Welcome

Dear Colleagues

Welcome all to our latest VSK Newsletter. First of all I would like to acknowledge a real landmark, highlighting the incredible commitment of 30 years service within KCC of our very own Fostering Education Liaison Officer Steve Orwin. So congratulations Steve from all at VSK, all the foster carers you have supported and most importantly the young people you have helped, who would all want to say a big ‘thank you’.

As well as celebrating this landmark please take time to read about the latest developments and important practice updates in this newsletter. This edition includes information on ePEP and news from our area and locality teams, including key updates on our literacy projects, developments in our new Progression Officer role and our current training offer around attachment.

So with the Summer Term and examination season fast approaching we enter a crucial time for our young people. Whether it is end of year tests or external examinations such as SATS, GCSE’s, Vocational Qualifications or A Levels, now is the time to work hard for the final push to ensure our young people achieve their potential. Please ensure you are in regular contact with the Virtual School to ensure you can benefit from all the support we can offer.

On behalf of VSK, thank you for all your hard work so far this year.

Tony Doran
Headteacher, Virtual School Kent
CONGRATULATIONS STEVE!

I’d first like to begin this spring update with big congratulations to our FELO Steve Orwin who is celebrating 30 years of loyal service with Kent County Council.

Steve arrived in 1986 as a principal social worker in the Gillingham office; and subsequently worked with Adult Services and Kent Youth Service before joining VSK as a Fostering Education Liaison Officer in April 2011.

The South Kent team enjoyed a well-deserved treat with Steve, as we tucked into a delicious afternoon tea at The Secret Garden together during the half term break - which was quite fitting, as Steve’s fondness for tea is legendary.

Steve is a great asset to VSK and we are very pleased to have been able to recognize his achievement whilst he remains a valued member of our team.

ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT FOSTERING?

Open your heart and you could help to transform the lives of children and young people in Kent by becoming a foster carer.

KCC are especially looking for carers for:
- older children – aged 13 to 18
- siblings
- disabled children

If you think you can provide children with the stability and routine they need to flourish and develop then please give KCC Fostering a call on 03000 420 002 or come along to an information event http://www.kentfostering.co.uk/events to find out about the benefits, payments and all the great support KCC can provide you.
ePEP NEWS

The ePEP team would like to extend their thanks to all Designated Teachers who have worked so hard to close as many PEPs as possible over the past few weeks. It is now more than ever imperative that PEPs are written up within the 7 day target date so that the document can be closed, all data preserved and the meeting evidenced. Over time this will reduce the administrative burden on our Designated Teachers as it will ensure the PEP is closed and each young person has a new PEP open and ready on the system for their next PEP meeting.

Reviewing Targets

One of the questions we have been asked frequently over the past couple of weeks is ‘How can the impact of the PEP targets / interventions be addressed?’, ‘How do target RAG ratings work?’ and ‘When should targets be RAG rated?’

We would suggest that targets are reviewed prior to the next PEP meeting so that the impact of interventions can be addressed by all professionals during the meeting discussion. You all know that Section B should be updated with the Designated Teacher input two weeks prior to the PEP meeting and for review PEPs we would suggest that reviewing targets should form part and parcel of this pre-meeting preparation.

To review a target on the system it is first necessary to navigate to the target section, once there click the ‘View’ button on the right hand side of available options;

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Id</th>
<th>Created</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Approval status</th>
<th>RAG Rating</th>
<th>Target Status</th>
<th>Date Submitted</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>16363</td>
<td>16/02/2017</td>
<td>Academic achievement and value</td>
<td>Pending</td>
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This reopens the target form and all of the details regarding the target action and responsibilities can be viewed. Approximately two thirds of the way down you are given the option to review the target within the section ‘On-Going Review of Target’; this includes a RAG rating and comments box;
A range of options to track the progress of the target intervention are available;

- **Red** – no progress toward the outcome has been made
- **Amber** – some progress toward the outcome has been made
- **Green** – good progress toward the outcome has been made and the outcome is nearly achieved
- **Intervention in progress** – this is the default value the systems assign before the target is reviewed.

Each of these options leaves the target within its default category on the system e.g. a target can be categorised as both ‘Green’ and ‘No Funding’;

- **Achieved** – the outcome has been achieved
- **Not achieved** – the outcome has not been achieved

Achieved and not achieved however are two options which over-write all other categorisations within the target section (funding, no funding etc.) and move the target to the bottom of the target area. Once you have selected the relevant RAG rating for the particular target and entered any comments required navigate to the bottom of the target form to save your changes.

The system will update the target with the RAG rating selected and display the date the target was reviewed;

If a target outcome is indicated as achieved or not achieved this will then drop to the bottom of the target section and the date will be updated;

Detailed guidance on this section can be downloaded from the noticeboard under ‘How to review targets and evidence the impact of PP+ spend using ePEP online’.
PEP RAG and Audit

As we are sure you are all aware the system has recently been updated to allow the Designated Teacher to view the Quality Assurance role the Virtual School takes in the PEP process. A PEP RAG rating (Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement, and Inadequate) is displayed on the PEP overview and the criteria used can be viewed in ‘Section F VSK Overview – PEP Audit’

If you have any questions about the rating received, PEP quality or identifying the relevant PEP section please contact your locality or ePEP Team directly. Guidance on this process will shortly be available on the noticeboard and website.

PEP Page and PP+ Spend

Please also be aware that we have added a new box to the PEP page to make it easier for you to evidence the use and impact of your £300.00 termly PP+ spend. This will have an impact on the PEP RAG rating and is available in Section D ‘The PEP Meeting’.

Further guidance

If you have any queries about this or any other aspect of ePEP please do not hesitate to contact the ePEP Team directly or check out the information on our website: http://www.virtualschool.lea.kent.sch.uk/vsk-resources/personal-education-plan-epep.
Thank you for your continued hard work, commitment and understanding in your daily work with our CiC. We have reached the half way point of the academic year, and your focussed dedication to ensuring our CiCs reach their end of year targets and examination potential is clearly evident in the contact we have with you in school, and the feedback we receive from Foster Carers. Paula Howe, our Progression Adviser, will be working closely with your Year 11 and 13 CiCs to help support that appropriate pathways are planned for their next steps in their educational journeys; at Locality level we are committed to reducing the potential of our CiCs becoming NEET and your collaboration with Paula and our Post-16 team is crucial. Our Educational Support Officers: Abigail Ingram, Emma Wills and Jo Rees are also beginning their work supporting the transition of Year 6 CiCs into their chosen secondary provision.

We are looking forward to seeing many of you at our Multi-Agency day on Thursday 23rd March ’17: the day will offer a further opportunity to share best practice, to enable our CiCs to get the best out of their education experience.

We are currently running ‘The Paired Reading’ programme with thirteen of our CiCs. This programme is supported by the Kent Educational Psychologists’ Service and involves foster carers reading regularly with their young person, using the specific method of paired reading. The carers receive weekly supervision from two of our Educational Support Workers, Abigail and Emma. Research from previous Paired Reading projects have shown an average increase in a child’s reading age of fifteen months in a sixteen week period. Thank you to the schools involved, for accommodating Abigail and Emma so they were able to complete the baseline reading assessments. We are hoping for exciting results when we re-assess at the end of the programme. We have received some great feedback already from carers:

“She’s enjoying it. At one point, she had got so into the story, that she was laughing so much she couldn't read!”

“Really enjoying it - understands the story and retells the story in her words, which is lovely.”

“He likes the method. It has moved him onto stories that he would not have been able to cope with. He is taking in the concept of story and asking questions. It takes the pressure off him and supports him. Beginning to remember some of the words that he has been told. School have commented on reading improvement.”

“She is loving it and I (foster carer) have already asked school to move her up a level in reading, which they have done – brilliant!”
Finally, I would like to recommend two publications which will further support your thinking around the children in care you are working with:


Both are a straightforward, yet insightful read. I particularly enjoyed ‘Pathways through education’ which references the Paired Reading Programme and has a whole section on practical approaches for removing the barriers to academic success for children in care.

**Jen Kemp, Assistant Head South Kent (Ashford, Hythe & The Marsh)**

Tel: 03000 415685 or Email: Jennifer.kemp@kent.gov.uk

Terms 3 and 4 for me are busy with tracking and monitoring visits, so if you have not seen me in school yet then rest assured you will soon. I like to emphasize on these visits that their purpose is not solely for the use of data collection, especially now that ePEP has the capacity to record much of what we need, but that this time is for you as DTs to reflect on your practice, receive advice and guidance on individual pupil cases and consider any training needs you or your school may have. It’s also an opportunity to discuss what is going well for our young people and think about the ways in which you as DTs make a difference to their outcomes. We so often focus on the negative aspects of life for our CiC that it is so important to record and acknowledge their achievements both in and outside of school.

I have also been alerting you all to the new function on ePEP that allows you to see what grading we have given each completed PEP. We hope this will continue to support us in our drive for improving the quality, particularly with regards to good target setting and reviewing. So go for green in South Kent!

Finally, myself and two AH colleagues, Jo Kelly and Gina Turner, have been re-developing VSK’s Attachment Awareness training which is ready to deliver from Term 4. The training is designed to help your school become more in tune with the needs of children who demonstrate insecure or disorganized attachments styles, and provide your staff with the opportunity to develop strategies of support. The training is now a three hour session that can be delivered in two twilight sessions or a half day inset. Please contact me if you are interested in receiving the new training package.
In-between a very busy / short / fast paced term, it’s nice to take time to look at other projects we enhance and share some nicer successes, these include:

Last May VSK bought into the **The Letterbox Club**, a programme which aims to provide enjoyable educational support for our CiC aged 5-13 years and managed by the Book Trust in partnership with the University of Leicester. The parcels went out monthly for six months for year groups 1, 3, 5, and 7 and included:

- A range of carefully selected books from different genres.
- Some simple number games (these can be played individually or as a group).
- Stationery items for writing and drawing.

Some of the parcels include letters from famous children’s authors such as Michael Rosen, David Walliams and Malorie Blackman! The feedback we have received from our children and carers has been so positive that I’m delighted to say that VSK have brought into this again and parcels will start to go out this May.

Seeing the success of this scheme VSK decided to buy into **Storytime**: a magazine that is full of fun stories and colourful pictures. We decided that these were suitable for various ages and so have sent these to the younger children and some of the ones in between the Letterbox age group with this programme running for one year.

The VSK FELOs are now responsible for **Early Years PEP’s**. From the age of 3 every child will have a EYPEP and so far we can report a 100% completion. However better than percentages, I feel that we need to credit our Early Years Providers at what is becoming very clear with the various settings we visit is the excellent work our early years providers are producing I have been very impressed with lots of settings that are addressing issues early, they are proactive in getting in outside agencies like the Specialist Teaching Service, they are aware and have referred to LIFT, they have applied and been successful in getting Speech and Language Assessments in place and work in a very target focused plan for every individual child, ensuring that the children are as school ready as possible and attending the first primary PEP to ensure continuity.
The VSK FELOs recently met with Beanstalk, the reading charity that offers fantastic support and continuity of working with our CiC in schools for one year. The scheme is not new; it has a proven track record of making real attainment difference to children’s reading abilities and has lately had a new intake of volunteers.

We have recently sent details to Designated Teachers in every primary school that has CiC in East Kent. Funding is met by VSK if the school have 3 CiC to work with. However if the school only has 2 CiC then another child that they feel would benefit can be included with the cost likely to be met by VSK by referring to Malcolm Thomas or you can use PP+ funding. If not then the cost to the school would be £214 for one child for one year, which in itself is a small amount and very cost effective value.

Feedback from real people experiencing Beanstalk

“J is very complex, school struggle daily with him, he has support in place, he has CAMHS, he has us, he has a good social worker, but what he really likes and I really do not want this to stop is Beanstalk, when times were difficult for another child we have in placement, they even came to our house, rather than J miss his sessions”. (Carer)

“We do struggle at times with J, but when Beanstalk come in, we see another side to J, he always knows the days she is coming, he waits for his session, and then we see this very calm boy who engages throughout his time and comes back to class a calmer, happier boy” (School)

“I just like it, she never lets me down, it’s my calm time, I’m not afraid to make a mistake and I always get to choose the books” (Young Person)

EAST KENT TRAINING DATES 2017

East Kent Multi Agency Day

- 7th March 2017 at Canterbury Academy

Attachment Training

- 6th March at Green Banks
- 25th April at Brook House

If you require more information about these events, then please contact the office on 03000 421157
Simon Fosse-Collins, Assistant Head Thanet

Tel: 03000 418601 or Email: simon.fosse-collins@kent.gov.uk

It has been great meeting many of the dedicated Designated Teachers in Thanet. It is clear that many of you face new challenges and here at Virtual School we are always willing to support you with these.

One area that we are always willing to help with is PEPs. It is clear that from reviewing these documents that many of you are holding high quality meetings and formulating solid plans to support our CIC. There are some really positive examples of good practice that I would like to share with you.

- Schools attaching EHCPs, PSPs or other support documents.
- Accurate details around current progress and attainment.
- Schools including SMART targets with at least one in the core academic subjects.
- Clear evidence that Pupil Premium Plus is being used to support the child effectively.
- When the child has chosen not to attend the PEP, schools outlining who will feedback to the child.
- Planning for an effective transition into a new school.
- The PEP Meeting Section fully reflecting the discussions held in the meeting.

Hopefully you have all noticed that there is a new box on the PEP Meeting Page relating to PP+. This is for you to show off all the good work you complete with our young people and ensure that they receive positive support with their educational outcomes.

One area of concern though is that a number of PEPs are not closed within 7 days of the meeting. We would ask you to ensure that you are meeting this deadline.

It is hard to believe that we are nearly halfway through the school year. Soon our thoughts will be turning to the long summer holidays, a well deserved rest and cocktails by the pool. For our Yr6s and Yr11s though this will mean a potential change in schooling is looming for them come September. This of course can be a period of huge anxiety. The transition from one education setting to another can be tricky for our CIC. Lots of new faces, lots of new places and very different routines. To help this transition go smoothly, we would ask that you start to build positive links with the young person’s next steps by inviting staff from school or college to the next PEP. If you are unsure whom you should contact please let us know, and of course VSK can also be part of the support package for our CIC.
In other news, Mike Kelly recently joined VSK as Thanet’s Y11 Progression Officer.

My key responsibility is to make sure that the Yr11s apply for suitable Yr12 courses. I will usually meet the young person within school hours, but depending on individual cases I will offer to work with them in their placement or an alternative setting. Some young people might need very little prompting and help, while others might require some intensive work. If the young person would like to visit an alternative provider I will help to arrange this for them. This can help provide a smoother transition into Yr12 and reduce anxiety for the young person. All this is with the aim of reducing the number of CIC who become NEET.

We have recently renewed two contracts that put in direct support for our young people:

- The Lighthouse Project will be continuing to support many of our children with challenges around their time in school.

- The second is Letterbox Project who will continue to post high quality books and activities to our young people in Years 1, 3, 5 and 7.

In the mean time if you have any questions about anything relating to our CIC, then please get in touch.

**VSK CHARITY QUIZ NIGHT 29TH MARCH**

The Thanet Locality Team are supporting Global Challenge an outreach of Queens Road Baptist Church in Broadstairs a charity which aims to alleviate poverty and suffering in the Soroti region of Uganda to improve education and self-sufficiency. They finance and support most of the running costs and all the capital costs of Crossroads Secondary School, providing education to around 300 children, many of whom have lost all their family due to conflict. The school is looking to expand and redevelop to meet the needs of these young people.

Venue: St George’s School in Broadstairs, Thanet
Time: 7pm for 7:30pm start
Price: £3 per person - £18 for a team of six. Cash on the night

Tea/Coffee available or bring your own alternatives!

For all bookings, please contact Laura James at laura.james@kent.gov.uk or 03000 411852
What have our children and young people been up to?

- One young man has passed his driving test – first time!
- One of our year 13 students has received an offer from Southampton University for this September…
- And our students at a NK special school performed in Voice in a Million at the Woodville Halls

Let us know other great news about what they’ve been doing in their next PEPs…

**Being Mindful at the Leigh Academy Trust Schools with VSK**

The first stage of the Mindfulness project was so successful that it is moving into the second stage at five of the Trust’s schools – Longfield Academy, Leigh Academy, Wilmington Academy, Hartley Primary Academy and Dartford Primary Academy.

Students will have the opportunity to take part in weekly groups this term run by the trainer Julie Stannard - and the focus is on helping them to learn Mindful techniques that can help them to improve their emotional well-being as well as hopefully their relationship management skills, engagement with education and reduce stress.

The Safe Quiet Place approach is being used and as Julie says “Mindfulness is simple, it means paying attention here and now, with kindness and curiosity - and then choosing your behaviour.” We look forwards to seeing how it all goes.

**Reflective Listening**

This new PP+ project has just started and is an opportunity for DTs/DT supports to come together regularly to contemplate complex cases with the support of Rachel O’Connor (Educational Psychologist).

Some of the schools have already fed back to me and feel it is a very positive help. Rachel uses a variety of techniques in the sessions such as ‘Imago’ and hopefully the group will be one way of helping schools to feel more able to regulate feelings that can come about through working with CIC.

Contact joanne.kelly@kent.gov.uk if you would like to take part in future
A new piece of Training in NK from VSK: The ATTACHMENT TOOLKIT TRAINING

The first of these sessions was held at the SMILE Centre in November for the SENCOs Well Being event. It is an extension to the Attachment training we usually deliver to schools (which is still available and free) and was developed with the support of CIC CAMHS.

The training was very well received and 100% of those attending rated it as either Excellent or Good.

It is based on ideas from the books in the range ‘Observing children with attachment difficulties’ (which also includes one for pre school and one for secondary). It extends the Foundation Attachment training into learning about Attachment styles and considering highly personalised strategies for young people with insecure attachment difficulties. It can be delivered as bespoke to your school/setting in a variety of ways as well as groups of schools. Contact Amanda.Ormond@kent.gov.uk for further information.

Distress Calls and Daisy Chains

We work closely with Eden Counselling as they provide a therapy service for our children using PP+ to fund the interventions. Eden have been supporting a group of young people to express their own interpretation of childhood difficulties and hope through photography - and the exhibition will be at the Orchard Shopping Centre in Dartford on Wednesday 3rd May, 12-5pm and Thursday 4th May, 9am-3pm. One of our own CIC has the opportunity to take part too. If you cant make it then Eden will also be doing postcards of the young people’s work.

And last but not least, look out for:

The LAC Solihull Approach Training in March

Mastery in Maths Project

And the NK PP+ Provision Map – see what you can access at a glance. All the things we have ready to offer your school/carer/young person. Email Joanne.Kelly@kent.gov.uk for a copy or for information on any of the above articles.

Have a great term and look forwards to seeing you soon! Joanne Kelly (Asst Head) & the NK Team
Natasha Devon (co-founder of the Self Esteem Team) spoke last week at an informative conference run by Maidstone STLS, and she had me thinking about resilience, vulnerability and the importance of being able to tell our own story; to make sure that our voice is heard. Her speech was inspirational, both in its content and in its delivery. Discussing the impact of our society on mental health (and we all have a mental health) she covered everything from the pressures of unnecessary educational assessment on young people (and their teachers) to the media, and the unrealistic ideals portrayed as reality all around us.

CiC are often unable to build the same level of resilience to such influences as other children (who have usually experienced more stability in their early years). According to this document published by the Government in December 2016 60% of CiC have “some form of emotional or mental health illness.” When looking at the risk factors, this is not a surprise and part of the work that we do, alongside colleagues from social care and health is to try to eliminate these risk factors, and introduce and build upon protective factors. Times of stress, including periods of change can impact negatively upon all children (and adult's) mental health. Even changes, which are expected, and planned (such as transfer to Secondary School) can impact on a child's vulnerability. A well-planned and supported transition is central to ensuring that school remains a place that is stable and where they feel secure, even if the building and adults have changed. We are running a training session on transition in the coming weeks, focussed on these expected and usual changes that children experience. Wherever possible an adult with a positive relationship with the child should support the child with their transition, working alongside other adults in the child’s network as well as a key person from the child’s new school.

It is also crucial that a child can communicate their feelings with those around them effectively. Many problems remain unsolved when children cannot verbalise their feelings, or are unable to find an adult who they trust to tell. Further issues can arise when a child does speak, but they are not heard, or they do not feel that their message has been listened to. We have recently completed some training with the Speakers Trust whose mission is to create a pathway for young people, from primary school through further education, to enhance their speaking and communication skills. By helping children to become better communicators, they can improve their education outcomes, and maybe the desire to use the power of their voice to bring positive change on a wider platform. The Speakers Trust also hold an annual competition for Young People in Public Speaking – the winner of 2015 can be seen here, with a very appropriate message.


Margaret Hamlyn, Assistant Head West Kent, SENCO & OOC (Tonbridge & Tunbridge Wells)

Tel: 03000 412777 or Email: Margaret.hamlyn@kent.gov.uk
PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

The Participation Team have been busy with the ever growing Children in Care Councils and organising activity days for Kent CiC. These days provide a great opportunity to meet other young people with similar experiences and help shape the services they receive.

Over the February half term they held two participation days and the Super Council and OCYPKC met to discuss what their ideal foster carer would be like and spoke about what their favourite thing about their carer is. Everyone got involved and gave some of the qualities that the young people identified were:

- Kind
- Loving
- Caring
- Honest
- Fun
- Good Listener
- Open Minded

On Monday 13th February 34 young people met at Revolutions Skate park and Climbing Centre in Broadstairs. Everyone had a go at rock climbing (and we are so proud of those that overcame their fear of heights) and skating with scooters. It was a brilliant day!

On Friday 17th February we held an activity day at This Art of Mine Studio in Maidstone where young people could decorate t-shirts or mugs. Over the day 42 young people attended and everyone had a lot of fun by getting creative and a little bit messy!!!!

For more information about the activity days or if you know any young people who would be interested in joining one of the Children in Care Councils, please get in touch with us at VSK_Participation@kent.gov.uk.

TEAM NEWS!

Congratulations to Bella Taylor who has recently completed her Level 3 NVQ in Business Administration. She has recently taken up an admin position in the NHS and we wish her all the very best for the future!

And we are looking forward to four new apprentices joining us shortly!

KENT CARES TOWN

Don’t forget to visit our website for Kent Children in Care and Care Leavers

http://kentcarestown.lea.kent.sch.uk/

Here they will find lots of useful information about being in care, copies of the latest newsletters, competitions, activities and much much more!
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