

Ealing LAC Designated Teachers Newsletter

November 2020



Dear LAC Designated Teachers

I am pleased to send you this update on some of the support for our children in care and care experienced young people that has been undertaken by the Ealing Virtual School and its pupils since the country went into lockdown in March this year.

For the VS teachers, life has been both very much the same and very different: they have continued to work with individual pupils, foster carers and families, social workers and school staff to resolve issues, to support changes and new initiatives and to ensure that the very best provision is in place for each student and that all the key adults are supported to deliver the very best opportunities for Ealing LAC. Like everyone else, including our children and young people, the COVID lockdown meant rapidly adapting to the virtual 'new normal' and the challenges of working from home using new technology – this has had some unexpected benefits too:



One VS teacher had, by the end of a meeting with a very anxious young person, not only got her to talk on MS teams but had introduced her to her hens as well, resulting in a few virtual smiles and a delighted young person!

I know that colleagues in schools have also worked very hard and that they have made special efforts to support the most vulnerable pupils in their schools, especially LAC. I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you all very much for that. I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible at the LAC Designated Teachers' Network next week.

In the meantime, you can see some of what has been happening here.

Bridie McDonagh, Virtual School Headteacher



The LA is not planning to hold any face-to-face LAC Designated Teacher meetings at EEC during lockdown or while CV-19 rates continue to cause concern in London.

However similar meetings have been successfully run on Microsoft Teams and as no one needs to leave their school site, often more members are able to participate in virtual meetings.

Next meeting: Thursday 26th November 9.30 - 11.00 a.m.

followed by a Q&A with the VS team for new LAC DTs at 11.00 a.m.

An invitation with an MS Teams link has been sent to all LAC DTs via EEC. You can also use this link to book a place: https://schools.ealingcpd.org.uk/courses/bookings/c_detail.asp?cid=17549 – advance booking is required to access the meeting.

EALING VIRTUAL SCHOOL UPDATES

Supporting Ealing LAC Year 11 Students in times of uncertainty

After a year of considerable turmoil, the VS teachers are very pleased with the impact of efforts to focus strongly on helping Ealing Year 11 LAC students to have very clear plans for post-16 study and transition. With regular meetings between the Secondary phase teachers Sue and David, alongside our Post-16 Teacher, Sundeep Gill, we were able to go through each young person's plans in detail, anticipating any potential problems and identifying students in need of greater support. We have also worked with social workers to ensure plans for post-16 study are captured in Personal Education Plans, and that there is a strong emphasis on forward planning in PEP meetings for Year 11s and Year 10s.

The cancelling of GCSE exams and the eventual use of Centre-Assessed Grades created complicated feelings amongst our young people, with fewer unpleasant surprises for most while some of our young people felt deprived of the chance to show the progress they had made. Given the uncertainty surrounding the exams scheduled for this summer, we are working harder than ever, with school colleagues, to make sure we can support our Year 11s to demonstrate their full potential week in and week out throughout the year, and to put interventions in place as soon as a need has been identified.

David Aizenberg - Specialist Advisory Teacher

Success of Ealing VS 2020 University Students and Graduates

14 care leavers supported by the Ealing VS started university in September; a total of 43 students are currently studying at university level.



It has been a fantastic year for Ealing graduates. This year 16 students have graduated from university with **13 first degrees and 3 postgraduate degrees** with outstanding results, including **3 First Class Honours degrees**. So **congratulations** to our 2020 graduates - very well done!

Two of our postgraduates have also completed further training to become teachers.

The Virtual School, the Leaving Care Team and the Horizons Centre are publishing regular newsletters to support our care leavers. The most recent edition was for our students at University including tips on referencing, support with their emotional well-being, housing, as well as with essays and funding and providing a care package to meet their needs during COVID-19. It is being circulated with this newsletter – please have a look... the advice might be of use for other students too

Sundeep Gill – Specialist Advisory Teacher (Post-16)

Ealing VS Education Awards

Sadly, this year the Virtual School was unable to hold the annual **Education Awards Ceremony** for the first time in 22 years due to COVID-19.

We are however pleased to share that **Awards, Certificates** and **Letters of Commendation**, cards and vouchers were sent to students in Primary, Secondary and Post-16 year groups to mark their excellent success during a very difficult year.



KS2 Transition

Change and transition can be a difficult and uncomfortable experience for all children. However, adapting to change is particularly more difficult and stressful for children that are looked after - see *Ealing's Virtual School Guidance on Transition to High School for Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children* (November 2020).

The Primary teachers in the Virtual School have continued to support all our KS2 children through this time of uncertainty, insecurity and instability. Many of our children had big expectations of completing their last year of school and sitting their SATs and had looked forward to the invaluable standard experience of transitioning to high school – this has of course been disrupted by COVID-19.

During this uncertain time for many looked after children, both Sian and I have continued to provide regular contact and to work with the previous Y6 children through to their high school and Y7. Preparatory work helped with the smooth transition to high school for the previous Year 6s' this year. We worked on restoring their confidence and self-efficacy skills during lock down and throughout the past few months, all of which have helped them to set personal academic goals ready for year 7.

Ealing's Virtual School Guidance on Transition to High School for Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children is a guidance and resource pack which will complement the existing transition work in schools and provide further support, in securing a smooth transition for our KS2 children into their chosen high schools. The document is almost complete and will be available to download on EGFL and our new google drive folder very soon.

Alison O'Connor - Specialist Advisory Teacher



Extension Tuition for Looked After Pupils

The Ealing Virtual School is taking part in a new government-funded initiative to enable Looked After Children to access educational support from independent and private schools. This initiative has enabled a large group of Ealing children to receive 1-1 on-line tuition from local independent schools.

Ealing's participation began with the VS's relationship with Harrow School, which started back in 2018 when a group of children, living fairly locally to Harrow, were able to attend sessions at the school on a Thursday after school. These sessions offered group and 1-1 tuition and study support from both the teachers and the 6th form students, followed by an hour of general activities which gave access to a wide range of experiences, from using the observatory to rifle shooting, music production and debating – all in the wonderful grounds and using the amazing facilities of Harrow school.

In the current COVID-19 context we can only do this work online, so we are restarting the Thursday sessions following the usual format but using 'chat rooms' – with of course the VS teachers in attendance.

Currently around 20 students from Ealing are taking part in the tuition scheme. The most popular request is for maths tuition, but there are some non-core subjects being delivered, including Japanese, French, history, geography and philosophy. Participating students range from Years 9-13 and we are currently exploring expanding the programme to those in Years 7 and 8.

The Virtual School is also now including other local private schools in the project and the scheme is expanding. Many Ealing LAC students are accommodated at some distance from Ealing and may not previously have had the opportunity to take part so the extension of participating schools and the use of online delivery is widening opportunity for Ealing LAC both in and out of borough.

The main advantage of this great project is that the tutors seem to be making a good relationship with their students and are really encouraging. Feed-back has been very positive. The tutors do this work at the end of their school day or at weekends, they really want to do this and make a difference to our children's lives!

Sue Tarry - Specialist Advisory Teacher

Laptop Distribution

The Virtual School Headteacher has had a lead role with schools and social care colleagues in the distribution of 859 DfE laptops to vulnerable pupils including LAC, during the lockdown period. These enabled vulnerable pupils to access learning and complete education tasks online over that trying time.



John Lyons Charity Competition

Ealing VS has a long history of working with the JLC, a charity which aims to promote the life chances of children and young people through education. (See <http://jlc.london/about-us/>)

The JLC has recently sponsored a competition for children and young people to create or write something about what had kept them going in the time of COVID-19 and lockdown. This was managed by the four participating West London boroughs' Virtual Schools.

There were two winners in Ealing: the first, a young woman now 18 years old and attending college. She has an EHCP and previously attended a special school. This young person submitted some stunning photos of her baking. She is quite passionate about cookery; taking part in the **Junior Chef** course at West London University a few years ago and that experience is still influencing her today, as you can see.



As her prize, she and her foster carer will be having afternoon tea at the Savoy.

The other winner is a very talented artist, currently in year 8. Her drawings are just amazing. She attends an Ealing school and is doing very well in all areas but her art is outstanding. Her prize will be a voucher to spend at her favourite art store!



Junior Council

The Ealing VS is recruiting members for a new Junior Council. This is the 11th year the Council has run. The children involved are from Years 3 to 6 and represent the views of all of Ealing's children in care in those school years.

We invite Key Stage 2 children accommodated either in or out of borough to join. Please contact Sian Hender for more information if you would like to recommend any child to join the Council.

Last year, our theme was **Health** which became particularly pertinent during lockdown. Luckily, our children seemed very clear on ways to keep physically and mentally healthy, especially when learning from home and not attending school, for some children and young people for a lengthy period.

Unfortunately, COVID meant many of the exciting activities planned to fully explore our *Health* theme were not possible, so we are going to carry forward this very important topic into part of this coming year's theme.

We will also be asking the children what issues are important to them and what they may like to focus on this year to see if there are any popular topics or a consensus that can be followed up.

Sian Hender – Specialist Advisory Teacher

Black History Month Reading Recommendation

Sundeep has enjoyed reading ***Martin Rising: A Requiem for a King*** by Andrea and Brian Pinkey - a beautifully written story in verse expressing the incredible life of Dr Martin Luther King Jr.

Black History Month

This is the first year that Ealing VS has independently celebrated **Black History Month** and the newsletter which accompanies this one was one way of doing this. The VS implicitly and explicitly recognises the importance of celebrating black history in UK for all children and all LAC, but particularly for LAC of Black African Caribbean heritage, who may not be placed with families of the same heritage as them or may be placed in areas with a lack of diversity. The VS is committed to supporting and celebrating all of Ealing's Looked After Children and Black History Month has been one way of doing this... It is a formal part of the VS's commitment to anti-racism and to exploring the experiences of Looked After Children from different backgrounds....



Virtual School Training Programme

The Virtual School's training course on ***Understanding and Supporting Children who have Experienced Developmental Trauma*** has been running this term; the last of the four sessions was held on the 20th November. We have had excellent uptake from staff in a variety of educational settings (primary, secondary and specialist) with a range of different roles (teachers, SENCOs, Deputy Heads, TAs, pastoral support and parent support advisors) represented. The training was successfully adapted to being delivered on a virtual platform and positive feedback has been received from attendees.

Participants particularly enjoyed the opportunity to interact with each other in small groups via 'breakout rooms' to do activities and have reflective discussions. This helped them to make connections (as would usually be the case in a four-part onsite training) and to not feel so alone in front of their computer screens.

Participants reported that the training helped to raise the profile of the needs of children who have experienced care, particularly when looking at the impact of early experiences on brain development and attachment, and the impact this can have in the classroom.

Please do make sure to check in with any colleagues who attended the training and ask whether they require any further support to put their training into action in your school.

We really look forward to welcoming another cohort of school staff for the next training, which will be held in the Summer Term. This will hopefully be in person! Or would some of you prefer courses to still be delivered online? Let me know what would suit you best and I will consider what is possible...

Dr Gabby Pelter – Virtual School Educational Psychologist



Be-Longing (2018)

14min | Short, Drama | 14 December 2018 (UK)

A 9 year-old boy in foster care is torn between the kindly foster family and loyalty to his birth parents.

Director: Mike McKenzie (See be-longing.com for more details....)

Representatives of the Virtual School were privileged to watch a preview of this sensitive award-winning 14-minute film in which a young looked-after child processes his experience of world.

We are hoping to invite the director, Michael McKenzie, to show the film at a future DT meeting where viewers will be able to engage with him in discussion about the experiences of fostering and being fostered and how that can impact on a child's learning in school.



Information and training opportunity

Adopt London West (ALW) is a regional adoption agency, offering support to families and their children who are either adopted or placed under a Special Guardianship Order and live in Ealing, Hounslow, Hammersmith & Fulham or Hounslow. As part of our support, we often link up with schools and the Virtual Heads in each of our partner agencies as a way of ensuring that the children's educational needs are adequately supported in light of the possible trauma and loss that they may have experienced in their early years.

ALW also hosts an education support group for adopters to enable parents to talk about areas that affect their adopted children at school. Parents have fed back that the group is a helpful forum to better understand and support their children's educational needs as well as being a good opportunity to meet other parents and learn from their experiences. Professionals from the Virtual School and other appropriate teams are also invited to attend and to answer questions. This group meets online on a Tuesday evening once each half-term. The planned topics for this academic year are:

Session 1 -- Tuesday 24 November 2020 -- Home-school partnerships and how to communicate effectively with school

Session 2 -- Tuesday 26 January 2021 -- Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs); Getting the most from the process

Session 3 -- Tuesday 23 March 2021 – Adolescence; How the brain changes and impacts behaviour in school

Session 4 -- Tuesday 25 May 2021 – Transitions and Helping school make change easier for your child

Session 5 -- Tuesday 13 July 2021 -- Selecting a school; Things to know, questions to ask when choosing a school for your child

Some feedback from those parents who have attended previously:

- *I thought it was an incredibly useful, well structured, informative and informal enough session, helping us to feel relaxed and easy to participate in and contribute to.*
- *I found the suggestion useful, as well as the general group discussion, and I will be fine tuning it along with contributions from the rest of the family.*
- *I found some of the advice offered really helpful and there were things I had not thought of but realise that some of those are important to ask.*

Should you wish to find out more, please contact Milena Bazelkova, Adoption & SG Support Manager at bazelkovam@ealing.gov.uk or Jane Pickerden, Consultant Practitioner at pickerdenja@ealing.gov.uk

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Well-being Indicator Tool for Youth (WIT-Y)



The role of Designated Teacher in a school requires a lot of practical organisational tasks to be carried out. It also gives an opportunity to mediate with colleagues in school about the lived experience of LAC and to explore ways of overcoming the obstacles in their paths.

The WIT-Y is a useful resource for working with teens and young adults: it is an assessment for 15 -21 year olds that is FREE and completed by the young person online. It explores 8 different indicators of wellbeing and is created to be very respectful and non-pathologizing.

After completing the assessment it highlights areas of life that are going well and those that may need some attention, including a free PDF blueprint for change that can be used to make a plan to improve difficult areas. <https://cascw.umn.edu/portfolio-items/well-being-indicator-tool-for-youth-wit-y/>

Recommended by Liz Fraser, Behaviour Consultant, Behaviour and Inclusion Service

The Virtual School is circulating with this Designated Teachers' Newsletter:

- **The EALING CARE LEAVERS' NEWSLETTER - The UNIVERSITY edition October 2020**
- **The EALING VIRTUAL SCHOOL – BLACK HISTORY MONTH Newsletter October 2020**

Also coming soon on EGfL ... ***Ealing Virtual School Guidance on Transition to High School for Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children***

As ever, please contact any member of the Virtual School Team if you have any questions about your students and their learning, any contributions to the next meeting agenda or newsletter or any items you would like to see in the future:

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