

Walsall Virtual School Early Years Offer



Walsall Council

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 walsallvirtualschool@walsall.gov.uk

Walsall Virtual School

Early Years 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 as well as acting in the best interest to promote the physical, mental health and well-being of children and young people.

Below is an overview of the interventions and support we offer our early years children, their families and their schools.

Direct work with children



Early identification of learning/ development delays in the early years is crucial to ensure that children receive the right help and support to enable them to achieve. We offer support from Early Years trained practitioners, who can offer support and advice around strategies, activities and routines to support the child.

In some circumstances we can offer short periods of direct work with children to support educational attainment, based on the child's next steps, or SMART targets.

Early Reading Interventions

Reading with children in early years is a fundamental part of supporting children's learning and development. Reading regularly can help develop vocabulary, understanding of the world, early reading skills, imagination and it helps to nurture a bond between child and caregiver. We offer direct reading interventions for children in Reception but can also work with carers of children aged 2-5 to offer information and resources about how to support reading at home.

Phonics Interventions

We offer direct work to children to strengthen their understanding of letter sounds. This supports the foundation for children's early reading skills. We prioritise requests for direct work to support phonics for Reception aged children, as research shows that strong phonics knowledge is an essential part of building reading fluency and comprehension for disadvantaged children. Our Early Years team are trained in Read Write Inc, but can adapt our sessions to follow the setting's phonics programme. During our direct work, we work closely with the class teacher to match the sessions to the child's level of skills in phonemic awareness and their knowledge of letter sounds and patterns.

Early Language Interventions

In order to identify any early communication needs, we support settings to undertake a speech and language screen with all children in care. Within Walsall Local Authority, WELCOMM screening is frequently used. Where settings do not have practitioners trained to carry out the WELCOMM screen, a member of the Virtual School Early Years team will visit the child in the setting to carry this out.

Following the outcome of the speech and language screen, we support by offering advice around early language strategies, targeted interventions, and referrals to the Virtual School Speech and Language Therapy Team as needed. If identified as an appropriate intervention, Virtual School Early Years staff may offer direct work with children to support language development, using school curriculum and/or specific language programmes.

Maths Interventions

We undertake direct work with children to support early mathematical skills. Interventions can include supporting children to develop numeracy skills, problem solving, understanding and using shapes and measure, and recognising and creating patterns. We work closely with the class teacher to follow current planning and the child's next steps. Where possible, we will prioritise requests for maths support, as this is an essential part of the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) for children to achieve a good level of development at the end of Reception.

Play based interventions to support learning in the Prime Areas

Where a child is working below age related expectations in any of the prime areas, we can provide direct work to children who have been working below age related expectations for more than one term. We request to see evidence of previous interventions and liaise with the child's teacher to discuss appropriate next steps to support learning and development. We work closely with schools to ensure that three and four year olds are 'school ready'.

Drawing and Talking Interventions (Reception only)

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 Early Years Education Support Officer, through the stages at their own pace. The child would have a weekly one-to-one 30-minute session for 12 weeks; however, this may be reviewed at any point within the programme.

Social Stories

Our Early Years team 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. how to identify and respond to a particular emotion).

Termly Enrichment Pack

All children in early years will receive a termly pack of activities and resources for carers to use with our youngest children to support their development at home. 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. Each term's enrichment pack is focussed around a key learning theme, e.g. language and communication, physical development etc.

Enrichment Activities

Early education and care can have a huge educational and emotional impact and support children's development holistically. High quality enrichment activities can help to teach children life skills that will benefit them beyond the classroom. We offer a variety of enrichment activities each term to support the child's learning and development. Activities may include educational visits, books, activities, resources and workshops.

Forest School Sessions

We are working to develop a 'Forest School' programme, which will be offered to three and four year olds. Trained forest leaders will support children's learning and development in an outdoor provision.

Forest school is a specialised approach to outdoor learning, which is effective in developing independence, confidence and self- esteem. Being outdoors can have massive therapeutic benefits for children and can support the emotional development of children who have experienced early trauma. Forest school provides children with the opportunity to develop skills and learning that can be used beyond the classroom.

Work With Our Schools and Settings



Enhanced Support at Initial PEP meetings

It is a statutory requirement that all children who are new to care have an Initial Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting within 20 working days.

Virtual School staff will support designated teachers by ensuring they have access to EPEP and provide information about the statutory role of the designated teacher. We also offer training for designated teachers around how to complete an effective Early Years PEP. A member of Virtual School staff attends all initial PEP meetings and can offer guidance and support to the designated teacher throughout the process. Virtual School will act as an advocate for the child and ensure that parents/ carers understand the Early Years Foundation Stage and the role the PEP plays within the child's care plan.

Support at PEP Meetings

Following the initial PEP, PEP meetings are held termly for all children in care. It is the role of the social worker to initiate these, although the date for the subsequent PEP should be agreed in the current one, and the designated teacher also plays a key role in this. The child's parents/ carers should be invited to attend as appropriate, and other relevant professionals can also be invited to the 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. However after the initial PEP, Virtual School staff do not attend all PEP meetings as routine. They may request to attend a PEP if there is a particular need or if social care, school or parents/carers feel it would be beneficial for the child for Virtual School to attend, they can discuss this with the child's designated Virtual School worker directly.

Enhanced Support During Transitions

Times of significant transition in a child's life may be an example of when a member of the Virtual School Early Years team may contact the social worker or school to request to attend the PEP to ensure that a transition support plan is implemented. This may be when a child is moving from Nursery to Reception, or if a child has experienced other significant changes which may impact on their learning, development or emotional wellbeing.

The transition for Reception children to Year 1 can be a big step in their school journey, and it is important to ensure that the correct levels of support are in place to ensure this transition is as smooth as possible. Virtual School staff work closely with designated teachers to ensure transition plans are in place and implemented to support any move. Strategies to support may include visits to the new classroom, meetings with the teacher and opportunities for information about the change or new year group to be shared with parents and carers. Where children may be significantly impacted by the transition, 1:1 support may be appropriate. Careful handovers also take place as children are transferred from the Virtual School Early Years Team to the Primary Team.

Co-ordinate Referrals to Specialist Support Services

Within the Virtual School, we offer several specialist support services, such as Speech and Language Therapy, Educational Psychologists and CAMHS practitioners. We are happy to support with referrals to these services where needed. We also support schools and settings through the graduated approach and ensure that interventions/ next steps are appropriate and achievable for the child.

Early Language Interventions/Communication Support

As discussed in direct work with children section of the offer, all children in care are screened using WELCOMM screening either by the educational setting or our Virtual School team. Following the outcome of the speech and language screen, we support by offering advice around early language strategies to both schools and carers, targeted interventions, and referrals to the Virtual School Speech and Language Therapy Team as needed.

Understanding Behaviour Support

As language is rapidly developing for three- and four-year-olds, so is their sense of self. As children start to become more independent and express their thoughts, feelings and opinions, behaviours may seem to become more challenging as children take a leap in their learning and development. Children's behaviour should be viewed as a form of communication, and this can be impacted in situations where a child has experienced early trauma.

We are available to offer advice and guidance around children's behaviour and may attend PEP meetings where there are significant concerns. We can offer advice around supporting early attachments, trauma, nurture, and effective understanding of behaviour and management strategies. Where appropriate, we can also support with screening tools to support a child's social and emotional mental health needs.

Enhanced Support at Reception Age to Support Children to Achieve ELG

At the end of Reception year, children's learning and development is assessed, as part of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework. This assessment provides information as to whether a child is deemed to have a 'Good Level of Development' and if they have achieved the 'Early Learning Goals'. In order to ensure that all children in care are achieving in line with their peers, and have the best start in KS1, Virtual School offer an enhanced support package to Reception children. This includes attendance at more PEPs, additional support to Designated Teachers to set SMART targets, sessions around using Pupil Premium funding and opportunities for direct work with the children. Reception children's progress will be monitored closely throughout the year and interventions put in place via SMART targets to support learning and progress.

Early Years Training

Virtual School can offer enhanced training to early years providers, in order to fully understand and meet the needs of looked after children. Training packages include:

- Early Trauma and signs in the classroom
- Supporting resilience for children in care/emotion coaching
- Supporting change and transitions
- Understanding behaviour support
- New DT training – attachment awareness and exploring behaviour causes and strategies

Designated Teachers may also request specific training that may be individualised to support practice, specific children or cohorts. Examples of such training may include:

- Self-evaluation advice
- Support in promoting positive environments (Inclusive and Communication Friendly)
- Support to access external services (SALT, CAMHS, EP, SEN TEAM)
- Attendance at PEP meetings when required
- Feedback on PEP completion as part of Virtual School Quality Assurance
- Support and advice around Pupil Premium funding
- Training on high quality PEP completion
- Termly Designated Teacher sessions
- Information about the statutory role of the Designated Teacher

Setting Support Visits

Virtual School offer setting support visits, which is part of our enhanced offer. Advice and guidance can be given around completing high quality PEPs, to gather an educational overview of the child, and to offer support, advice and guidance to ensure the child's needs are being met. Where Designated Teachers have a high volume of PEP meetings to complete, support visits are a useful way of refreshing knowledge and having the opportunity to talk with your Virtual School Education Support Officer about the process.

Progress Check at Age Two

Under the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory requirements, all children between two and three years old should have a progress check, which identifies strengths and areas for support within the prime areas. This should be documented and shared with parents, carers and other relevant professionals. It is best practice to co-ordinate this development check with the child's health visitor. Virtual School support settings to co-ordinate this with the child's health visitor as part of the PEP meeting. A copy of the Two-Year Progress Check will be uploaded to the PEP, as part of the child's care plan.

Where there are any concerns around a child's development, Virtual School will support designated teachers to offer early interventions and make referrals to external agencies where needed.

Social Worker, Parent and Carer Support



Termly Enrichment Pack

Each term, you will receive a home learning pack from the Virtual School Early Years team to explore with your child at home. The activities are based on the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and are designed to be a fun and interactive way to support your child's learning and development at home. With each resource, we will send out a feedback questionnaire, and appreciate you taking the time to respond.

Stay and Play Sessions

As part of our Early Years offer, we run 'stay and play' sessions in which parents and carers are encouraged to participate in fun learning experiences with their child. The sessions are a fun way to enhance speech and language development, encouraging sharing and turn taking, exploring a range of sensory activities, and building confidence and self-esteem. The sessions are designed to support children within a specific age range, which also give parents and carers the opportunity to meet and network with other adults who are looking after children of a similar age.

Access to a Variety of Online Learning Resources

Many parents and carers often ask us for advice around activities to do in the home to support children's learning and development.

We provide a wide variety of educational resources to access free of charge. Please visit the Virtual School website, where the resources are updated regularly – [HTTP://WVS.SCH.LIFE](http://WVS.SCH.LIFE)

Trips and Activities

As part of the Virtual School enrichment offer, we offer a variety of trips and educational activities each term. Please see the Virtual School website for more information.

Support with Accessing Library Provision

All carers for children in Walsall are strongly advised to join the local library. All libraries are free to join, and many offer stay and play sessions/ learning activities which the children can attend.

We can support you to register the child at the library and send information about which libraries are close to you. This will be discussed as part of the child's PEP meeting.

Library Sessions

We offer a range of library session as part of the Early Years enhanced offer. The sessions are designed to support children's love of reading, and are lead by the Virtual School team. Activities include story time, puppets, songs and musical movements.

Supporting Information about the EYFS

Within schools and during PEP meetings, we follow the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (EYFS). This is a set of standards and learning objectives that the children should have the opportunity to learn in school. The Virtual School Early Years team offer 1:1 and group workshops to share more information about the EYFS, and how this can be supported at home.

Support around the Two-Year Development Check

It is a statutory requirement that each child has a progress between the ages of two and three. We offer one-to-one and group information sessions to share details of what to expect in the Two-Year Development Check, and what you can do at home to support your child.

Early Communication/Language/Phonics Information

Virtual School can provide information sessions around how to support early language and communication, as well as phonics (where appropriate). This will support parents and carers to have a greater understanding during PEP meetings, as well as being able to support learning and development within the home environment. If your child has speech and language therapy support, our Virtual School Therapists are available to offer additional support and guidance to parents and carers.

Support and Advice Around Toilet Training

From around two years old, children may start to show signs that they are ready for toilet training. This is a big milestone for young children and can be an emotional time for both children and parents/ carers. We can support by offering advice and guidance, based on NHS recommendations. We can support with links to the child's health visitor and offer lots of resources to support the child. We also offer toilet training workshops for parents, carers and practitioners.

Understanding Behaviour Support

At two, children are becoming more independent and learning about the world around them and they continue this journey as they move through early years learning to identify, understand and respond appropriately to their emotions. As they begin to explore their independence, children can experience big emotions, and often, 'tantrums'. This is typical behaviour for young children, however, can be exacerbated where children may have experienced early trauma and use this as a form of communication.

We are available to offer advice and guidance around children's behaviour and may attend PEP meetings where there are significant concerns. We can offer advice around supporting early attachments, trauma, nurture, and effective behaviour management strategies. Where appropriate, we can also support with screening tools to support a child's social and emotional mental health needs.

Termly Drop in Sessions

The Early Years team within Virtual school offer termly support sessions, which focus on a specific area. The sessions are designed to offer additional support to parents and carers, so they can help children at home. Examples of the sessions include:

- Toilet training workshops
- Literacy Workshops
- Speech and language development workshops
- Behaviour, Emotional Regulation and supporting Early Trauma sessions.

Information about the workshops will be sent out termly.

2-Year-Old Funding

Virtual School will be supporting the early education of two-year olds from September 2023 (having previously started support at 3 years old). PEP meetings will be held for two-year-olds during the term following their second birthday, provided they are attending an educational setting.

All 2-year-olds in care are entitled to fifteen hours per week funded early education. Virtual School can support parents, carers, and social workers to find an appropriate setting, and offer advice about how to claim the funding. Virtual School will offer support to settings about how to access the 2-year-old funding, and signpost to relevant departments within the Local Authority.

Support and Guidance Around Early Education Funding and 30 hours funding

In England, all three- and four-year-olds are entitled to 570 funded hours per year. This is known as 'Early Education Funding' (EEF). This is usually split across 38 weeks of the year for 15 hours per week. Some private settings may offer 'stretched' funding, where children are able to attend less hours per week all year round. EEF funding can be accessed from the term after the child turns three.

Some children may be able to access enhanced funding, where they attend a setting for thirty hours per week. There are eligibility criteria that apply, and an application must be sent to the Local Authority in which the child resides. Applications must be made by the child's social worker. Virtual School can support by sending application paperwork and advising on eligibility.

Support with Identifying 'Good' or 'Outstanding' Provision

It is expected that all children from 2 years of age, will attend an educational provision. We will support parents, carers, and social workers to find an appropriate setting which is Ofsted rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. Evidence suggests that children's education and attainment are supported to a better standard when accessing high quality provision.

We also offer setting support sessions, to ensure that best practice is being maintained for our children, and to offer support, advice, and guidance to Designated Teachers and front-line practitioners.

Reception Applications

All children must be in statutory education following the term after their fifth birthday. The majority of children will start Reception in the September after their fourth birthday (meaning they will turn five within their first school year).

The deadline for Reception applications is January each year, and places are allocated by April of each year.

Virtual School works closely with parents, carers and social workers to help decide which school is the most appropriate choice for the individual children. Virtual School can also make the application for the child, where this support is needed. All children in care should receive priority places in Reception. Where a child does not receive a place in their preferred school, Virtual School will intervene.

Support for Social Workers Advice and Training Around the PEP Document

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. 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.

Advice and Training on Educational Matters

Virtual School can offer advice and guidance around the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum, and how children's learning, development and emotional needs should be met within an educational environment. Virtual School will act as an advocate for the child to ensure that any decisions regarding their education are in their best interest. We are able to offer support, advice and guidance to social workers to ensure that the best opportunities and standards of education are in place for each child.

Supporting Transitions

There may be occasions within a child's life where they need to move educational settings. Virtual School plays a key role in supporting, advising and facilitating educational moves. All children who are above statutory school age must have any school move authorised by the Virtual School Head.

A smooth transition is key to ensuring that a child's learning, development and emotional health is well supported. As well as school moves, we offer support and advise around a range of significant transitions in a child's life, and these will be discussed as part of the PEP meeting. We are available for one to one discussions with social workers to offer advice and guidance around transitions.

For more information


Please contact the virtual school on 01922 652816
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