



# VIRTUAL SCHOOL NEWSLETTER TO SCHOOLS

## SPRING 2021

### IN THIS ISSUE:

- ◆ Dates for your diary
- ◆ PEP developments
- ◆ How our team is working to support you this year—East/West pods
- ◆ SEMH Snapshots
- ◆ Post 16 Update
- ◆ DT Questionnaire Feedback
- ◆ Previously Looked After Children
- ◆ Accessing Resources

Happy New Year! I hope everyone had a bit of a break over Christmas. Despite hopes that this term would see us gradually beginning to put the last two difficult terms behind us, things have started with perhaps even more uncertainty and complexity. It has been an incredibly challenging time for us all, but out of this has come, as always, some remarkable support and care for children and young people. Thank you very much for everything you have done and continue to do to provide both education and care for our Children Looked After for whom this time has presented even more challenge and difficulty. Your work providing stability and continuity through disruption and the unknown has been hugely important and we do know how hard it has sometimes been. We hope the spring term unfolds positively for you all. Please stay in touch with us and join our training and network events to help us remain connected.

Emily Walters  
Virtual School Head,

## SOME MEETING/TRAINING DATES FOR SPRING 2021

**DT network meeting—intro and training on new ePEP**

**2.00—4.00 10.2.21**

**Delivered via Microsoft Teams -links out to all schools**

**w/b 25.1.21**

**East DT workshop**

**West DT workshop**

**2.3.21 2.00-4.00**

**4..3.21 2.00-4.00**

**Delivered via Microsoft Teams -links out to all schools**

**w/b 9.2.21**

**Working with the Traumatized Child**

Attendance at all three sessions is required.

**13.1.21 9.30 -11.30**

**4.2.21 9.30-11.3**

**2.3.21 9.30 -1.30**

**Sensory Processing**

**16.3.21 1.30-4.30**

To reserve places and receive links to any of these online development opportunities, contact

[thevirtualschool@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:thevirtualschool@somerset.gov.uk)

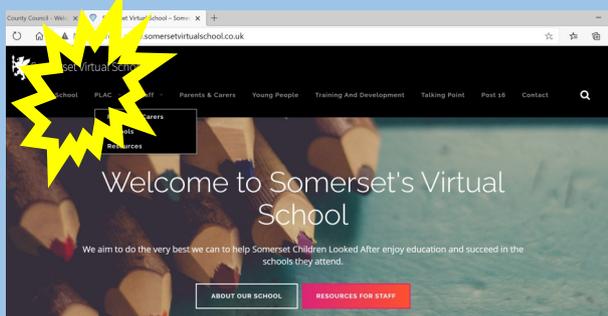


For more details of opportunities visit the training page of the VS website

[www.somersetvirtualschool.co.uk](http://www.somersetvirtualschool.co.uk)

## PREVIOUSLY LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Happy New Year and a big welcome to the new PLAC section of the Virtual School website!



If you have Previously Looked After Children in your setting or would like to expand your knowledge please do have a look at the resources available and familiarise yourself with what's on offer. The pages are evolving and being added to all the time so if you feel there is something missing or something you would like more information on let me know by emailing the dedicated PLAC mailbox [PLACInclusionSomerset@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:PLACInclusionSomerset@somerset.gov.uk)

Coming Soon – We are looking at developing our offer for PLAC and will be looking for schools and parents/carers to work with us in doing this. More information will be available for this soon so keep an eye on future newsletters and DT Network meetings for more information.

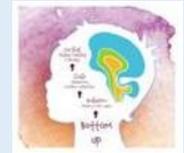
**A member of our team spotted this quotation on Staplegrove Church School's website and reflected on how well it encapsulates the role of the Designated Teacher. Thank you all for everything you do as champions of our Children Looked After to help them become their best.**

***Every child deserves a champion, an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be!***

***Rita F Pierson***

## SEMH SNAPSHOTS

Do look out for our new SEMH updates—SEMH Snapshots—being sent out to schools during each term. The first of these came out via email to all DTs in November and is here in case the email passed you by.



Dear Designated Teacher

We hope you are well, staying safe and taking care of yourselves in these challenging times. Thank you, as always, for all you are doing to support looked after and previously looked after children in your school in what has been a very difficult term.

Every fortnight we aim to send you our “SEMH Snapshots”. We will review and select resources, strategies, websites, video clips, podcasts and newspaper articles or share ideas submitted by Designated Teachers in schools and send you the resource, link or a brief overview of the suggestion.

All ideas will be applicable to all young people with SEMH needs but will be especially helpful to consider for Looked After or Previously Looked After Children in your school.

The plan is for each suggestion to be in a quick, takeaway format so that you can easily, print, download or use the resource without lots of trawling!

It is a developing idea, which we hope will evolve over time and we will be adding the resources to our [website](#) so that you can refer back to them.

Your feedback will be important to us in developing this idea and assessing its usefulness.

**This edition of SEMH Snapshots has 3 things for you:**

1. A resource to try, this time from Beacon House. The resource is a list of effective [Brainstem Calmers](#) which can be trialled with children and young people displaying heightened anxiety.
2. A survey we would like you to complete to give us a sense of the SEMH provision available in your school and the areas we may be able to help you with [Survey Link](#)
3. A link to the very useful SEMH Toolkit for Schools developed by Somerset's EPS Service [SEMH Toolkit](#)

If you have not received the SEMH Snapshot email, if you would like to let us know what you think of the resource and of “SEMH Snapshots” or if you have recommendations for resources, tips and clips for other DTs, please email [virtualschool@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:virtualschool@somerset.gov.uk) with the subject “SEMH Snapshots”

## PERSONAL EDUCATION PLANS (PEPs) 2020-21

Our work to introduce an electronic PEP (ePEP) has continued through the autumn term. Welfare Call has been identified as our provider and some of you may have already used an ePEP delivered by Welfare Call if you have CLA from other areas of England as lots of LAS use their platform.

We had hoped to have the ePEP ready to launch in January but although the PEP is now effectively ready to use, we want to make sure everyone has access to the programme of training and support before we introduce the ePEP. This training will only start to be rolled out in February 2021. We are not, therefore going to be using the new PEP process until later in the spring term.

Communication about these changes and invitations to the training will be emailed to DTs, school offices and Headteachers, so please look out for these emails and ensure the right people get to book onto the training. The first training session on using the ePEP will take place during the Designated Teachers' Network meeting on February 10th. Options to book a place and links to this training will be made available in January.

## ATTENDANCE MONITORING FOR SOMERSET CLA

Many thanks to all the schools who have made the transition to our new attendance monitoring process. The new app was introduced via well attended Q&A sessions in October and went live to all schools with a Somerset CLA on roll on November 2nd.

Each school has its own, individualised link, which lists just the Somerset CLA on your roll and requires session date to be inputted via a couple of clicks for these learners so we can work with you to support excellent attendance.

If you have any queries or issues using the new system, do contact us or have a look at the page of Frequently Asked Questions which has been prepared and is available via our website or the link here.

<http://www.somersetvirtuelschool.co.uk/staff/>

## POST 16 FOCUS

### Attendance in Post 16 Settings

Following the introduction of the new attendance app 2.11.20, a number of issues for our colleagues in post 16 settings have emerged. We are working with representatives from this sector to tweak our processes and ensure accurate attendance data can be returned from all setting with CLA on roll.

### Somerset Works

The Virtual School post 16 team has linked up with Somerset Works to ensure we are able to focus on those young people who are both Looked After and NEET. A joint approach to re-engage and refocus will hopefully see a reduction in those who are not accessing training, education or employment but we are also working to improve the transition support available to year 11 pupils moving into post 16 provision We hope that earlier support and advice will impact on good choices and reduce drop out and disengagement.

### Links to Opportunities and Resources

There is a specific area of our website [www.somersetvirtuelschool.co.uk](http://www.somersetvirtuelschool.co.uk) for post 16 information and resources. Do have a look. If there are particular things that it would be helpful to have on this page, please let us know and we will do our best to help.

### Accessing Higher Education

We have been delighted by the number of young people Looked After who are actively pursuing places in Higher Education. We are very keen to ensure any Looked After young person who is able to move into HE is given all the information on the support (both financial and emotional) to which they are entitled. Please keep in touch with us and make sure we are aware of the PEP meetings for these young people so we can signpost and link to services, agencies and providers as appropriate.



## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR DESIGNATED TEACHERS

Many thanks to all those colleagues who responded to our DT questionnaire which was available for completion during September and October 2020. We were keen to gather your views to help us focus our support, for example shaping the content of Designated Teacher Network Meetings.

It was interesting to read the comments and suggestions, many of which indicated that the support and guidance offered by the team is valued. Equally clear, however, was fact that communication with DTs remains a challenge and you are not always receiving the notifications, invitations and updates sent directly into schools. This is something we will, of course, continue to work on. Currently we communicate via email and provide links to our website and other information platforms for example to the SSE website for booking training. Emails are sent out to the named DT, the Headteacher and the school office.

**You can help us to get the right information to the right person by:**

- ◆ **Making sure you alert [thevirtu-alschool@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:thevirtu-alschool@somerset.gov.uk) when there is a change of DT, providing name and email contact**
- ◆ **Making sure the school office knows who the DT in your school is and is able to forward emails within your school or setting**

The annual safeguarding return will also be asking you to name your DT in the future and we will be using this data to help us keep our lists updated but if you can think of other ways that we can make sure we stay in touch, please let us know.

**Email: [thevirtu-alschool@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:thevirtu-alschool@somerset.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.somersetvirtu-alschool.co.uk](http://www.somersetvirtu-alschool.co.uk)**

## VIRTUAL SCHOOL SUPPORT FOR DESIGNATED TEACHERS

We ran the first of our additional Designated Teacher Network meetings in the autumn term and were pleased with the feedback and suggestions from those attending.



We now offer a 'central' (geography has become less important during Covid working!) meeting for all schools in the first half and then a follow up meeting in the second half of the term held in both the east and the west.

The network meetings are lead by our Advisory Teacher team and although there are links to our termly theme—in the autumn we focused on developing resilience in our most vulnerable learners - and time for any updates and Qs&As, the east/west meetings have a focus on problem solving with an EP leading a solution circle type of peer support discussion. We hope that these meetings will become a valued resource for Designated Teachers.

Our first meeting in the Spring term on 10th February will provide a space for an introduction to and support in the use of the new ePEP. Invitations will be sent out to all DTs and school at the end of January.

## VIRTUAL SCHOOL & LEARNING SUPPORT TEAM CLA SUPPORT 2020-21 (UPDATED JANUARY 2021)

### WEST

**Lead Advisory Teacher - Sarah Melhuish**

**Advisory Teachers**

- ◆ Anne Constable
- ◆ Cassie Jones
- ◆ Claire Eastwood
- ◆ Julie Hunt
- ◆ Zoe Crarer

**Learning Mentors**

- ◆ Bev Robson
- ◆ Ella Kusiak
- ◆ Emily Ballard
- ◆ Emma Dickinson

**Post 16 Officer - Abi Calderwood-White**

### EAST

**Lead Advisory Teacher - Helen Berryman**

**Advisory Teachers**

- ◆ Heidi Humpage
- ◆ Jackie Jones
- ◆ Mark Long (LAT for SEND)
- ◆ Sian Biggs
- ◆ Wendy Birkett
- ◆ Jo Milum

**Learning Mentors**

- ◆ Kerry Ashworth
- ◆ Natalie Cochrane
- ◆ Polly Slade
- ◆ Catherine Steadman

**Post 16 Officer - Gary Roper**

From September 2020, the advisory team supporting CLA has been working out of East and West pods, with the staff within these two areas linked to the schools, colleges and settings there. We hoped this has worked well for schools.

We have added to our team through the autumn term, with three excellent new Learning Mentors: Catherine, Emma and Polly joining us and from January 2021, we have two further Advisory Teachers working with us, too. Zoe will be part of the west pod and Jo will have her CLA work based in the east but will work with the SEND agenda across the east and west.

The expansion of the team may mean some changes to who the Advisory Teacher is for one or two schools. Where this is the case, the new Advisory Teacher will make contact early in the spring term.

## GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL & LEARNING SUPPORT TEAM

If you are not sure who you need to contact about a particular CLA, please email

[thevirtualschool@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:thevirtualschool@somerset.gov.uk)

and your query will be directed to the right person. This mailbox is staffed year round although the Advisory team works during school term time.

If you have a query about Previously Looked After Children, we have a dedicated mailbox for these questions

[PLACSomersetInclusion@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:PLACSomersetInclusion@somerset.gov.uk)

The Virtual School website remains a source of information and provides links to a range of resources and guidance including support for completing PEPs, Education Plans for Previously Looked After Children (EPPLAC) and the current Pupil Premium Policy .

[www.somersetvirtualschool.co.uk](http://www.somersetvirtualschool.co.uk)