

# Walsall Virtual School Offer 2023-2025

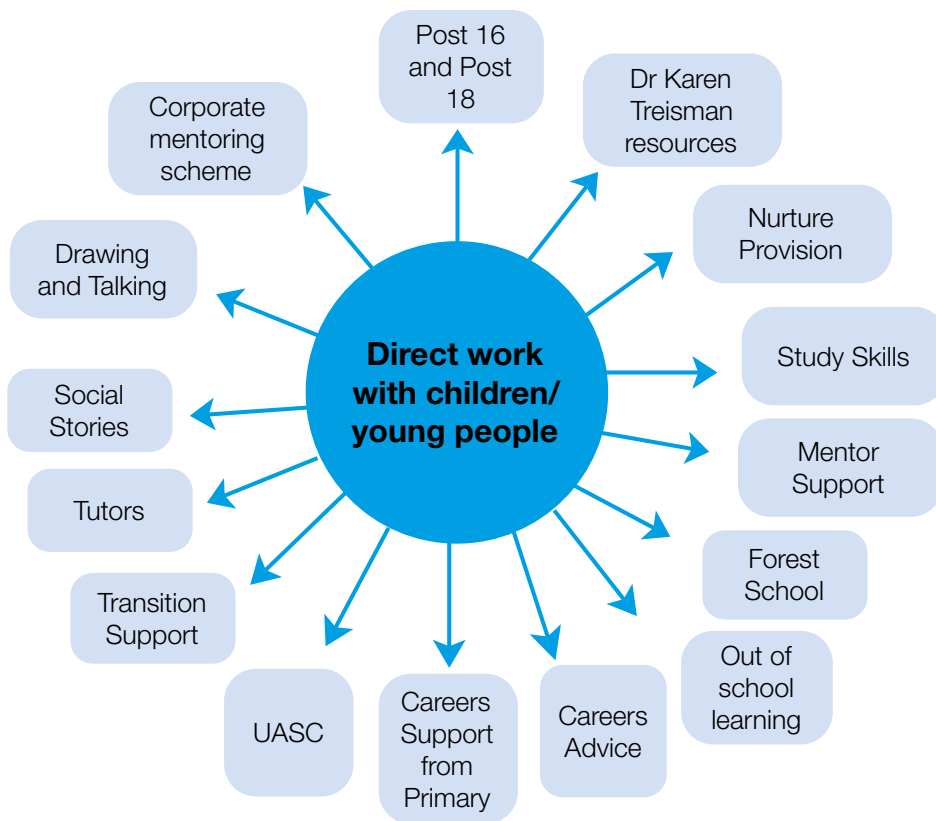


Walsall Council

## Walsall Virtual School Offer

As a Virtual School we offer a range of interventions to support our children and young people to access suitable, high quality learning and education opportunities. This can include creating a culture of high educational aspirations and as well as acting in the best interests to promote the physical, mental health and well-being of children and young people. Below is an overview of some of the interventions and support we offer our schools and young people. Each child or young person will receive support based on what they need at a given time, this will then be reviewed and evaluated to measure impact.

### Direct Work with Our Children and Young People:



## Study Skills Support

A good set of GCSE, Functional Skills or BTEC qualifications will provide our young people with a passport to further education, employment or training. We aim to support young people with time management, stress management strategies and the nuts and bolts of revision, e.g. reading, note-taking techniques and revision planning. We know that the lead up to exams can be a challenging time for young people. With this in mind, we are also able to support them with mindfulness and calming strategies to ensure they are able to fulfil their potential. Study skills support is available to young people in secondary school.

## Transition Support

Walsall Virtual School offers transition support for our young people and schools appropriate to the stage that they are at. We tailor transition packages to each individual child or young person to ensure they have a smooth transition whether that is from Year 6 to secondary school or moving schools within an academic year. As well as working 1:1 or in small groups with the young people, part of our transition support involves facilitating appropriate information sharing with previous and prospective schools to ensure all staff who work with our young people have the knowledge and skills they need to support them. PEP meetings play a key role in this and where appropriate we can invite the designated teacher from the new school to join the final PEP before a child moves. If there has been a quicker move, we may suggest bringing a PEP meeting forward at a new school or holding an additional interim PEP, inviting the designated teacher from the previous school.

## Forest School

Taking learning outside is good for promoting children's self-esteem, well-being, behaviour, co-operative learning and problem solving. These skills feedback positively into classroom work and other settings. We take part in the Forest School Programme at Watling Street Primary School which builds on the natural instinct to learn and explore that everybody is born with. It offers opportunities for children to make choices for their own learning and take and manage risks. Development of these skills encourages positive attitudes and behaviour. The sessions are not activity based but instead are led by the interests of the learners. Children may enjoy such experiences as building shelters, woodland craft-work, telling stories, cooking over fires, climbing trees, hunting for mini-beasts and making mud pies. As the programme develops, woodland tools are introduced to extend learning and provide new opportunities for risk management. Forest school sessions are available for children in year 3-5 during the summer term.



## **Nurture Provision**

Some of our children and young people need a higher level of nurture to support their needs. We are able to access nurture provision in schools across Walsall, including Lower Farm School, Short Heath School, Delves Junior School, St John's Primary School and Watling Street Primary School. Each child will have an action plan set at the start of the interventions at the Nurture House and this will be reviewed during and at the end of the child's time there. Children can access this provision for between 6-12 weeks dependent on their needs and progress when they are there. Nurture provision is available for children in years R-Y6.

## **Corporate Mentoring Scheme**

Walsall Virtual School operate a Corporate Mentoring Scheme for care experienced children aged 14-19, where senior managers within the local authority provide career focused mentoring to children who have an interest in work based learning opportunities.

The mentoring scheme supports care experienced young people to realise their potential and build their futures through support provided by 'the family firm'. The aim of the mentors is to enhance the understanding and experience of their mentees by assisting them to have a work based experience that will help them gain an insight into the world of work and how organisations work which will in turn support young people in making informed choices about their career pathway. The Corporate Mentoring Scheme is available to young people in years 9-13.

## **Out of School Learning**

We work with schools and local authorities across the country to ensure all of our children are in the best educational provision for their needs. However, we recognise there may be short periods where our children and young people are not attending an educational institute. When this happens, we ensure the children and young people have access to learning online. A member of the Virtual School team will hold an online video call with the child or young person to introduce themselves and show them how to access the online programmes that we offer. From there, we will then offer further support and online learning that is tailored to the individual needs of the children and young people.

## **Careers Support from Primary**

Walsall Virtual School understand the importance of supporting aspirational and achievable career paths from an early age. With this in mind, we offer primary aged children various experiences of career opportunities. These experiences can range from visits designed to widen children's horizons by offering cultural capital opportunities to specific arts and sports workshops. We aim to offer a blend of education and entertainment encourage and foster independence, confidence and empower children to consider wider horizons early on in life. We also offer visits to local universities to allow children opportunities to experience options at an early age before they must make decisions.

At the end of Year 6, Virtual School select a number of children who have shown an interest in attending university to take part in the Aspire2Uni programme in secondary school, please see the Enhancement and Enrichment section for more information on this.

Our offer continues through Years 7- 9 with continued conversations about future aspirations and an enrichment programme that offers experiences in different careers opportunities. We can support young people when choosing GCSE/ Functional Skills and/or BTEC programmes of study. We are also working to expand opportunities to visit employers and work experience placements, within the council.

## **UASC – Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children**

The Virtual School ensures that all UASC young people have an appropriate school place with the support they need if they are school age. Our post 16 UASC are placed on courses to support the development of English and maths skills to ensure that they can communicate effectively within the community and to support them onto future appropriate education in a field that meets their aspirations. We aspire for young people to be placed within education within two weeks of their first Personal Education Planning meeting taking place, but where this is not possible we will provide one to one online tutoring. We ensure that the young person has access to a laptop or tablet, and provide access to the Flash Academy App to further develop independent learning and develop English skills.

We aspire for all UASC young people to also be engaging in a vocational element of learning in conjunction with developing English skills, alongside participation in enrichment activities within their local community.

### **Drawing and Talking**

Drawing enables a child to express, in a visual form, worries and preoccupations from deep in the mind that they may not be able to talk about. Drawing and Talking is a gentle, non-intrusive method of working with children who need a little help to support their emotional and learning needs. The programme is made up of 3 stages: The Initial Stage, The Middle Stage and The Resolution Stage. The child would work with our key worker, through the stages, at their own pace. Our Education Support Officers will deliver a 30-minute session for 12 weeks; however, this may be reviewed at any point within the programme. Drawing and Talking sessions are available to children and young people in years 3-8.

### **Social Stories**

Our Education Support Officers can assist schools in creating social stories to support children in various ways. They support children with social understanding in contexts specific to their needs. They are short descriptions of a particular situation, event or activity, which include specific information about what to expect in that situation and why. Social stories can support children to develop self-care skills, social skills and academic abilities. They can also be used to provide positive feedback about an area of strength or achievement in order to develop self-esteem or as a behavioural strategy (e.g. what to do when feeling different emotions).

### **Mentor Support**

Mentoring in education involves pairing young people with one of our mentors, who acts as a positive role model. In general, mentoring aims to build confidence, develop resilience and character, or raise aspirations, rather than to develop specific academic skills or knowledge.

Mentors typically build relationships with young people by meeting with them one to one for about an hour a week over a sustained period, either during school or at the beginning or end of the school day. Dependent on the students' needs, they may have more or less time with their mentor. Mentors are able to support a young person who is finding the school environment challenging or those who have been out of full time education for a prolonged period of time. They express understanding of students' aspirations and fears, and support their success by acting as an advocate for students' best interests. Mentoring sessions are available to children and young people in years 2-11.

### **Dr Karen Treisman Resources**

We also have access to a full range of therapeutic resources created by Dr Karen Treisman to support children and young people who have experienced relational and developmental trauma. Our Education Support Officers can work 1:1 with the children and young people using resources to support them with relationship building, anxiety and stress, sleep and nightmares, self esteem, regulating emotions and relaxation. This programme would start by creating a plan for the individual child's needs for 6 weeks, with review and evaluation opportunities planned in.

## **Tutors**

The Virtual School can fund tutors to work with individuals or groups of pupils in their education setting or home. They focus on targets set by the school in the core subjects of English and Maths and work towards making progress or accelerated progress in these areas. The programmes are bespoke for the individual learner and progress is monitored and impact assessed. The pupils' voice is listened to and the teaching styles reflect the most effective style for that particular young person. The focus initially may be to reignite their interest in learning. For some young people, the tutor may focus the young person in their learning. The young person is encouraged to discuss their learning and communicate ways in which the tutor is able to support them.

## **Careers Advice**

Young people are supported with careers advice, guidance and financial information about further and higher education, training and employment to achieve their longer term goals.

This process starts by assisting Year 9 young people in their choice of GCSE, Functional Skills and/or BTEC programmes of study. This work continues as we support the young person to source work experience placements to improve their employability skills and to narrow down their career options. We also support young people as they source and apply for post-16 options, this support includes preparing young people for interview, and support with attending interviews where required.

Our post-16 provision supports and tracks progress, supports young people in post 16 education, employment and training with individualised support on a wide range of education/training options, including but not limited to career options and progression, applications to University or apprenticeships. We continue to work with young people as they move through post 16 to ensure they have access to the most appropriate provision to meet their evolving needs. We also have an Education, Employment and Training Officer who can support and advise young people who are not in education, employment or training.

## **Post 16 and Post 18**

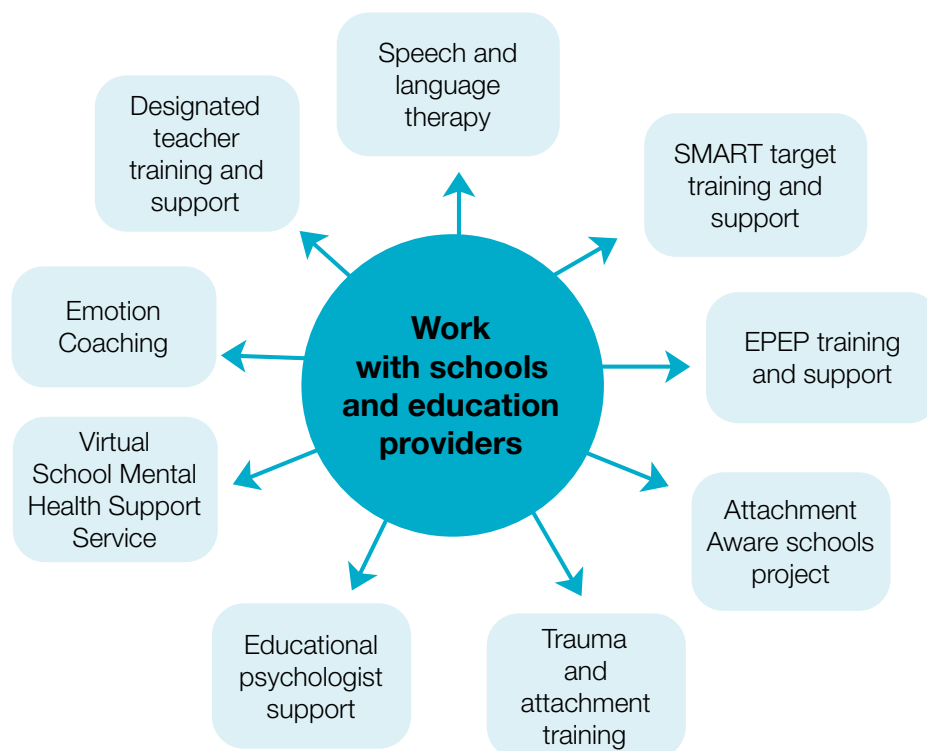
We know how important the transition to post 16 education is and how different it can be to secondary school.

The Virtual School supports young people to make informed decisions around post 16 education by offering advice and support in Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings. We also ensure that schools are meeting their responsibilities to provide comprehensive careers advice to young people. Virtual School staff attend the spring and summer term PEPs, with the latter being attended by our post 16 team to ensure planning for a smooth transition is in place. We can also advocate and support the young person in any additional transition meetings that are needed.

We encourage all young people to investigate a range of education pathways and are expected to attend open days with support from carers. Virtual School will provide signposting, advice and guidance as required to both young people, schools, parents/carers and professionals working with the young person to ensure the right course, and right provision are sourced.

The Virtual School is available to provide advice and guidance in relation to education post 18 to all our young people around transition to university, further college courses, apprenticeships and traineeships. We are able to provide support to professionals who continue to support care experienced young people into adulthood with any queries relating to education and will continue to do so up to age 25 where needed.

## Work with Our Schools and Education Providers:



### Emotion Coaching

Emotion Coaching is an approach that supports children and young people to identify and understand the emotions that they may be feeling. It has been shown to be effective in reducing exclusions and sanctions, while improving attainment and attendance. The Virtual School can facilitate training for school staff on Emotion Coaching, and then offer continued support and advice.

### Speech and Language Therapy Service

Our Speech and Language therapists offer bespoke packages of support for children presenting with SLCN (speech, language and communication needs) on a needs led basis, including both direct and indirect support. Direct support can include offering 1:1 assessment and therapy to target specific areas of difficulty with the child or young person, alongside indirectly supporting the child/ young person via the network of people surrounding them (e.g. virtual school Education Support Officers, carers &/or parents, social workers, educational providers) to facilitate and enhance the use of positive communication strategies to support their ongoing speech, language and communication development.

### Educational Psychologists

We can facilitate access to an Educational Psychologist who can support schools, offer training and direct work with children and young people. This means using psychological theory, research and approaches to understand and advise on complex situations with the aim of supporting the development, learning and well-being of children and young people.

Educational psychologists work with children and young people with special educational needs but also with those who have not been identified in this way but where consultation is required. The service uses consultation to help develop an understanding of the child or young person in context. This approach seeks to actively engage the child/young person, parents and carers and other key adults in developing solutions.

## **Training Offer for Schools**

We offer training for designated teachers as part of our offer to schools. The designated teacher should be a central point of initial contact within the school and it is their responsibility to promote the educational achievement of looked-after children, including those aged between 16 and 18 who are registered pupils at the school. As a Virtual School, we provide information and advice to designated teachers on meeting the needs of these children - this may be general information, including training opportunities, or information and advice on individual children at the request of their parents or designated teacher. We provide termly designated teacher briefing sessions that school staff are encouraged to attend to support their professional development and build connections with other designated teachers. We also offer various training offered by our specialist support team which includes Speech and Language Therapists, Educational Psychologists and a Senior Mental Health Practitioner.

## **ePEP Training and Support**

As part of our continuing programme of professional development, the Virtual School is providing training to drive forward improvements in the quality of Personal Education Plans (PEPs). The aim of the training is to enrich the planning and provision that will enable children in care to make accelerated progress and also ensure the school is fully prepared for Ofsted. Personal Education Plans are part of the child's care plan and will be part of their care records through to adulthood. We want to ensure that these documents will enable the child and other professionals to clearly identify how the next steps can be made whilst being a document that any school would be proud of, to use as evidence of achieving good outcomes for children in care.

## **SMART Target Training and Support**

A key part of an effective and high quality PEP is the inclusion of short and long-term SMART targets. According to statutory guidance, "SMART means specific, significant, stretching, measurable, meaningful, motivational, agreed, achievable, action-orientated, realistic, relevant, result-orientated, time-bound." These should monitor each area identified against development and educational needs in the short term. Longer term SMART targets should include plans for educational targets and aspirations, which according to age and understanding, typically focus on: public examinations, further and higher education, managing money and savings, work experience and career plans and aspirations. We can offer support and training on SMART targets for schools to match their individual needs.

## **Trauma and Attachment Training**

An understanding of the impact of trauma and attachment on our children and young people's brains enables schools to understand our children and their background more. A school with a firm and whole school approach to attachment theory can support our children and young people to feel secure, develop strong relationships with adults and enhance learning outcomes. We offer schools training in this to support the overall wellbeing of our children and young people and to increase understanding of the needs of children who have unmet attachment needs or have experienced trauma and neglect.



## **BRICS-Attachment Aware Schools Project**

We are currently working with a group of primary and secondary schools, in association with Walsall Educational Psychology Service, on our Attachment Aware Schools Project. The project is based on the assumption that all children in school need to be ready to learn and achieve and that children who have experienced trauma and neglect are often not able to do so. Schools need to be 'attachment aware' to enable this to happen.

In addition to specific training opportunities for key staff, this project provides schools with a strategic framework for development. The ambition of this impact-evaluated project is to support schools on an Attachment Awareness journey which will equip staff with the knowledge enabling them to develop 'trauma-informed practice'.

An Attachment Aware school is a place where the resilience of all is promoted and where the most vulnerable children are able to recover from trauma. It is a place where the resilience of staff is strengthened, enabling them to effectively implement high-impact/low-cost interventions. This improves outcomes for the most vulnerable children whether in care, adopted, on the edge of care or vulnerable through economic deprivation and it supports schools in their endeavours to be spaces where all can thrive and fulfil potential.

## **Virtual School Mental Health Support Service**

The aim of the Virtual School Mental Health Support Service is to improve the emotional wellbeing of looked after and previously looked after children and young people by enhancing educational placement stability.

The primary role of the Senior Mental Health Practitioner is to support education placement stability by delivering direct support to designated teachers, teachers and support staff to increase and improve the emotional wellbeing and mental health provision for looked after and previously looked after children. Support provided by the Senior Mental Health Practitioner may involve:

- Consultations with teaching staff to help them manage children's emotional behaviour in the classroom.
- Carrying out school observations of children and young people and working with teaching staff to develop care plans
- Delivering time limited direct work to children where needs indicate regarding emotional support where it is adversely impacting on the child's capacity for learning
- Referrals to Tier 3 CAMHS following assessment of needs for further support where needed
- Delivering bespoke training packages or workshops where there are themes of support identified
- Delivering strategies that are evidence based, needs led, trauma/attachment focussed (PACE).

## Enhancement and Enrichment Offer:



### School Holiday Activities

We aim to offer a range of enrichment and enhancement opportunities over each of the school holidays. In the past we have done some fantastic activities based around different themes, ranging from graffiti workshops to dance sessions, drumming workshops to outdoor pursuits!

### Learning Platforms

We have different learning platforms that our children and young people can access at home. We offer these as an additional way to support learning at home. In the event that a child or young person is not in education, they can also access these while we work to find them the best education placement to meet their needs. The learning platforms have been carefully selected as they use technology to find any gaps in knowledge and support the children and young people to close these gaps. Both English and maths can be accessed on these platforms.

### What on Earth! Magazine

We have subscribed to What On Earth! magazine by Britannica for Years 7 and 8. Britannica's What on Earth! Magazine is a brand new non-fiction monthly magazine designed for all curious young minds! Prepare for your brain to be boggled with amazing facts, extraordinary feats and awe-inspiring true-life stories! What on Earth! Magazine is published and will be sent to young people in Years 7 and 8 10 times this academic year - that's monthly with a bumper 2 month issue in July/ August and December/ January.

### Duke of Edinburgh Award

We are delighted to be able to provide the Duke of Edinburgh Award and support young people to participate in this award with the guidance of staff within the Virtual School. This provides experience around volunteering, skill development, independence, confidence and the opportunity to participate in an expedition with peers. The Duke of Edinburgh award is recognised and respected by further education provisions and employers, giving young people extra opportunities in these areas.

We also work closely with the National Citizenship Scheme and encourage and support our young people to participate. We are able to fund the cost of this scheme and it also works in conjunction with some elements required to be completed for Duke of Edinburgh award.

## **Aspire2Uni**

The Aspire2Uni scheme is an Awareness Raising Programme with the aim of increasing the number of Looked-after children achieving successful outcomes pre and post-16 and consequently entering university.

To support young people to progress to higher education, Aspire2Uni designs and delivers a programme of informative and engaging outreach activities that give the young people more information and advice about what university is about, how to get there and what to study. They also offer work experience opportunities and support young people to achieve their qualifications by providing mentors and a tutor if needed.

There are currently 27 young people on our Aspire 2 university programme. We have 5 cohorts running at present from Year 7- 11. Each cohort has 3 outreach activity days a year, 1 per term.

Our young people are offered opportunities to explore a range of different faculties where they can meet current students, lecturers and mentors, in areas such as Science and Engineering, Sports, Performing Arts, Education and Health and Well-being. They also have the opportunity to visit Birmingham City University and University of Wolverhampton (Walsall Campus). Additionally, the children attend Jaguar Land Rover to share with them the different pathways into higher education such as apprenticeships or Vocational studies.

There are further opportunities such as a visit to the Houses of Parliament, opportunities to be ball boys and flag bearers at Walsall Football Club and residential camps to support with their studies and preparation for their exams.

## **Year 6 Residential**

Each summer, the Virtual School runs a residential for Year 6 children to support them with the transition to secondary school. It is a great opportunity for them to develop relationships with peers and build on the social skills needed to prepare them for the start of secondary education. The Year 6 children are supported by peers in older years who have been through the transition themselves, which gives the children the opportunity to build relationships with them and discuss anything they want to about secondary school with peer mentors. It is a great trip away. We stay for 2 nights at different residential centres, taking part in a range of outdoor pursuits.

## **Theatre Trips**

We offer theatre trips for appropriate age groups. We have taken different age groups to various theatres across the country from Walsall Arena to The REP Theatre in Birmingham to the West End in London!

## **Arts Link**

Artslink was set up in 2018 by the consortium of 14 Virtual Schools across the West Midlands. Its mission is to create a high-quality arts and cultural offer which all children in care across the West Midlands can access. The Artslink offer is underpinned by a model of a progression pathway which provides a range of experiences and opportunities that enables children in care to develop their interests and talents.

This year we have a range of experiences on offer, from orchestra workshops to attending a Break Dance Convention!

## **Dolly Parton Imagination Library**

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a book gifting programme for children aged 0-5 operated by the Dollywood Foundation, Dolly Parton's own charity. Their mission is to inspire a lifelong love of books and reading by placing books into the hands of children.

All children enrolled in the Imagination Library programme receive a free book every month from birth until their 5th birthday. We register children when they come into care at any age between birth and five. All titles in the Imagination Library are published by Penguin Random House (PRH) and carefully selected by a panel of experts in early childhood development and reading. Each age group from birth upwards receives a different book, all of which are age-appropriate, except for the first book, 'The Tale of Peter Rabbit'. This is a special edition with a forward from Dolly herself.

## **Book in a Bag**

We are developing our own book gifting programme for children in years 1 to 8. These children will receive books with carefully crafted activities to go with it to cultivate a continued love of reading. They will receive their book in a bag once a month. Reception children will receive a book once a term as part of this programme, additional to the Dolly Parton Imagination Library books..

Reception children will receive a book once a term as part of this programme, additional to the Dolly Parton Imagination Library books.

## **Early Years Enrichment Pack**

Early education and care can have a huge educational and emotional impact both short and long term. We have created a pack of activities and resources for carers to use with our youngest children to support their development. We work with carers, parents and social workers to model how to use the resources with their child. There are a range of fun activities designed to stimulate enjoyment while developing key skills.

## **Storytime Magazine**

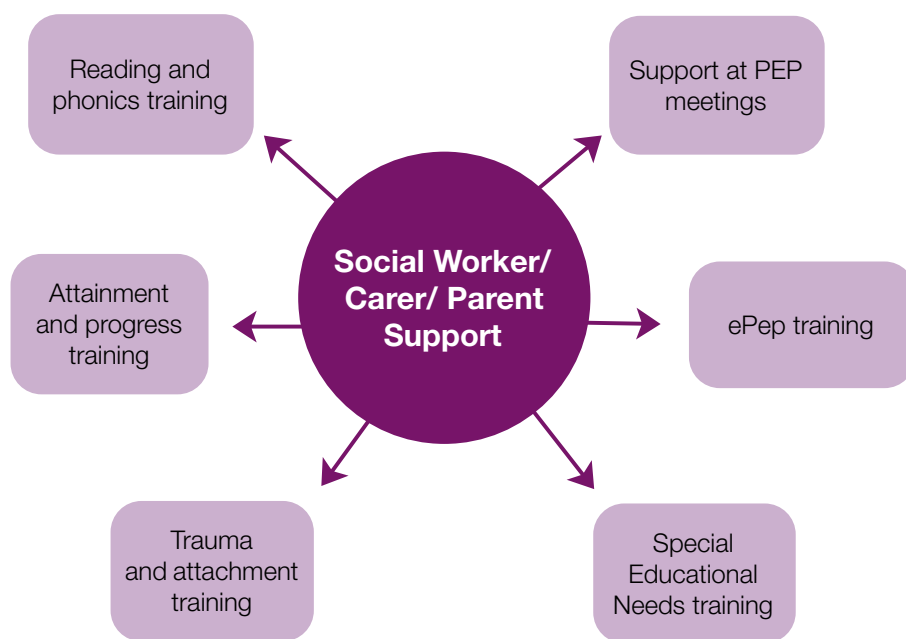
Reading for pleasure is so important it's now part of the national curriculum, and magazines for children play an important role in that, as well as books. This is why we have subscribed to Storytime magazine for all children in years 1-4. Each magazine is packed with brilliant tales for both boys and girls and each magazine includes a pack of resources relevant to each edition. The magazine is delivered monthly direct to the child's home address.

## **Magazine subscriptions**

Pictures, short stories and activities open the door to the most reluctant readers, so to encourage our young people in KS4 to continue reading and help spark their interests, we offer all our young people in year 10 & 11 a free annual subscription to a magazine of their choice.



## Social Worker, Carer and Parent Support:



### Reading and Phonics Training

Phonics is taught in schools across England to teach children to read. Research shows that when phonics is taught in a structured way – starting with the easiest sounds and progressing through to the most complex – it is the most effective way of teaching young children to read. It is particularly helpful for children aged 5 to 7. We offer training to carers and parents on how to support children in their learning of phonics at home, as well as understanding the process for the statutory phonics screening check that children undertake at the end of Year 1.

Following on from this, we offer parents and carers support in understanding how the different skills in reading are taught in schools from decoding to comprehension. We can then advise on ways parents and carers can support our young people with this at home.

### Attainment and Progress Training

Language around attainment and progress used by schools can be loaded with educational jargon making it difficult to understand. The aim of our attainment and progress training is to support social workers, carers and parents to understand what attainment and progress means for their child.

### Special Educational Needs Training

A number of our children have special educational needs (SEN) which can range significantly. Again, the aim of these training sessions will be to support all stake holders working with our children to understand the language and processes involved in supporting a child with SEN. We can support carers and parents to understand timelines for assessments, the role of different professionals and support children are receiving at school and how to support them at home.

## Trauma and Attachment Training

As well as supporting schools in understanding the impact of trauma and attachment on our children and young people's brains, it is important that we ensure all adults who have contact with these children also have a clear understanding. Therefore we also offer trauma and attachment training to parents and carers to support the overall wellbeing of our children and young people and to increase understanding of the needs of children who have unmet attachment needs or have experienced trauma and neglect.

## Support at PEP Meetings

As a parent or carer you may be invited to attend your child or young person's Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting. PEPs are part of the child's care plan and will be part of their care records through to adulthood. The meeting is an opportunity to review educational progress and consider any barriers to learning and support that can be put in place to overcome these. Staff from the Virtual School can attend these meetings as an educational advocate for the child and can support parents and carers to understand the educational system.

## ePEP Training

ePEP is the electronic system used to record the information gathered and targets decided at the PEP meetings. The Virtual School offers parents and carers support to understand the process and how the information is stored and used to support children and young people.

**For more information please contact:**  
[walsallvirtualschool@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:walsallvirtualschool@walsall.gov.uk)



To request a service from the Walsall Virtual School Offer, please complete and return the following request form.

Date of request: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of child or young person:	
NCY	
Named Social Worker:	
Name of education provision:	

Which service(s) are you requesting?
Reason for request:

Referee Details	
Name of person making the request:	
Company/ service:	
Relationship to child/ young person:	
Contact number:	
Contact email:	

Request discussed with (please tick all that apply):
<input type="checkbox"/> Child or young person
<input type="checkbox"/> Social worker
<input type="checkbox"/> Carer(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> Parent(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> Education provider
<input type="checkbox"/> Virtual School
<input type="checkbox"/> Other, please state: _____

Thank you for completing the request for services from Walsall Virtual School.

**Please send requests to the Virtual School at [walsallvirtuelschool@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:walsallvirtuelschool@walsall.gov.uk).**

**Virtual School**  
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