

VSK WEEKLY UPDATE

20 May 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](#)



FROM DISENGAGEMENT TO DIRECTION: ONE YOUNG PERSON'S JOURNEY FORWARD

Looking back on Year 11

Looking back on Year 11, this young person describes life at that point as *"eventful... very hectic and unstable."*

School and personal challenges collided, making regular attendance feel impossible. By the end of compulsory education, their attendance had fallen dramatically, and school no longer felt like a place of learning.

"It felt more like a prison than a school," they explain, reflecting on strict rules, constant changes and an environment that didn't feel safe or understanding.

Although support was offered, it wasn't taken up at the time.

"It would be wrong to say there was no support — it was offered. I just didn't accept it," they said.

A lack of trust, and previous negative experiences, made accepting help feel risky.

From Learner to Role Model

After completing his course, confidence grew into capability.

The young person progressed from learner at the provision - to intern - working alongside the staff who previously taught him; working different jobs throughout the placement and supporting both staff and students.

"I do a bit of everything," they explained. *"Front desk, classrooms, supporting adults with additional needs — I like being able to talk to people. That's my favourite part."*

Being close in age to many learners has made them a trusted figure.

"Sometimes people don't feel comfortable going to older staff — I can relate more," they said, reflecting on how shared experiences help build trust.

They describe this phase as giving back:

"I feel like I'm doing now, what I needed then — being that consistent person."

A Turning Point Rooted in Determination

The turning point didn't come through a planned intervention, but through an unexpected moment. Overhearing a conversation where staff assumed they would not sit their exams had a powerful impact.

"They said they didn't see me doing any of my exams... so I just wanted to prove them wrong," the young person shared.

Despite low expectations — both external and internal — they began attending twilight sessions where the environment felt calmer and less pressured. Adjustments were put in place that reduced barriers and anxiety, including alternative exam arrangements.

Against the odds, they sat their exams.



Finding an Environment That Worked

Whilst at school, VSK supported the young person to visit a smaller, more flexible education setting. The difference was immediate!

"It was a lot more relaxed. Everyone was there for a reason," they explained.

"I didn't understand why at first — but when you see it from the staff side, you realise why it works."

They described feeling treated like an adult rather than a problem to be managed. Simple but meaningful approaches — such as being listened to, having choices, and being trusted — rebuilt confidence.

Having people believe in them mattered too.

"Yeah, people did believe in me — and that helped my confidence a lot," they said.

Music also became an important tool for focus and emotional expression.

"It sounds silly, but music really helped. Sometimes it was how people knew how I was feeling."

The Role of a Trusted Adult

A key part of this young person's progress was having a consistent, trusted adult who listened and advocated for them. Through regular involvement from a Virtual School Kent EWO, they had someone who took the time to understand what actually worked for them — not just what was available on paper.

The young person reflected positively on these visits, describing them as 'helpful and grounding'. Much of the support centred on listening first, then translating the young person's views and needs back to education providers in a clear and practical way.

"We talked about college, different staff and options," they explained. "We visited places together and looked at what would actually suit me."

Rather than pushing a single pathway, the EWO supported the young person to explore alternatives, including smaller settings and structured visits ahead of transitions. This helped reduce anxiety and gave them a sense of control over their next steps.

From the young person's perspective, this approach mattered. Having someone who "stuck with me" and ensured their voice was heard helped rebuild trust — not just in professionals, but in education itself. The EWO acted as a bridge between the young person and school, advocating for reasonable adjustments, reduced barriers, and flexible approaches that ultimately enabled them to sit exams and stay engaged.

Reflecting on that time now, it's clear that the impact wasn't about a single intervention, but about consistency. By listening, believing in the young person, and working with them rather than to them, VSK helped create the conditions that allowed progress to happen.

This sustained, relational support played a significant role in helping a disengaged young person begin to see a future again — and take real steps towards it.

Teacher Feedback: Recognising Growth and Impact

Staff working closely with the young person have also noticed a significant change. His teacher described him as "*a breath of fresh air*," highlighting his positive presence within the setting and his natural ability to communicate with others.

They noted how he engages confidently with both learners and staff, often going beyond his role to support others. Whether welcoming students, helping peers with practical problems, or stepping in where needed, he has become someone people naturally turn to.

"He talks to everyone," his teacher reflected. *"Students know him, staff know him — he's always ready to help."*

His teacher also recognised the value of his lived experience.

Being close in age to many learners, and having faced similar challenges, has allowed him to build genuine rapport. This makes him particularly effective at supporting others who may feel hesitant to approach older staff.

Overall, the feedback was clear: **this young person has developed into a well rounded, dependable and empathetic member of the team — someone who contributes positively to the community and serves as a powerful example of what progress can look like when young people are given trust, time and belief.**

Academic Progress and Personal Growth

Academically, the change has been significant. From low GCSE outcomes, the young person has since achieved a Level 2 qualification in English and is working towards Level 2 Maths.

"That's what I'm most proud of — getting my English," they shared. But the biggest change has been internal.

"I've learned that not every step back is permanent," they said.

"Sometimes you think 'this is it' — but it isn't!"

Life now feels calmer, more settled and more purposeful.

"Much better... more focused and a lot calmer," they reflected.

Looking Ahead

With growing confidence and experience, the young person now has clear aspirations for the future, focused on roles that involve helping others and keeping people safe.

They see their lived experience as a strength — something that helps them empathise and understand others' circumstances without judgement.

Transition from Nursery to Reception



This training from Medway Virtual School, it is open to foster carers, kinship carers and adopters who live in Kent but have children going to a Medway School.

If you are a foster carer, kinship carer, adopter living in Medway, or any foster carer that is caring for a Medway child, or a child that is / going to be attending a Medway setting, please do book onto a session that works for you. If you need to bring a younger child with you let us know so we can facilitate this.

Key themes:

- Principles of effective transitions and understand what school readiness looks like.
- Practical ways to support communication and early learning at home.
- Building relationships with Early Years settings and schools.
- Understand the impact of positive language to support children in care, those who are care experienced.
- Supporting routines and expectations.

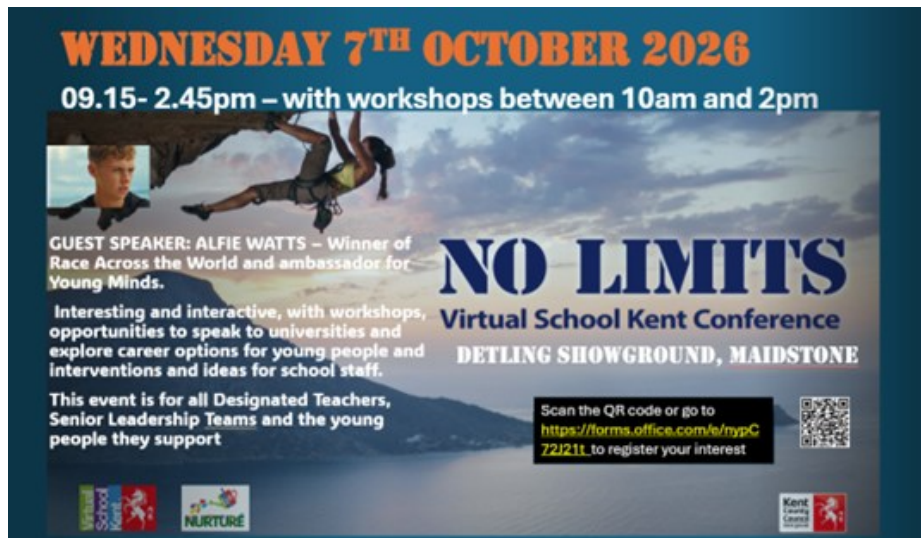
Strategies for supporting children experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).

Transition from Nursery to Reception: in person session – Fill in form



Date	Time	Venue	Postcode	Group
Wednesday 3rd June	9.30 -11am	Lordswood School	ME5 8NN	foster carers, Kinship carers, adopters
Monday 15th June	9.30 -11am	Lordswood School	ME5 8NN	foster carers, Kinship carers, adopters
Thursday 25th June	1 – 2:30pm	Brompton Westbrook Primary School	ME7 5DQ	foster carers, Kinship carers, adopters
Tuesday 30th June	1 – 2:30pm	Brompton Westbrook Primary School	ME7 5DQ	foster carers, Kinship carers, adopters

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

Opening Doors Webinars for Foster Carers and Care-experienced Students:

Free webinars!

Keeping Doors Open – Wednesday 17th June, 10:00–11:30am

This free online webinar for young people and their carers or supporters who are completing Level 3 qualifications at sixth form or college (such as A Levels, BTECs, T Levels or IBCP).

The session will explore next steps after post-16 education, including how to make the most of the summer period and what options are available if plans have changed. It will also cover the university clearing process, the benefits of Higher Education, and the range of support available for care-experienced students both when applying to and attending university.

Everything You Need to Know Before You Go – Tuesday 8th September, 10:00–11:30am

This free session for young people considering going to university in Autumn 2026, along with their carers or supporters.

This session will cover key information to help young people prepare for university, including what to take, settling in during the first few weeks, managing finances and employment, and accessing support services.

Session aims include:

- Supporting young people to feel confident and prepared for the transition to university
- Helping carers feel better equipped to support progression decisions
- Hearing directly from care-experienced students about their experiences of preparing for and starting Higher Education
- Raising awareness of the support and opportunities available to care-experienced learners at university

These sessions are part of the *Opening Doors* programme – a collaborative initiative delivered by the University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University, University of the Creative Arts, and Kent and Medway Progression Federation, designed to support care-experienced young people into Higher Education.

To register for the below webinars, please follow this link:

https://universityofkent.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3UbseajZaulIW8u

University of
Kent



THE
ADOPTABLES



Space School August 2026

A fantastic opportunity for budding scientists to take part in a hands-on, engaging experience.

Open to Year 10 and Year 11 students, this three-day programme gives young people the chance to design, build, and (weather permitting) launch their own rockets.

Dates: Wednesday 5th – Friday 7th August
Time: 10:00am – 5:00pm each day

The programme is free to attend, with lunch provided. Some support with travel costs is also available.

[Apply here](#)

Bioscience Work Experience Week August 2026

An excellent opportunity for young people interested in science and research.

Aimed at Year 12 / Year 1 Level 3 students, this week-long programme enables participants to carry out their own mini research project in an undergraduate teaching laboratory. Young people will also have the opportunity to attend research talks and create and present their own research poster.

Dates: Monday 24th – Friday 28th August
Time: 10:00am – 5:00pm each day

The programme is free to attend, with lunch provided. Some support with travel costs is also available.

[Apply here](#)

CyberFirst Advanced Course July 2026

Delivered by the Institute of Cyber Security Society (iCSS), this is a fantastic opportunity for young people interested in technology and cyber security to deepen their knowledge and skills.

Aimed at Year 12 / Year 1 Level 3 students, the course offers hands-on experience in areas such as digital forensics and encryption, helping students to develop valuable practical skills in a growing and in-demand sector.

Dates: Monday 27th – Friday 31st July
Time: 9:00am – 4:30pm each day

The course is free to attend, with lunch provided. Some support with travel costs is also available.

[Apply here](#)

OPEN AFTERNOON

FOR STUDENTS 16-25 WITH AN EHCP

Tuesday 7th July 2026
3-5pm (last entry 4:30pm)

Join us for a tour of our education provision based on our beautiful 15 acre site as well as an introduction from tutors about our curriculum

Woodpecker Court, Wigmore Lane, Eythorne. Access via CT15 4AN
office@woodpeckercourt.com
01304 830958

Woodpecker Court
"Where learning meets the outdoors"






The **Digital Employability Experience (DEX)** is a free platform designed to help individuals explore career pathways, develop essential digital skills, and connect with over 60 local businesses and organisations across Kent.

Whether you are supporting others into employment or looking to build your own skills, DEX offers:

- Real insights from employers
- Practical, downloadable learning resources

Opportunities to explore a range of industries
Digital skills are essential across every sector - DEX provides a structured, accessible way to build confidence and prepare for the future of work.

Sign up today: [Digital Employability Experience](#)



Digital Employability Experience

"Inspire and engage the workforce of tomorrow"

Digital skills are essential across all industries. Explore, learn and be inspired by local businesses and organisations across Kent.

Sign up today:

- A free resource for anyone looking for employment or those looking to be inspired
- Over 60 business available to explore
- Complete downloadable workbooks to build your skills







Upcoming University Open Days and Events

[Open Days at Kent - Visit Kent - University of Kent](#)

[Open Days and events | CCCU University](#)

[Open Days & Virtual Tours - Complete University Guide](#)



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.

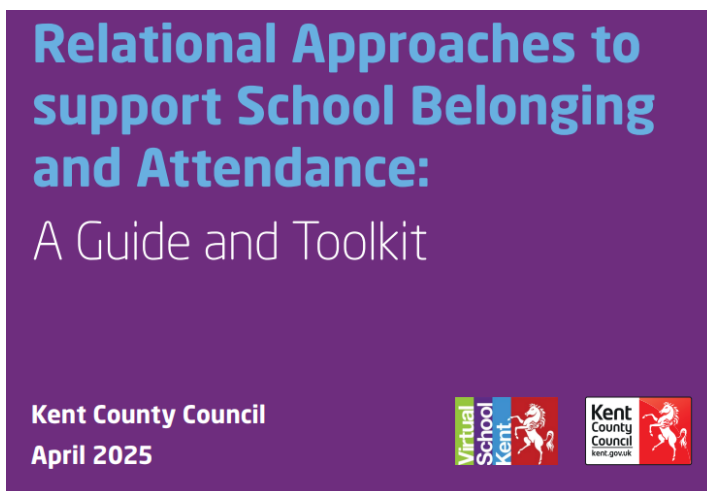
Get in touch

- 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](#)



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



North Kent Assistant Head: Jo Hayes - northvsk@kent.gov.uk

West Kent Assistant Head: Jen Kemp - westvsk@kent.gov.uk

South Kent Assistant Head: Carole Bailey - southvsk@kent.gov.uk

East Kent Assistant Head: Simon Fosse-Collins - eastvsk@kent.gov.uk

Advisory Team Assistant Head: Emma Wills - vskadvisoryteam@kent.gov.uk

Post 16 Assistant Head: Catherine Thompson - 16plusvirtualschoolskent@kent.gov.uk

Post 16 NEET Team Lead: Samantha Perrin - 16plusvirtualschoolskent@kent.gov.uk

Out of County Team Lead: Amanda Ormond - virtualsschoolkentocc@kent.gov.uk



Instagram [participation team](#)



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