

VSK WEEKLY UPDATE

1 April 2026

Supporting Children in Care During the Easter Holidays

Even though Easter is a shorter break than Christmas, children in care may still experience:

- Disrupted routines and loss of school structure
- Mixed emotions during family-focused celebrations
- Anxiety over contact arrangements
- Increased risk of loneliness or isolation
- Reduced access to trusted adults in school



Relational Approaches That Help:

1. Keep Connections Strong

- Check in before, during and after the holiday period
- Show curiosity about their feelings
- Use warmth and attuned communication to strengthen felt-safety

2. Provide Predictable Structure

(Consistent routines reinforce belonging)

- Create a simple holiday timetable together
- Use visual schedules for younger children
- Share plans early to reduce anxiety

3. Co-Plan Meaningful Activities

- Incorporate the child's wishes & feelings
- Offer low-cost ideas: crafts, baking, nature walks, local events
- Avoid assumptions about religious involvement

4. Watch for Emotional Triggers

- Family themes, religion, or sudden changes in routine may evoke strong emotions
- Use a trauma-informed lens: validate, reassure, co-regulate

5. Support Older Young People & Care Leavers

- Offer light-touch check-ins
- Share community activities
- Be mindful of increased isolation during school closures

[KCC Relational Approaches to Support School Belonging and Attendance – Guide & Toolkit](#)

Dear All

Virtual School Kent are *delighted* to announce that nominations for this year's VSK Post 16 Awards are now open for Kent Young People in Care and Kent Young Care Leavers currently in Years 12, 13, 13+ or who are in employment/training.



We encourage you to nominate young people for an Award.

You can make a nomination yourself and help us share this information with other colleagues so they can make a nomination. This will ensure that we are able to celebrate our young people's achievements and help make sure that they do not miss out on the opportunity of being recognised and rewarded.

[Link to Nomination Form: VSK's Post 16 Award's Nominations 2026 – Fill out form](#)

Award Categories this year are:

- ◇ **Outstanding or greatly improved academic achievement**
- ◇ **Outstanding or greatly improved engagement and/or attitude towards learning**
- ◇ **Outstanding contribution to the education, training, or employment placement**
- ◇ **Outstanding contribution to the community**
- ◇ **Wider achievements of note**

*The deadline to make a nomination is 5.00pm – Friday 8th May 2026

As in previous years, we will not be able to accept any nominations after this date.

If you have any further questions, please contact us at: vsk@kent.gov.uk



Kent Family Hub YouTube Channel – New Support for Families Across Kent

We're pleased to share that **Kent Family Hubs** now have their very own **YouTube channel** — a fantastic new way to connect with and support families across the county.

The channel brings together friendly, accessible and easy-to-follow video content designed to complement the advice and guidance already offered through our Family Hubs. It's another step towards ensuring families can get the help they need, **when and how they need it**, in a way that feels welcoming and easy to use.

By launching on YouTube, Kent Family Hubs can:

- Make information available 24/7** for families and professionals
- Provide visual, step-by-step guidance** to support early years development and family wellbeing
- Strengthen the Family Hub offer** with clear, consistent digital resources
- Build an online community of support**, reaching even more families across Kent

New videos will be added regularly, and we encourage colleagues to share the link with carers, families, schools, and partners who may find the content helpful.

Subscribe [here](#) to explore the Kent Family Hub YouTube channel

Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme

How Families Can Access Free Holiday Activities

We want to make sure all our children, young people and families are aware of the support available to them during the school holidays. Kent's **Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme** offers a fantastic opportunity for children aged **4 to 16** who receive **benefits-related Free School Meals (FSM)** to enjoy free, enriching activities alongside healthy, nutritious meals.

The programme runs during the **Easter, Summer and Christmas** breaks and is designed to support children's **physical health, emotional wellbeing and confidence**, as well as giving them a chance to try new experiences and make positive memories.

More information can be found on the [Kent HAF Programme website](#).

From **Wednesday 4 March 2026**, all eligible families will receive an **electronic E-Voucher**.

This voucher allows parents and carers to:

- **Search for a local HAF provider** offering Easter 2026 activities
- **Request a place directly** for their child

Book without needing any additional eligibility checks

The E-Voucher confirms eligibility automatically, helping families access support quickly and easily, and reducing workload for schools, social workers and providers.

We encourage schools, social workers and all professionals supporting children to share this information with eligible families so they can make the most of the opportunities available.





Working Together to Give Kent's Children the Strongest Start

At VSK, we know that **what happens in the earliest years of a child's life shapes everything that follows**. That's why we want to highlight Kent's new **Best Start Local Plan**, which brings together partners across the county with one shared ambition: to ensure every child has the foundations they need to thrive, feel ready for Reception, and begin their education with confidence.

The plan recognises the importance of the early years — especially the first **1,001 days** — as a crucial period for children's learning, development, emotional wellbeing and long-term life chances. It aligns with the national *Best Start in Life Strategy* and supports Kent's drive to improve outcomes against the **Good Level of Development (GLD)** measure.

Central to delivering this work are the **Best Start Family Hubs**. These hubs offer families a single, welcoming access point where services come together — health, education, childcare, community support and early help. They provide support from pregnancy through to age five (and up to 19, or 25 for young people with SEND), ensuring families receive joined-up help at the right time.

The Best Start Local Plan focuses on three key priorities that strongly connect with VSK's aspirations for all Kent children:

- **Raising ambition and reducing inequality** — helping more children be ready for Reception and narrowing attainment gaps, particularly for those who face additional barriers
- **Enabling curiosity, communication and learning** — strengthening early language development, play, and the home learning environment
- **Building family resilience and wellbeing** — supporting parental mental health, infant feeding, parent–infant relationships and community connections

This plan has been developed collaboratively across early years, education, health and children's services, and provides a shared framework for improving early childhood outcomes across Kent.

As ever, VSK will continue to champion our youngest children and work alongside our partners to ensure that **every child has the best possible start on their learning journey**.

You can read the full Best Start Local Plan [here](#)





New Government Screen Time Guidance for Parents of Under 5s

The government has published new **evidence-based, non-judgemental guidance** to help parents manage screen time for children under five, responding to growing concerns from families about the impact of screens on early development. [\[gov.uk\]](https://www.gov.uk)

Key messages from the guidance:

- **Under 2s:** Screen use should be avoided, except for shared activities that support bonding and interaction (for example, video calling family).
- **Ages 2–5:** Screen time should be limited to **no more than one hour a day**, and avoided at mealtimes and in the hour before bed.
- **Content matters:** Parents are encouraged to choose **slow-paced, age-appropriate content** and avoid fast-paced, social-media style videos and AI-based toys or tools.
- **Watch together:** Using screens **with children**—talking, asking questions, and engaging with what’s on screen—supports development more than solo screen use.

The guidance highlights that screens can displace important activities such as sleep, play, physical movement and face-to-face interaction, which are all critical in the early years.

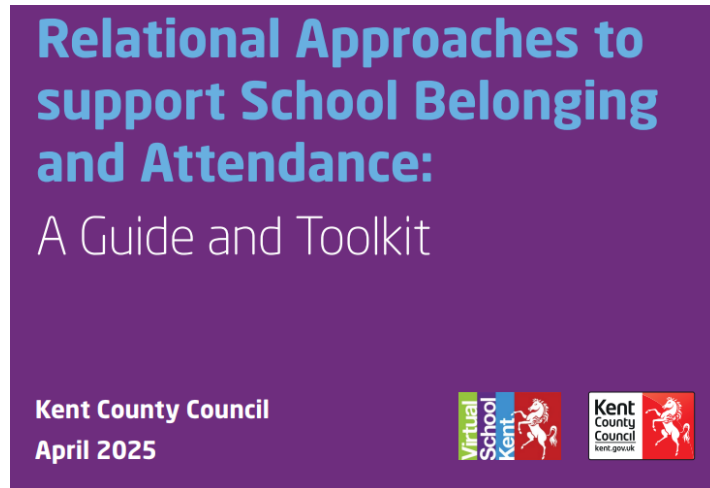
It is available free on the **Best Start in Life** website and will be shared through the **Family Hubs**, supporting staff conversations with parents around healthy digital habits.

[Baby and toddler screen time guidance - Best Start in Life](#)



This guide and toolkit was initially developed by the Virtual School Kent and the Kent Educational Psychology Service. Its aim is to support schools in their understanding of the importance of promoting relational approaches to create a sense of connection, school belonging and with trauma informed practices supporting all vulnerable children, particularly those who may struggle to attend school.

[Click here](#)



We'd love to hear from you!



How have VSK supported you or your team recently?
Please take a moment to let us know by clicking the link below:

[Feedback Form: Share how VSK supported you](#)

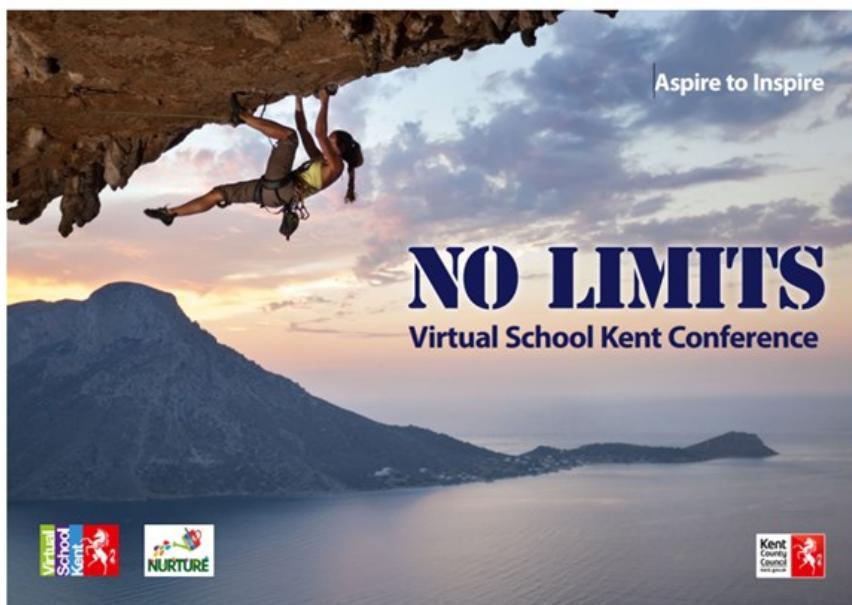


Book Your Place Today!

Click. Book. Secure. *Don't miss out.*

12.05.26	County Wide Designated Teacher Update 12:30 & 15:45 Online Countywide Virtual Designated Teacher Updates – Fill in form
13.05.26	County Wide Designated Teacher Update 8:00 Online Countywide Virtual Designated Teacher Updates – Fill in form
30.06.26	East Kent Designated Teacher Forum 13:30 @ Whitstable Youth Hub East Kent Designated Teachers Forum - Booking Form 30th June 2026
01.07.26	North Kent Designated Teacher Update 13:30 @ North Team - Virtual DT briefing - 01 July 2026 -Term 6 – Fill in form
02.07.26	West Kent Designated Teacher Induction 13:00 Online Countywide Virtual Designated Teacher Updates – Fill in form
07.07.26	South Kent Designated Teacher Update / Induction 13:30 @ Smile Centre Whitfield Primary South Kent Designated Teachers Forum - Booking Form Tuesday 7th July 2026 –





SAVE THE DATE
Wednesday
7th October
2026
10am til 2pm

DETLING SHOWGROUND

GUEST SPEAKER: ALFIE WATTS –
Winner of Race Across the World

This event is for Designated
Teachers, Senior Leadership
Teams and the young people they
support



Join Us at the “No Limits” Virtual School Kent Conference!

We’re excited to announce this year’s *No Limits* Virtual School Kent Conference on
Wednesday 7th October 2026, from **10am to 2pm**, at **Detling Showground**.

This inspiring event is designed for **Designated Teachers, Senior Leadership Teams, and the young people they support in Years 8 to 13**. Together, we’ll explore ambition, resilience, and what it truly means to aspire without limits.

We’re also thrilled to welcome our guest speaker, **Alfie Watts – Winner of Race Across the World**, who will be sharing his remarkable journey and the lessons he learned along the way.

Please save the date and start planning which young people you’d like to bring—this is an event they won’t want to miss!

Who To Contact



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Instagram [participation team](#)



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