

Exploring Practice: Creating simple digital tools to support kinship families

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Context

From September 2024, the DfE expanded the role of Virtual School to specifically include championing the educational attendance, attainment and progress of children in Kinship Care.

Our extended duties for this cohort include:

1. Raising awareness of the needs and disadvantage of children in different types of kinship care arrangements
2. Promoting practice that supports attendance and engagement of kinship children in education
3. Promoting practice that improves the educational attainment of children in kinship care
4. Expanding provision of advice and information to all kinship carers*, helping them to navigate the education system and to advocate for the educational achievement of their children (*with the exception of carers with informal arrangements)

These duties are outlined in [Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements](#). Many previously looked after children reside in kinship care and our [statutory responsibilities](#) also apply to this group.

To best meet the duties

- To better understand the educational disadvantages for this group, Surrey Virtual School and Achieving for Children Virtual School embarked upon a research pilot alongside St Mary's University.
- The project had a theory of change approach. The theory of change is a framework that outlines how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context, by mapping the steps from activities to outcomes and long-term goals.

The initial questions for the research were:

- What are the component groups of children and young people who are included within the umbrella term of 'kinship care'?
- What is the quality and breadth of data available to the LA about their education and how can this be improved?
- Whilst all children and families will be individual, are there any shared characteristics that we need to particularly understand to inform our approach to meeting the educational needs of children in kinship care?
- What can we learn from caregivers, schools, professionals, other partners and research literature?
- What can we learn from the views and voices of children in kinship care about what a good school day looks and feels like for them?
- Cluster Schools Approach-termly training

Research outcomes

National

- Department of Education to amend admissions legal requirements to include an option to identify kinship care.
- In England (and Wales), kinship care is not currently a standard category in the School Census or in the National Pupil Database. DfE to consider adding an identifier to raise the visibility of children in kinship care.
- Alongside this, DfE (with expert sector support) to consider creation of guidance for parents and carers explaining the benefits of making kinship care experience known to their child's school.
- Ensure that Pupil Premium Plus Conditions of Grant makes clear reference to children in kinship care and explains their eligibility (or not) for PP+ funding. Consider expanding eligibility so that there is an equitable PP+ offer for all children in kinship care.

Schools

- Amend school onboarding or admissions forms to enable the identification of kinship care within the school community.
- Expand inclusive practices through trauma and attachment-informed training and resources.
- Ensure curriculum resources reflect and include a positive and inclusive narrative about the experiences of children in kinship care families and avoid contributing to assumptions about traditional family structures.
- Careful consideration about the intersectionality of children in kinship care, and the different ways in which they (and their families) may view different aspects of their identity.
- Consider the specific needs of kinship carers (many of whom are 'returners' to education) when developing parent/carer engagement activities.

Research outcomes

Local Authority/ Virtual School

- Ensure equitable support for carers, including respite and emotional wellbeing services recognising the important role they play in children's education.
- **Develop and maintain a high-quality central resource to offer advice and guidance around improving the educational outcomes of children in kinship care.**
- Continue to share learning from the pilot with schools and education settings to enable sustainable change through training and targeted support.
- Continue to support schools with attachment aware trauma informed training and resources in order to expand inclusive practices, increasing visibility of children in kinship care.
- Ensure that the Virtual School's programme of advice and guidance is integrated into the LA's Local Offer around Kinship.

Kinship Care Padlet

- Outcome: Develop and maintain a high-quality central resource to offer advice and guidance around improving the educational outcomes of children in kinship care.
- In response to kinship carers and school leaders/teachers identifying a central source of information for schools and carers as a major gap in provision, the Virtual Schools and SMU created a Kinship Care Padlet in the spring term of 2025.

What is a Padlet?

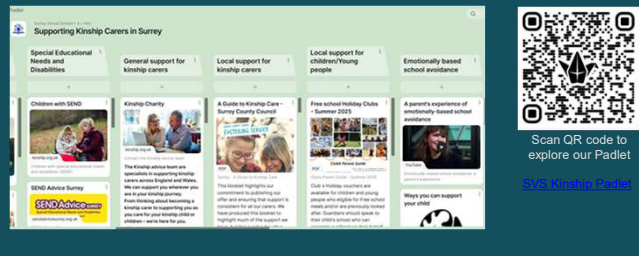
- A Padlet acts as a digital bulletin board for which allows users to collect and share a wide variety of online content like text, images, links, and videos on a shared board.
- Online resource draw on information and support from several relevant websites.
- Personalised to the different areas with signposting to local sources of support for children and kinship carers.

Why Padlet?

- Easy to update compared to a website
- Collaborative - can be updated by many
- Easily shareable e.g. added to email signatures, websites, documents
- Low cost
- One central resource to share but enables sharing of variety of media including our own guidance as well as links to other sites.
- Potential to record audio/ film and include for carers
- Sections enable easy navigation, e.g. highlight column

Support for carers: Surrey Virtual School Kinship Padlet

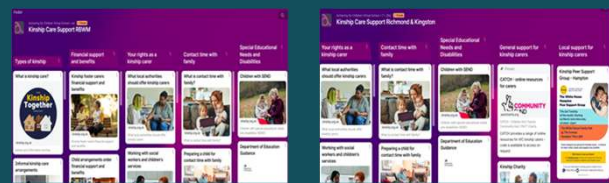
The Surrey Virtual School Kinship Padlet is a hub for up-to-date advice, information, and resources for Designated teachers, professionals and kinship carers of children and young people in Surrey.



Achieving for Children Virtual School padlet for kinship carers

Separate Padlets were created for RBWM and Kingston & Richmond to reflect the local offer

[AfC Kinship Care Support Padlet](#)



Impact and evaluation

Feedback from the research:

- The Padlet was shared with the members of the cluster group, who were asked to start to begin to investigate how it might be used with staff and carers in the summer term 2025.
- Over 1000 views combined in less than a year.

Three main benefits of the resource:

1. The Padlet was described as comprehensive, covering the key themes and did serve as the 'one stop shop' that had been identified as a gap in provision.
2. Potential for supporting a shared understanding of kinship care and therefore more potentially consistent and collaborative practice across schools, families and LA partners. For example, one school had shared it with key members of staff including the safeguarding leads and the ELSA lead. Another school had shared specific sections, especially those with an emphasis on how to support developmentally appropriate behaviour. Another member of the cluster group had shared it with the Business Manager of the school to illustrate the number and needs of children in kinship care and how support for the group should be similar to those children looked after. The Home Link Worker was another professional in the school who was important in knowing about the Padlet and how to use it with kinship families.
3. It had not been a costly resource to make, could be easily shared and updated.

Other examples developed: For professionals working with CWSW, Education Psychology- EBSNA, Adopted families, Designated Teachers/DSLs
