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Ask for
Our ref
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Dear Colleague,

RE: Looked After Children - Best Practice in Schools/ Virtual School Support in National Emergency

The Heads of the Virtual Schools across the East Midlands region meet regularly to share their knowledge and experience in order that children and young people who are in care across the region (referred to here as *Our Children*) can have the best opportunities we can create for them. This collaboration is particularly important as children in care to one Local Authority may access education in another Local Authority.

As a group of Heads of Virtual School teams we would like to thank you all for your hard work and commitment in supporting *Our Children* and their foster families in these challenging times.

You will no doubt share our concerns regarding the potential negative impact of the current national emergency on the educational progress of all children and young people. The impact on *Our Children* is likely to be even greater considering all of the additional factors which may affect them, as documented in the November 2015 report by the Rees Centre "The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England". <http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Key-Messages-for-Policy-and-Practice-2.pdf>

All the East Midlands Virtual School teams continue to provide advice, support and guidance on the education of *Our Children* irrespective of whether they are accessing provision at school, or are remaining at home during this time. In order for *Our Children* to access education, it is imperative that sufficient equipment and connectivity is available for them to access the online learning resources provided by schools and settings, or that effective alternative methods are provided to facilitate their learning. You are likely to be aware of the government's proposals regarding the provision of IT equipment for Care Leavers, children and young people (0-19) with a Social Worker, and disadvantaged Year

10 pupils. Your Local Authority is responsible for ensuring that this equipment is targeted where the need is greatest.

Representation has been made through National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) to Ofqual regarding the calculation of exam grades for *Our Children*. As a group of Heads of Virtual Schools we believe that, if the calculation of exam grades is to be fair and equitable, it is important that the life experiences of *Our Children* are taken into account. For example, multiple care and school placements, or special educational needs arising from their experiences. In situations where a school may have insufficient evidence on which to make an accurate judgement, the region's Virtual School teams would support discussions around reaching a realistic view of the child's ability despite minimal data being available.

The expectation of the Virtual School teams across the region is that Personal Education Planning meetings will take place over the summer term wherever possible, either over the phone or by other electronic means. This is important if *Our Children's* progress and well-being is to continue to be monitored. Whatever the outcomes of the Ofqual qualification process, many of *Our Children* will require additional help to negotiate transition into the next phase of their education, and we ask schools to pay particular attention to planning effective transition for September.

If you wish to speak to any of our Virtual School teams on this, or any other matter relating to the education of *Our Children*, please email the relevant Virtual School for the child about whom you have concerns.

If you wish to access some research-based guidance that will support you to maintain the progress of *Our Children* over the course of these challenging times, and once we return to normality, please see *Looked After Children - Best Practice in Schools (OfSTED 2008)*.
<https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8180/1/Looked-1.pdf>

Yours Sincerely

The East Midlands Virtual School Heads



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