



VIRTUAL SCHOOL NEWSLETTER | SUMMER 2025

HELPING EVERY CHILD TO THRIVE



Meet the team

Hi everybody!
my name is Carol.



I am the Business Support Officer, supporting the Aspire Virtual School. I have joined the team recently on a contract and I am very excited to be working with such a great set of committed people.

I will be supporting the Deputy Headteacher, Assistant Headteacher for CIN and CP, and SENDCo Assistant Headteacher. My role also involves supporting the admin team in the great work they do in the virtual school. I am enthusiastic and keen to learn a lot, as I am sure I will.

SAVE THE DATE

FOSTER CARERS COFFEE MORNING

Tues 16th Sept 2025 : 9:30 - 11.00am

Venue: Costa opposite Barking Station

FOSTER CARER TRAINING

Tues 30th Sept 2025 : 10.00 am - 1.00pm

Topic: Getting the most out of the PEP & Pupil Premium Plus

Venue: Dagenham and Redbridge Football Club RM10 7XL

DESIGNATED TEACHERS: DT NETWORK MEETING

Wed 8th Oct 2025 : 8.30-12.30

Venue: Dagenham and Redbridge Football Club RM10 7XL

INTRODUCING THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL APP

We are excited to introduce the Virtual School App

a brand-new resource designed to support the adults around our children and young people in care, as well as the young people themselves. The app provides easy access to a growing library of training modules for Designated Teachers, Social Workers, and Foster Carers, with a particular focus on trauma-informed practices and effective strategies for supporting education and emotional wellbeing. Whether you're looking to build your knowledge, upskill in your role, or explore current best practices, the app brings training straight to your fingertips in a convenient and accessible format.

For our young people - especially care leavers and those at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) - the app is a vital companion. It includes practical, youth-friendly guides on everything, from applying to university and preparing for interviews, to understanding apprenticeships, building research skills, and managing money. Updated regularly with new content, the Aspire Virtual School App is a one-stop hub to empower young people on their path to independence and success, while also helping the professionals around them to offer the best possible support.

ASPIRE VIRTUAL SCHOOL MENTORING PROGRAMME

EMPOWERING FUTURES

Aspire Virtual School recently commissioned a Mentoring Programme for young people in Year 9 and above, with the goal of supporting their personal development, career planning, and emotional wellbeing.

The programme matched young people with experienced mentors who provided consistent one-to-one sessions focused on goal setting, self-reflection, and exploring future pathways. Whether students were thinking about college, apprenticeships, or employment, the mentors offered tailored advice and encouragement.

The programme had a significant impact. Young people reported feeling more confident, motivated, and better prepared to make decisions about their futures. Many described how the mentoring sessions helped them develop key life skills such as communication, time management, and planning.

**Aspire Virtual School
Mentoring Programme –
Empowering Futures**
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One student shared, “My mentor helped me believe in myself – I didn’t think university was for me before, but now I feel like it’s something I can actually do.”

Another commented, “I liked having someone who listened to me and didn’t judge – it made a big difference.”

Feedback highlighted that having a trusted, non-judgemental adult to talk to on a regular basis helped students feel supported and more engaged with their education.

Some even said it was the first time they had spoken to someone about their aspirations. The mentoring programme clearly demonstrated the power of positive relationships in helping care-experienced young people to build resilience, raise their ambitions, and take steps towards a brighter future.

FUTURE FRONTIERS

▶ We have been working with an organisation called Future Frontiers who are a non-profit organisation who work with young people at KS4 around careers. ▶

The Virtual School has funded their work in all of the secondary schools across the borough following a pilot into schools last year.

The impact reports from the pilot schools were very favourable and we hope that all of the young people participating this year will have similarly positive experiences.

The project runs across 4 weeks in year 10 and involved trips into businesses in London where pupils discuss career aspirations with professionals, have opportunities to explore different avenues and what qualifications they will need to follow them. This is followed up with further mentoring during year 11.

The Virtual School's Extended Role

The DfE has extended the role of the Virtual School to include supporting Kinship Carers. Kinship carers are people other than parents who are looking after a child for 28 days or more at a time (this includes grandparents, other family members and family friends).

These carers may require support as these children:

- May have experienced trauma
- Could be vulnerable and disadvantaged
- Could present with challenging behaviour

Kinship Carers require support because their willingness to help introduces a big change into their family dynamics, both physically and emotionally, which if not well managed can impact negatively on their own mental health.

The Virtual School is available to help this group in the same capacity of advice and support that we currently offer to PLAC (Previously Looked After Children). This school term, we sent invitations to Kinship Carers to join us for our Coffee Morning with free breakfast. We will continue to share information on training and support opportunities for Kinship Carers. We would appreciate it if our designated teacher could make families in school aware of training for Kinship Carers in your newsletters and through your other communication forums when we share the information with you.

For any clarification regarding Kinship Care contact [Angelina Ikeako](mailto:angelina.ikeako@lbbd.gov.uk): angelina.ikeako@lbbd.gov.uk

OUR THANK YOU CORNER



ALL SAINTS SCHOOL TEAM

A big thank you to the safeguarding team at All Saints School for all they have done particularly since Christmas to support our Looked After Children.

A huge thank you for the care you have shown, particularly **Clare Cantile** (Headteacher) and **Simon Lucraft** (Designated Teacher)



LITTLE HEATH SCHOOL

The extra mile you went in co-ordinating your provision with placement so that our young pupils can engage has been immensely useful. Very happy with the suggested arrangements and their implementation. **Mr D Ramsden** (Head Teacher) and **Josh Coulson** (Deputy Head).



E-LEARNING PLATFORM

As most of you will be aware, the Aspire Virtual School have been working in partnership with BDSIP to create an online CPD platform for the borough. There are units on Trauma and Attachment, ASD for the mainstream classroom, SEMH in the mainstream classroom, Speech and Language development for the primary classroom and Speech and Language development for the secondary classroom.

The online learning takes around an hour and consists of short videos and information sections followed by learning checks in the form of quizzes. At the end you are given a mark and, if you reach the pass threshold, a certificate of completion. This is not to replace all day training but rather to act as an immediately accessible training for new staff who may arrive mid CPD cycle, and as short refreshers for current staff. It is designed for ALL staff including support, admin and mid-day, not just teaching staff.

The platform runs through the BDSIP and the Aspire Virtual School websites. To get your staff onto the platform you will need to contact the BDSIP: at elarning@bdsip.co.uk to request logins.

If any schools have further requests for a short course CPD for their staff, please email adela.kay@lbbd.gov.uk as we are looking to develop the platform with more useful short courses and we would like these to meet your needs.

SUMMER PLANS



This summer promises to be exciting. The Aspire Virtual School has a line-up of activities for our young people.

PLAYFUL CODING

5th - 7th August 2025
at London South Bank University

This event will give young people the opportunity to work on robotics-related projects, produce innovative ideas, and test their limits. It is a great way for young people to enjoy coding and apply their knowledge and skills to solving real-world problems.

A FUN RESIDENTIAL IN WALES

19th - 23rd August 2025

The Aspire Virtual School has organised A free trip to Trewern- August Tuesday 19th - Friday 23rd August (inclusive). This will be in the lovely region of Wales for young people in years 7 - 10. The activities will include mountain walking, caving, gorge walking, canoeing, climbing wall, bushcraft and BMXing.

For more information on any of these events please contact:
Carol Julien
carol.julien@lbbd.gov.uk



QUALITY ASSURANCE TIPS

When PEP is Ragged as Requires Improvement

It can be frustrating to find your Personal Education Plan (PEP) rated as "Requires Improvement."



Often, the reasons come down to missing or incomplete key sections, particularly in Sections B and C. While the importance of each form may vary depending on the child's individual needs certain core elements are non-negotiable for audit and moderation purposes.

PEP minimum standards checklist

If any of the following are missing, the PEP will be RAG rated as Requires Improvement:

SECTION B.

• Attainment Levels and Achievements

How do we track progress term after term?

• The PEP Meeting Notes

(Input from Designated Teacher & Social Worker is essential)

• Targets

PP+ (Pupil Premium Plus) funding must be clearly accounted for.

Section C

• **Young Person's View** : Their voice is not optional - it's critical.

Good practices for completing PEPs

• **Evidence is key** : Each form should contain some data. If a page has too many fields not applicable to the child, typing "N/A" in the top box shows it was considered and is not simply missing.

• Complete forms before the meeting :

Populate forms using generic data (e.g., teacher round robins).

• Leaving them blank with an intention to "fill in later" often leads to oversight due to other pressing tasks.

Social Worker's final checklist before signing off.

Ask yourself: Why was I asked to attend PEP training?

Because the PEP is your document. It represents your professional contribution to the young person's education. Its quality must mirror that of any document you submit in Liquid Logic.

You're expected to work closely with the school to ensure the following are fully completed:

Section A.

- Care Information
- Health and Emotional Wellbeing
- The PEP Meeting

Plus, the designated teacher's essential sections (from Section B & C as above).

The PEP meeting section matters

The PEP Meeting entry in Section B is critical. It should house the minutes of discussion. If left blank, it may be assumed that no meeting took place. While designated teachers may sometimes pre-fill all sections due to tight timelines or difficulty scheduling meetings, this does not replace the value of a real discussion involving all stakeholders.

Emotional well-being supports learning

Use the Health and Emotional Wellbeing section to reflect:

- The foster carer's view
- The young person's emotional needs

This helps in setting targets that support the child's well-being and encourage active learning (e.g., homework support, accessing online resources at home).

FINAL THOUGHT:

The PEP is more than a form - it's a living educational support plan. Treat it with the same level of care and completeness you would any statutory document. When each section is thoughtfully completed, the PEP becomes a powerful tool to advocate for and improve the life chances of our children in care.

KATHY IS RETIRING

Hear the heartfelt messages from colleagues

HAPPY RETIREMENT
KATHY

Thank you, Kathy, for always being by my side xx

Thank you, Kathy, for always going above and beyond to serve the team and our Looked After Children xx

Thank you Kathy for your calm and measured approach, especially when under pressure xx

Thank you Kathy for sharing your beautiful home with us xx HA

Dear Kathy, it has been such a pleasure to work with you over the years. You always had the answer to my questions and pointed me in the right direction. Thank you for going above and beyond many times. Your smile and calm demeanour always lightened my day. I will miss you. AI

I have loved working with Kathy. I love our little catch ups in the Town Hall and how helpful she is always is when I call her for information on finance help that I never have any clue about. JK

I can't think of just one memory, you've been there in the background (and often the foreground!) in so many moments, always ready to step in and help, no matter the task or team. Whether I was at the college or here, I always knew I could count on you. Thank you for your calm, your kindness, and the way you just quietly get things done. You've been a constant, supportive presence, and you'll be so missed. TC



I met Kathy on my first day at the virtual school and she has been a constant source of guidance and support. I hope she has a restful and enjoyable retirement, she will be missed. AK

A wonderful and kind colleague. My first day encounter and your genuine hospitality made me feel I was coming to a caring environment. That has lasted to this day. Your day-to-day support is beyond measure as you always give above and beyond expectation. PP+ wouldn't be the same without you...the attention to detail will be lost. EB

Dear Kathy, although we have only worked for a short time together, I will miss your welcoming smile and warm character. Thank you for all your help, especially with booking those train tickets.

Take good care of yourself and enjoy this special time with your family. JO

Your warm reception was unparalleled at all events. A memorable instance involved a high-profile speaker and a late attendee who thanked you for making her feel at ease by pointing at you across the hall. That's how I felt with you Kathy. People might not remember your name but your kindness will remain in them. EB