dates for the DSL updates are:

**DSL VSK update online meeting for West Kent** **11<sup>th</sup> January 3.30-4.30pm**

(Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Malling, Sevenoaks, Maidstone and Ashford)

**DSL VSK update online meeting for East Kent** **12<sup>th</sup> January 3.30-4.30pm**

(Thanet, Canterbury Coastal)

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(Gravesham, Dartford and Swale)

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(Canterbury Central, Dover, Folkestone and Hythe)

If you are interested in attending, please email us: [VSKAdvisoryTeam@kent.gov.uk](mailto:VSKAdvisoryTeam@kent.gov.uk). If you are unable to attend the Update for your area, please feel free to join a different session. We really do value your opinions and we look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at one of the sessions.

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## Kent Analytics Data



Over the summer we commissioned Kent Analytics to review the data we have on our children and young people who have a social worker (i.e. those under a CHIN or CP plan). The report provided us with an overview of Kent's school pupils in academic years Reception to Year 14, who were recorded as a child in need (CHIN<sup>1</sup>) or had a child protection plan (CP<sup>2</sup>) during the 12 month period from September to August, in 2018-2019 and 2019-2020.

<sup>1</sup> Pupils who were CHIN only and were not CP or CIC between September to August.

<sup>2</sup> Pupils who had a CP plan only and were not CIC between September to August.

### We can now share with you the headline findings:

- **ONE IN 8 of the pupils with a social worker had three vulnerabilities.** They were regularly absent or excluded from school, had SEND and were from a challenging family and socio-economic environment.
- **58%** of pupils with a social worker were eligible for free school meals, which is more than **THREE TIMES** the rate of all KCC pupils.
- **36%** of pupils with a social worker recorded poor attendance at school, which is **THREE TIMES** the rate of all KCC pupils.
- **9%** of pupils with a social worker had a fixed term exclusion, which is nearly **FOUR TIMES** the rate of all KCC pupils.
- **21%** of pupils recorded as being permanently excluded from school in 2018/2019 had a social worker in the same year.
- **24%** of pupils with a social worker had SEN support at school, which is more than **DOUBLE THE RATE** of all year R-11 non-special school pupils.
- **8%** of secondary school pupils with a social workers had an EHCP, which is more than **FOUR TIMES** the rate of all KCC secondary school pupils.
- **7%** of primary school pupils with a social worker had and EHCP, which is more than **THREE times** the rate of all KCC Primary school pupils.
- **2%** of pupils with a social worker were known to the youth offending team, which is **TEN TIMES** the rate of all KCC school pupils.
- **11%** of pupils with a social worker visited a Children's Centre or Youth Hub, which is more than **TWICE** the rate of all KCC pupils.

We are sure you will agree that these figures are not comfortable reading. We are very much looking forward to working with you and the services which support these young people to see a positive impact on this data. When we achieve this, we will know that we have made a positive impact on the educational outcomes for these children and young people.

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## How schools can help. Please can you:

Identify the cohort of children within your school:

- Which children are currently on a CIN or CP Plan? Which children have been on a CIN or CP plan whilst being on roll with your setting? The government have identified this cohort within Local Authority guidance so far, so be prepared and ahead of the game in terms of potential changes within other statutory guidance – for example, Ofsted inspections etc.
- Ensure the relevant staff are aware of who these children are – by working with the Designated Safeguarding Leads, Designated Mental Health Leads, Pastoral support team, SENCO, Designated Teacher, Form tutors etc. As an educational setting, you will be able to have a clear picture of the needs of your cohort, which in turn will enable you to plan support and interventions. Meet regularly to discuss this cohort to review their attainment, attendance, and wellbeing data.
- Use the opportunities available to you from the Countywide approach to inclusive education – invest time and energy in becoming nurture schools (as VSK are doing!). It is an approach that is proven to work and will give you the knowledge to support all children through any adverse experience. The practices you will develop and embrace within your ethos of your educational setting will benefit all who are part of your community – pupils, staff, and families.
- Our children want us to have high aspirations for them, to believe in them and not to treat them differently. We must support them to achieve their potential and to ensure that educational settings and services do not become barriers to achieving this for them.
- Take up the opportunities available through the Reconnect Programme and consider any reconnect grants that may be available to you. For more information please see [Reconnect: Kent children and young people - Kent County Council](#)
- Use the Quick Link section of our website to access further information and support for this cohort of children, for example the Resilience Hub, SEN Hub, trauma and attachment resources etc.
- Identify interventions that will support your cohort of children with a social worker. Please refer to the Education Endowment Foundation for more information.

## Exclusions and Reduced Timetables (RTT).

We have been liaising with PIAS and social work teams to look at ways to reduce exclusions and reduced timetables.

We are fully aware of the pressure schools and education settings are currently under, as we all begin to recover from Covid, school closures and the impact this has had on social, emotional mental health. We would always recommend that schools are led by their safeguarding policies, rather than their behaviour policies when it comes to the most vulnerable children.

PIAS and VSK are in the process of putting together some supporting documents for social workers and the families, so that they understand the implications and reasons behind exclusions and reduced timetables.

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## **Kent Education Psychology Service.**

We are working closely with the Kent Education Psychology Service (KEPS) on a range of initiatives for this cohort of children:

### **School Based Review consultations with KEPS and VSK.**

We will be holding termly 30 minute consultations with schools and social workers, KEPS and VSK to give you the opportunity to discuss individual complex cases (with parental consent). They aim to support school staff to provide an educational environment that is ambitious and designed to give all learners, particularly the most disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), what they need to succeed in life.

These will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. The next consultations will be on held on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> January between 1 – 4pm. If you are interested, please contact us for more details.

### **Other Projects:**

#### **Sensory Training for schools**

VSK, KEPS, Specialist Teaching and Learning Service and the Regional Adoption Agency are putting together a suite of training opportunities to support schools to inclusively support children with sensory needs within the classroom. We will begin with an hour introductory webinar and follow this up with in-person hands-on training to share ideas and techniques. After this we will offer further webinars to ensure practices are embedded within the classroom setting. If you would like to find out more, please contact us for more details.

#### **Anxiety Based School Avoidance support for schools.** (Previously known as School refuser)

Anxiety Based School Avoidance (ABSA) is when a child or young person:

- Has extreme difficulty attending school due to anxiety or other emotional factors, often resulting in long absences from school
- Has severe emotional reactions when attempting to go to school – for example, fearfulness, anxiety, bad temper, misery, physical symptoms, low self-confidence etc.
- Stays at home during the school hours with parents' knowledge.

Please look at [Kent CPD Online | Home Page \(theeducationpeople.org\)](https://www.theeducationpeople.org/) for training details.



## Future Plans



We will be contacting all schools directly over the coming months to talk about your cohorts of children with a social worker and previously looked after children. Please get in contact with us if you would like us to prioritise our visit to your provision.

### Handy Guides.

We are in the process of compiling a range of handy guides for social workers and parents around educational issues. Please look out for these on our website.

### VSK Children with a Social Worker school project.

We are hoping to work with a small number of schools across the county who have high numbers of children with a social worker. This is a pilot project which will involve a multi-agency approach to how best to support the schools to support the young people. We are aware of some amazing inclusive practice, and it is hoped that we can share this with other schools to also benefit their cohorts.

If you have any good news stories about how you have made a difference to these young people, please do get in touch, we would love to share your story!

If you have any ideas, however big or small, we would love to hear from you, please do get in touch.

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