

VSK WEEKLY UPDATE

3 June 2026

VSK Pre 16 Awards Nominations – Live!



The nomination window will remain open until Friday 3rd July at 5pm.

Please be aware that no further nominations will be accepted after this deadline.

This is your opportunity to recognise the Kent looked after students that you support up to the academic Year 11.

We're keen to celebrate a wide range of achievements and contributions, so please consider nominating someone who shines in any of the following categories:

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

You can submit your nominations using the VSK Pre 16 Awards Nominations 2026 form:

[VSK Pre 16 Awards Nominations 2026 – Fill out form](#)



Attendance, Safeguarding and Inclusion – Key Updates for VSK Partners

As we move through the exam period, we wanted to share key updates for Designated Teachers, social workers and carers supporting children in care and previously in care across Kent.

Attendance remains a shared priority

Attendance across Kent continues to track closely with national averages, reflecting strong multi-agency working. This reinforces the expectation outlined in the DfE's statutory guidance that **attendance is everyone's responsibility**: [Working Together to Improve School Attendance \(DfE guidance\)](#)

Colleagues will be aware that strong attendance underpins educational progress, wellbeing and long-term outcomes for children.

There have been **continued improvements in overall attendance and persistent absence**, particularly in secondary schools. However, **severe absence remains a priority area**, and ongoing focus is needed for our most vulnerable learners.

Kent's approach to tackling severe absence has been recognised nationally, with the local authority leading a DfE-supported project bringing together schools, Early Help, Social Care, Youth Justice and the Virtual School. This reflects the importance of **early identification, coordinated support and partnership working** in improving outcomes.

Safeguarding and attendance – strengthening practice

A Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership (KSCMP) audit will shortly be launched to further strengthen understanding of the relationship between **attendance and safeguarding risk**: [KSCMP – Safeguarding resources and guidance](#).

This work will focus on shared learning and system improvement and will explore:

- How attendance data is used to identify emerging concerns
- Barriers impacting attendance
- How safeguarding thresholds are recognised and applied
- How partners work together where attendance may indicate vulnerability

For VSK partners, this is a timely reminder that **poor attendance can be an early indicator of risk**, and that effective communication between schools, carers and social workers is essential.

Why attendance matters – key messages for practice

Recent Kent analysis reinforces the strong link between **attendance and attainment across all key stages**. While this will be familiar, the data continues to highlight that:

- Even small drops in attendance can significantly reduce the likelihood of achieving expected outcomes
- The attainment gap widens further for disadvantaged pupils, even where attendance is strong

This aligns with national evidence and best practice resources available through the DfE's RISE programme: [RISE Attendance Improvement Support and Toolkit](#)

For children in care, it is particularly important that we:

- maintain **high expectations for attendance**
- act early when attendance begins to dip
- ensure **joined-up planning through PEPs and multi-agency working**

Transition – using data to support Year 6 to Year 7

Secondary schools can now access attendance and absence data for incoming Year 7 pupils via the DfE's View Your Education Data platform: [View Your Education Data \(VYED\) platform](#)

This supports:

- early identification of pupils who may need additional support
- more effective transition planning
- continuity of intervention across phases

Colleagues may also find this DfE webinar useful: [Monitor Your School Attendance: Transition Webinar](#)

For VSK partners, this is an important opportunity to ensure that **attendance information is actively discussed within transition planning and PEP meetings**, so that the right support is in place from the start of Year 7.

Inclusion – continued positive picture in Kent

Kent continues to demonstrate a strong inclusive approach, with **suspension and permanent exclusion rates remaining significantly below national averages**.

Year-to-date data shows:

- **Suspensions reduced by 5.5%**
- **Permanent exclusions reduced (59 cases, down by 3)**

This reflects a consistent commitment across Kent schools to use exclusion **only as a last resort**, and to work proactively to keep children engaged in education.

For children in care, this remains a key priority. Designated Teachers, social workers and carers play a vital role in:

- advocating for inclusive practice
- supporting early intervention where concerns emerge
- ensuring a coordinated response where risk of exclusion is identified

Strong multi-agency working continues to make a positive difference across Kent. For children supported by Virtual School Kent, maintaining a sharp focus on **attendance, safeguarding, transition and inclusion** will remain central to improving outcomes.

Kent SEND Inclusion – Q&A with DfE SEND Expert

Craig Chapman, Interim Deputy Director for Education: Access and Inclusion, recently met with the DfE's SEND Expert Adviser, Mark Vickers MBE, to explore the developing SEND Reform Plan and respond to key questions from schools.

This **Kent SEND Inclusion Q&A session** provided a valuable opportunity for open dialogue about the future of SEND provision across the county. The discussion focused on:

- clarifying key elements of the proposed reform plan
- addressing common concerns raised by schools
- responding directly to questions submitted through KCC
- supporting the ongoing development of Kent's local Reform Plan

The session reinforced a shared commitment across partners to **build a more inclusive, responsive system** that better meets the needs of children and young people with SEND.

[Mark Vickers MBE SEND Expert Kent Inclusion Session](#)

Foundation to Drawing and Talking Therapy

Following the success of our last drawing and talking course, we would like to offer a second opportunity to take part in this exciting course – link below to find out more about the course.

[Foundation to Drawing and Talking Therapy](#)

- Course details : 1 full day online training (9am-3:30pm)
- Dates: Possible dates: Monday 25th January 2027 or Wednesday 3rd February 2027
- Funding : The course is funded by VSK
- Available Spaces left: 12

Upon completion you will have 12 months access to membership area.

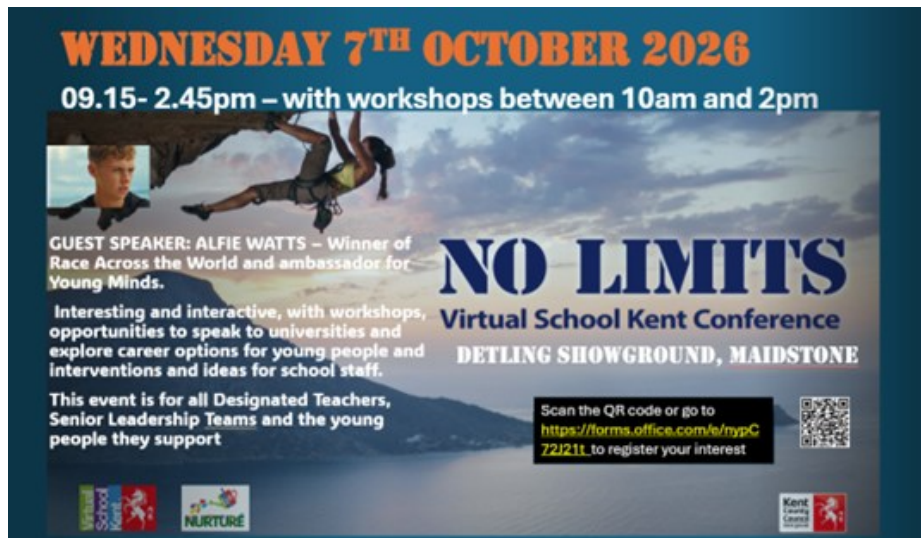
Based on level of interest and the preferred date selected, the course date will be agreed, and you will then be contacted to confirm your place on the course.

Booking form - Please complete 1 form per training type request.

[EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FORM - Drawing and Talking Training – Fill out form](#)

Please contact Michelle.Olden@kent.gov.uk if you have any questions.

Book Your Place Today!



We're really pleased to welcome Dr Asha Patel from Innovating Minds to our [No Limits Conference](#), where she will be leading an engaging and practical workshop for teachers attending the event without young people. Dr Patel brings both warmth and expertise, creating a space where research and real-world practice come together in a way that feels relevant and easy to apply.

Her session, 'Becoming & Being a Trauma Informed Practitioner', will support professionals to better understand how trauma affects children's development, behaviour and wellbeing, while offering clear, practical strategies that can be used day to day. The workshop also highlights the importance of early intervention and explores how simple, body-based approaches can help children feel safe, calm and ready to learn. Importantly, it also gives thoughtful attention to staff wellbeing, helping practitioners recognise and respond to the impact of the work they do.

HEALING TOGETHER



Alongside this, there is a fantastic opportunity to be part of the Healing Together programme.

There are 60 fully funded training places available for schools across Kent and Medway, offered on a first come, first served basis. There is no cost to train or maintain accreditation, although practitioners are expected to go on to deliver the programme, including work to support children affected by domestic abuse. Practitioners can train in two programmes, with at least one focused on this area.

You can find out more here: [link](#)

To apply to become an accredited facilitator, please email: healingtogether@innovatingmindsgroup.com

Neurodiversity Definitions



OCD

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is characterised by recurrent intrusive thoughts (obsessions) that drive a person to perform repetitive, ritualistic behaviors (compulsions) to relieve anxiety

Autism

Autism is characterised by differences in communication, social interaction, and behavior, often involving challenges with social skills and repetitive patterns of activity

ADHD ADD

ADHD is marked by persistent patterns of inattention / executive dysfunction, hyperactivity / hyperfocus, or impulsivity / dopamine mining that interfere with daily functioning

Misophonia

Misophonia is marked by an intense negative emotional or physiological response to specific repetitive sounds, such as chewing or tapping. Similarly, those with Misokinesia experience an intense negative emotional or physiological response to small, repetitive movements like fidgeting or leg shaking

Misokinesia

Dyslexia

Dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, and dyspraxia are specific, often co-occurring, neurodiverse learning differences. Dyslexia involves difficulties with reading, writing and spelling. Dyscalculia causes difficulty with arithmetical skills. Dysgraphia affects the physical act of writing. Dyspraxia affects fine and gross motor skills

Dyspraxia

Dyscalculia

Dysgraphia

Synaesthesia

Synaesthesia is a condition where people experience things through their senses in an unusual way, for example by experiencing a colour as a sound, or a number as a position

Auditory processing

Those with APD may find it difficult to understand people speaking in noisy places, people with strong accents or fast talkers, similar sounding words and spoken instructions

Downs Syndrome

Down's Syndrome is a neurodivergent condition characterised by an extra copy of chromosome 21. This genetic difference affects physical growth, cognitive abilities, and can also lead to health complications

Sensory Integration Disorder

SPD is a neurological condition where the brain struggles to organise and respond to sensory input (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, movement, body awareness)

Tourette Syndrome

Tourette syndrome is a condition that causes sudden, repetitive sounds or movements (tics)

Intellectual Disabilities

ID is a condition characterised by IQ scores below 70 and significant limitations in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills

Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a long-term condition that causes seizures due to unusual electrical activity in your brain

Hyperlexia

Hyperlexia is a syndrome characterised by a precocious, self-taught ability to read far beyond expected age levels, often appearing before age five, paired with significant challenges in understanding spoken language and social communication



A DAY OF WELCOME

A Day of Welcome – Friday 12 June 2026

A Day of Welcome is an annual event that supports schools to build a culture of welcome, belonging and understanding for people seeking sanctuary.

In 2025, more than 820 schools and over 220,000 young people took part, using the day to begin Refugee Week with meaningful learning and discussion.

The day provides free live events, resources and activities suitable for pupils of all ages, making it easy for schools to engage with this important theme.

Why take part?

A Day of Welcome can support your setting to:

- build a culture of inclusion, belonging and solidarity
- explore stories of migration, both locally and globally, past and present
- better understand and support refugee pupils and their families

This is particularly relevant for children in care and those experiencing transitions, where a strong sense of belonging is key to wellbeing and engagement in education.

Get involved

Colleagues can [find out more and register here](#).



Young Interpreter Scheme Supporting New Arrivals and Celebrating Multilingualism

The **Young Interpreter Scheme**® is a well-established programme designed to support pupils who are new to English as an Additional Language (EAL), helping them feel welcome, included and confident in their new school environment.

➔ <https://www.hants.gov.uk/emtas/younginterpreters>

What is the Young Interpreter Scheme?

The scheme offers training for pupils aged 5–16 to develop the skills needed to support new arrivals to school. Young Interpreters help their peers to settle in, understand routines and build friendships, whilst also developing their own **confidence, communication and leadership skills**.

For schools, the scheme provides a meaningful way to:

- promote inclusion and belonging
- value and celebrate multilingualism
- develop pupil leadership and peer support

Who can be a Young Interpreter?

A key strength of the scheme is that it is open to **both bilingual and monolingual pupils**.

This inclusive approach helps:

- build empathy among English-speaking pupils
- raise awareness of the challenges faced by learners new to English
- encourage creative communication strategies across the school

Young Interpreters work together using skills and ideas developed through training to support their peers in practical and welcoming ways.

📺 https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=young+interpreter+scheme

How the scheme works

The scheme is supported by Hampshire EMTAS, with guidance and resources available for schools to deliver the programme in-house.

Schools can access:

- structured training materials via a Moodle platform
- resources tailored for both primary (KS1–2) and secondary (KS3–4) phases
- practical strategies to develop and sustain the programme

Colleagues can also view a practical overview of how to implement the scheme effectively:

□ https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=young+interpreter+scheme+training

Safeguarding and good practice

It is important to note that Young Interpreters:

- **do not replace professional adult interpreters**
- are deployed in appropriate, low-risk situations
- are supported and supervised by trained school staff

Clear guidance is provided to ensure that the scheme is implemented safely and appropriately within schools.

Impact

Research from the University of Reading highlights the positive impact of the scheme, including:

- increased empathy and intercultural understanding
- improved communication skills
- enhanced awareness of language and learning

The scheme supports not only EAL learners, but also contributes to wider **social and emotional development across the school community**.

Getting involved

Schools can register to access the full suite of training materials and resources.

(Registration includes access to training materials, guidance and optional resources such as badges and recognition items.)

Stay connected

Colleagues can explore ideas, case studies and updates via:

<https://www.linkedin.com/>

<https://emtas.hias.hants.gov.uk/blog/>

For children in care and those new to school placements, peer support through approaches such as the Young Interpreter Scheme can play a key role in promoting **belonging, confidence and successful transition into education**.



Identity-Informed Approaches Supporting Inclusive, Trauma-Informed Practice

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has developed a **Guide to Identity-Informed Approaches**, focusing on a key element of trauma-informed care: **identity**.

This resource explores:

- what **intersectionality** is
- how identity can be linked to **privilege and oppression**
- how understanding identity can support more inclusive, responsive practice with children and young people

Why this matters

For children in care and those who have experienced adversity, a greater understanding of identity can support practitioners, carers and schools to:

- better recognise **individual experiences and barriers**
 - promote **belonging and inclusion**
- respond more effectively to **diverse needs and backgrounds**

The guide also includes practical activities that can be used with both adults and children to support discussion and reflection.

Access the resources

Colleagues can access the materials below:

- Download: IRC Guide to Identity-Informed Approaches (Intersectionality)**
- Child-friendly activity: My Invisible Knapsack Worksheet**

<https://www.rescue.org/>

This accompanying activity provides an **age-appropriate way to explore intersectionality**, helping children to reflect on identity, difference and lived experience.



PEP reminder:

Please ensure upcoming and overdue PEPs are prioritised and completed within statutory deadlines. Timely PEPs are essential to securing the right educational support for our children and young people.

Virtual School Kent Advisory Team

Strategically championing the educational needs of children with a social worker, those previously in care and children in kinship care.



Did you know VSK has an Advisory Team?

The VSK Advisory Team provides advice, guidance and signposting for education settings regarding three vulnerable groups of children and young people:

- **Ever6 Children with a Social Worker:** Children currently or previously subject to CIN, CP or assessment in the last 6 years, including those who have returned home from care.
- **Previously Looked After Children (PLAC):** Children who were in care and left via Adoption, Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Child Arrangement Order (CAO).
- **Children in Formal Kinship Care:** Children living with relatives under a formal court order (SGO or CAO) who were not previously looked after.

What do we offer?

Although children in these cohorts do not have an allocated VSK officer, the Advisory Team is available when needed to discuss concerns about individual children or groups, and to help plan next steps and solutions to support their education and wider outcomes. Parental consent is required to discuss a named child or share personal information. Cohort or anonymised discussions can take place without consent.

Get in touch

- To find out more, visit the VSKAT section of our website: [VSKAT Introduction | Virtual School Kent](#)
- To discuss a child or cohort, complete the contact form (remember to obtain consent if required) [VSK Advisory Team - Request Advice](#)

We also welcome examples of good practice, strategies, and success stories. Understanding what works well across the county helps us provide the best possible advice to schools, families and professionals supporting the VSK Advisory Team cohorts.

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](#)

Relational Approaches to support School Belonging and Attendance:

A Guide and Toolkit

Kent County Council
April 2025



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.*

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 – Fill out form
07.10.26	VSK No limits Conference @ Detling showground for Primary/Secondary and College staff. Sign Up form https://forms.office.com/e/nypC72J21t



WEDNESDAY 7TH OCTOBER 2026

09.15- 2.45pm – with workshops between 10am and 2pm

GUEST SPEAKER: ALFIE WATTS – Winner of Race Across the World and ambassador for Young Minds.

Interesting and interactive, with workshops, opportunities to speak to universities and explore career options for young people and interventions and ideas for school staff.

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

NO LIMITS
Virtual School Kent Conference
DETLING SHOWGROUND, MAIDSTONE

Scan the QR code or go to <https://forms.office.com/e/nypC72J21t> to register your interest

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!

<https://forms.office.com/e/nypC72J21t>

Who To Contact



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Instagram [participation team](#)



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