

Welcome!

Hello and welcome to the Walsall Virtual School newsletter! We know this is always a very busy term in school, so we hope this newsletter finds you well, and that you have had a positive start to the year.

In this newsletter please find updates on Virtual School projects, training dates for this term and other information we think you will find useful.

As always, don't hesitate to contact us if you have any thoughts, questions or ideas at WalsallVirtualSchool@walsall.gov.uk



Virtual School Spring Term Projects and Updates

IXL

We have subscribed to the learning platform IXL, so all of our children and young people in Years 1-11 have access to the IXL English and maths programmes. IXL is personalised learning. With a comprehensive curriculum, individualised guidance and real-time analytics, IXL meets the unique needs of each learner.



Learning designed for your child



Real-Time Diagnostic

Find out what your child knows and next steps for growth with IXL's Real-Time Diagnostic



Unlimited Practice

Build a strong foundation of knowledge with unlimited practice in over 6,500 topics



Targeted Guidance

Diagnostic personalised skill recommendations based on your child's practice



Mobile Apps

Take learning on the go with IXL's mobile apps



Awards & Certificates

Earn fun awards and certificates that celebrate hard work

The usernames are mostly the child's first name and initial of their last name, e.g. Joe Bloggs would have the username JoeB.

The passwords are all walsallvs but you can log in and change this.

If you have any issues logging onto IXL, please contact your child's/school's Education Support Officer.



Magazine and Book Projects

As part of our Virtual School offer we have various magazine subscriptions and book projects. Please see below for the projects that started (or continued) in September:

- Children in years 1-8, have received their September and October Book in a Bag pack. This will continue monthly for the rest of the year. In September, the children received a range of fiction and non fiction books depending on their age and in October every child received an age appropriate book about Black History Month.
- Children in years 2, 3 and 4 have received their first 2 monthly copies of Storytime magazine.
- Children in years 7 and 8 have received their first 2 monthly copies of What on Earth!, a magazine created by Britannica.



Half Term Activities

Over the half term holiday, we ran a number of activity days for children from early years through to post 16. We are pleased to say that these were a huge success and we have had really positive feedback from the young people about the activities.

Please see below for some photos, quotes from young people and an idea of what we got up to!

Weekend Residential Trip to Kingswood

We took a small group of children on a weekend residential trip to Kingswood Activity Centre, Staffordshire. The focus of the visit was to support the children to build their self-esteem, confidence and resilience.

They were amazing at giving all of the activities and go and it was lovely to see friendships form as they supported each other as they negotiated activities they had never tried before! We did caving, crate stacking, archery, climbing, bushcraft and much more including a bonfire in the rain!

We are so proud of the children for stepping out of their comfort zone and coming with us for what was a wonderful weekend for them and the adults who went with them!



"I loved all of it... I just wish we could stay a bit longer!"



"I was nervous about coming because I didn't know anyone, but I'm so glad I did come because it's been the best trip ever!" longer!"



"Everyone is really nice and supports each other."



Early Years Stay and Play

It was lovely to see so many carers and children attend the Virtual School Early Years and Play Sessions on Tuesday 31st October at Walsall College Nursery. The session focused on supporting Communication & Language development.

There were lots of lovely activities and resources available for the children to enjoy, including role play activities, having a reading session, using the song sacks and decorating Halloween biscuits.



It was also a great opportunity for carers to speak with the Early Years Team, who can offer advice around the early years curriculum, and activities you can do at home to support learning.

Feedback from this session has been very popular so please look out for future events next term!

Special thanks to Walsall College Nursery for lending us their beautiful space.

ACTIVENOW Snooker Session

Working in partnership with sports professionals from around the country, WMVS Children in Care Foundation is delivering sporting events and workshops that spark an interest in sport and physical activity, to develop the life long skills embedded within young people.

This half term, we had 2 snooker sessions which were enjoyed by young people and staff alike!



Artslink DJ Workshop

Music is such an effective tool to allow people to express themselves and connect. The DJ workshop, run by Artslink, enabled a group of young people to come together and learn useful techniques. They blended sounds, spoke on the mic to hype each other up before performing and simply created art!

The workshop was very empowering, lead by a passionate DJ who channels his creative sounds to entertain. All the young people had thoroughly enjoyed the experience and were keen to ask if there was another session to follow! Watch this space...



Learning Packs

Summer Activity Pack

During the summer holidays we sent 20 boxes of educational, creative and exciting activities out to children and their carers. The boxes contained resources such as den making kits, origami, gardening packs, sports equipment and a polaroid camera. The children had to take part in all the activities and create a scrapbook. Those who sent us some photos of the scrapbook and completed the evaluations went on to receive an additional book voucher, for taking part.

Here are some photos and comments from those who took part:



"Thank you for this fantastic opportunity she really had a great time completing it"



"We enjoyed sharing these activities as a family."



"My young people learnt to work better together. They also learnt to be resilient and got to try new activities that they hadn't tried before."



"A has had lots of fun doing the activities in the box....we have spent the last week making tents and dens every day!"

Year 11 Revision Packs

Young people in Year 11 also received revision packs to start their academic year off with all the equipment they need!

We hope they help your revision!

Writing Packs

Some children in upper Key Stage 2 were also sent Writing Packs. These children were chosen based on information in the Personal Education Plans (PEPs) so we could target those we thought would benefit most from the pack



Pack in the Post

For some children, our Book in a Bag project is not appropriate. But we don't want anyone to miss out so we have created a Pack in the Post project!

Pack in the Post is our project to offer slightly different resources and books that those children not receiving Book in a Bag can enjoy at home. We will send a pack 3 times a term for this academic year.

The first pack was a Halloween themed sensory box!



Teacher's Tool Room

Training so far

This term we had briefing sessions entitled, 'Language that Cares' for our Designated Teachers. The sessions focused on how to write the Personal Education Plans (PEPs) to the children, being mindful that these are documents the children should be at the centre of. These sessions were well attended and feedback was very positive. We can already see the impact of these sessions on how staff are writing the PEPs to the children so thank you for your work and effort in doing this.

If there is something that you think is a particular training need, please let us know by emailing **WalsallVirtualSchool@walsall.gov.uk**

Training Calendar

Please find all upcoming training on our website - <https://wvs.sch.life/Page/Calendar>

We will send an invite closer to each event asking people to email WalsallVirtualSchool@walsall.gov.uk if they would like to attend.

Nurturing Schools Project

As part of our BRICS Project we have recently launched our Nurturing School Project.

The project consists of

- Identifying and developing 4 Nurture Hubs to provide short term nurturing support to vulnerable children and young people in their own locality. This includes the option for commissioned places within the Nurture Hub for children from other schools.
- A Virtual Team of Nurture Specialists to support the development and delivery of training to schools. This will include whole school training, school audits and support in setting up nurture provision in schools. This team will consist of Locality Nurture Hub staff, Specialist EPS, Nurture UK trained Practitioners from the Virtual School and Inclusion Hub.
- Training for all school staff to provide a basic awareness of and the impact of Nurture on a child's development and learning.

The aim of the project is to support schools to deliver the 6 principles of nurture

1. Children's learning is understood developmentally
2. The classroom offers a safe base
3. The importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing
4. Language is vital as a means of communication
5. All behaviour is communication
6. The importance of transition in children's lives programme this term and finding out more how we can become trauma responsive within our school settings.

Trauma & Attachment Aware Schools Project

We are really pleased to announce that we have developed an Attachment Aware & Trauma Informed Practitioner Status. The pathways for practitioners and lead practitioners and take place over 3 or 5 days. We are currently piloting the programme with a hope to fully launch it in February 2024.

We are also excited to be working with 5 new schools in our 4th cohort of schools taking part in our Trauma and Attachment Aware Schools Programme.

If you would like any further information on any of our projects please contact Lorraine.thompson@walsall.gov.uk

Specialist Support Team

Within Walsall Virtual School, we have a Specialist Support Team which consists of Speech and Language Therapists, Educational Psychologists and a Senior Mental Health Practitioner.

Each professional offers different individualised support to schools and young people, including advice, direct work and training.

If you feel your school would benefit from support from our Specialist Support Team, please contact your school's Education Support Officer to discuss further.

Reach2Teach App.

The app offers consistent advice to schools with common challenges they may be facing, using a large evidence base of published books. The app (and advice) has received a positive reception with staff and schools finding it useful.



If you would like any further information on this, please don't hesitate to speak to your Education Support Officer or visit <https://courses.coursewedo.com/courses/reach-to-teach>



Carers' Corner

EasyPeasy is an app-based parenting programme for parents & carers of children from birth to five. It is primarily delivered in the home of the family and used independently, but can also be integrated into early years settings.

Download the EasyPeasy app and discover the best tips and activity ideas, personalised for you and your 0-5 year old shared by our community of parents and experts.

Support Your Child's Development For Free

Download the EasyPeasy app and discover the best tips and activity ideas, personalised for you and your 0-5 year old shared by our community of parents and experts.

Scan to join



It has statistically significant impact on improving the home learning environment and children whose parents/carers have access to EasyPeasy are more likely to achieve a Good Level of Development at the end of Reception, equivalent to two months additional progress.

If you don't have a Walsall address but you have a Walsall child in your care, please use our office postcode – WS1 1NS.

Secondary Transition – Year 6 to Year 7

If your young person is in Year 6, they will be moving to Year 7 and their next adventure in secondary school in September.

The **deadline for applications for children without an EHCP was 31st October 2023**. You will receive your **offer by email on 1 March 2024**. The emails are sent automatically over the course of the day.

The admissions system for children with EHC plans is different; you do not go through the normal admissions system. Our SEN are working on ensuring children in year 6 have their annual reviews of their EHCPs to then consult with secondary schools.



Reception Transition – Nursery to Reception

Children born between 1 September 2019 and 31 August 2020 are due to start reception in September 2024.

Having a place in the nursery class attached to a school does not guarantee a place in the reception class at that school. You must send a separate application for a place in the reception class.

The **portal for Reception 2024 applications opens on 6th November 2023**. If you live outside Walsall, you should complete an application from your home local authority (even if you are applying for a Walsall school).

The 15th January 2024 is the closing date for all primary 2024 applications. Your application along with any additional forms or supporting evidence must be submitted by this date.

Carers apply for the school places. When this has been completed, please send confirmation and the school preferences to Amun Bains (amun.bains@walsall.gov.uk).

Infant to Junior Transitions – Year 2 to Year 3

If your child goes to a primary school, you do not have to make another application. However if your child attends an infant school, you will need to apply to a junior or primary school for year 3.

The **portal for Junior 2024 applications opens on 6th November 2023**. If you live outside Walsall, you should complete an application from your home local authority (even if you are applying for a Walsall school).

The 15th January 2024 is the closing date for all primary 2024 applications. Your application along with any additional forms or supporting evidence must be submitted by this date.

Year 11 Transition

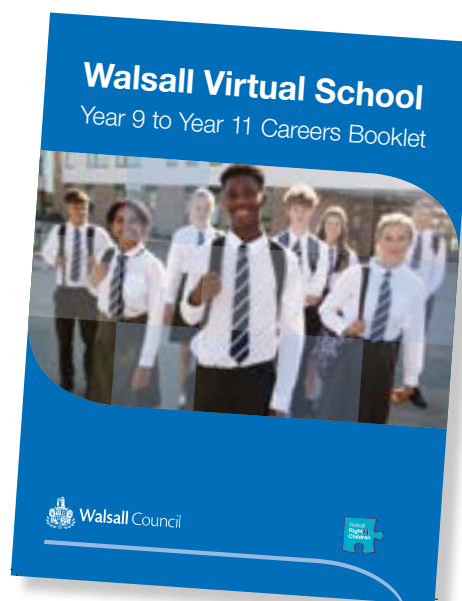
If you have a young person in year 11, now is the time to be supporting them to think about what they will be doing when they leave school and start year 12. They may have already seen our careers advisor, but they will also have one within their school. If you are worried that they don't know what they want to, you can contact their school and ask for them to see the school careers advisor.

By the end of May we would hope that all our year 11 students have applied to a school/college/apprenticeship/training provider and been offered a conditional place.

We have a booklet to help to information and guidance during this important time, so get in touch if you would like a copy (walsallvirtualschool@walsall.gov.uk).

It is important that you support your young person to visit colleges, find out about courses, and apply for their next educational step. If you have a young person with an EHCP, this process needs to be completed by March.

It gives a checklist on what students and carers need to do during years 9, 10 and 11, to make sure they are fully prepared for their P16 education.



Literacy Lounge



Blue Peter Reading Badge

Blue Peter have released a brand new Blue Peter Reading Badge! The exciting new Book badge has been designed by one of the UK's best known illustrators, Sir Quentin Blake; who you might know from bringing to life characters such as Roald Dahl's BFG and Matilda!

To earn your badge, just share your love of books with us by answering the questions in the link below! You can apply using the online form or by post.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/findoutmore/blue-peter-apply-for-a-book-badge>

If you do get a Blue Peter badge, let us know by sending us a photo or an email to walsallvirtualschool@walsall.gov.uk and we'll send you a book voucher to celebrate your love of reading!

Storytime

We have signed up children in years 2, 3 and 4 to Storytime magazine through the Walsall Virtual School Offer!

When children read for the sheer pleasure of it, it improves their reading, writing, spelling and vocabulary, but best of all it's just fantastic fun!

Each month, Storytime magazine is packed with brilliant tales for boys and girls of all ages. Storytime gives you a quality children's magazine that actually helps to improve literacy with great content you can keep forever. And, unlike most magazines for kids, Storytime has no adverts and no throwaway plastic toys.

- Wonderful stories for kids every month, including fairy tales, myths, fables, stories from different cultures and tales from new authors.
- Specially commissioned, full-colour illustrations.
- Puzzles, activities, games and colouring.
- Printed on quality paper so you can read it again and again.
- Kids' competitions every month, win books and much more.
- Beautiful tidy files to store them in.



Reading for pleasure is so important it's now part of the national curriculum, and magazines for kids play an important role in that, as well as books. With Storytime magazine, kids can enjoy an engaging and magical world of stories every month.

Please do explore the Storytime website to find out more, <https://www.storytimemagazine.com/>

If you would like to opt out of the Storytime project, please let us know by emailing Walsall Virtual School (WalsallVirtualSchool@walsall.gov.uk) with your child's name and the reason you would like them to be withdrawn from the project.

We hope you enjoy the Storytime magazine subscription! As always, we welcome feedback from our young people and the adults around them so please let us know how the children get on with the parcels and send any photos/ completed activities to us at WalsallVirtualSchool@walsall.gov.uk.

Celebrating a Love of Reading!

Our final section is very much a celebration of reading! Having received their Book in a Bag parcel, a number of children emailed WalsallVirtualSchool@walsall.gov.uk with photos and feedback about the books they were enjoying reading! It was wonderful to receive these and as a thank you we sent these children book vouchers so they could go and choose more books to explore and love!

Please see below for the some of the photos we received, including one young lady taking a trip to Waterstones to choose her new book!

"Thank you for book and activities M has been learning about Rosa Parkes at school so the book was brilliant as she was excited as she had heard about her - she loved doing the word search too."



"Pics of our girls reading their books and completing their word searches. They've been reading up!"

"Massive thank you for M's book voucher - she was so excited to get a letter in the post and she can't wait to use the book voucher."

