May 3rd 2020

Dear Parent and Carers,

In this letter we have some updates on lots of initiatives the Virtual School are involved in and some information about schools and the latest guidance from the government. We hope you are all well and the team are pleased to be communicating with so many of you.

You may have heard of an app called Mind of My Own which is an easy to use digital app which can be downloaded onto a phone or tablet or used via the website. Oxfordshire County Council are rolling out some training for social workers and other professionals to highlight how the app can be used to support young people and children to express their voice. The app comes in two versions - one and express. Express is for children with additional needs. It is accessible and easy to use with clear display and colourful icons. Children and young people can download the app and use it independently or their social worker can support them to use it on a laptop. It can record their ideas, questions and views. They can use it to contact their social worker or IRO and it takes away the face to face awkwardness of having to speak to someone about difficult things. They can decide who to send the information to and the pupil voice converts easily to PDF so that IROs or Social Workers can include it in review meetings. It is safe to use and complies with all the necessary ISO and GDPR regulations. If you would like to encourage your child(ren) to have a look you can see the Mind of My Own website. The team at Mind of My Own recognise that some children and young people are struggling with their emotional wellbeing during the current crisis. Physical and social isolation are having a huge impact and not being able to go to school or college, meet up with friends or family is adding to the challenges. The team have set up a challenge to support wellbeing and have a new free resource on their website called the Mindfulness Challenge. Please share this with your young people.

The Oxfordshire Kindness Wave are also doing some fantastic art challenges with some local artists who are setting creative projects for children to participate such as making a story tent and making collages out of clothes! Have a look and encourage your child(ren) to take part. You can submit work via the website and it will be shown in the virtual art gallery.

https://oxfordshirekindnesswave.org.uk/creative-challenge/
https://oxfordshirekindnesswave.org.uk/
News from The Virtual School early years lead Christine Grandison about some superb training for foster carers: PEEP Learning Together for Foster Carers course - supporting babies and young children’s health (NOCN Level 2) has moved online. This week 14 foster carers attended their first online session. The 10-session course is jointly funded by The Virtual School, early years team and treatment Foster Carer team and delivered by Peeple practitioners. It is an accredited course which develops skills as a ‘professional parent’ and has enabled foster carers to upskill themselves in using technology! (Peeple is a charity supporting families to raise babies and young children to teach their full potential)
The Virtual School is also planning an exciting project designed to support parents/carers with early language development. The Birth to 2yr old project will provide parents/carers with practical ideas and fun activities to support their children’s early speech and language communication and to understand the crucial skills required in supporting their children to become confident talkers. Developing talking skills is such an important foundation for school and helps children pick up literacy skills more easily. Further information will be shared as the project develops and we will let you know how to get involved.

Although there is not a time frame yet, schools are starting to think about how things will work when the restrictions are partially lifted. Looked after children are invited to attend school unless there is a health risk to themselves or the family. Staff can support them to access work and support them socially and emotionally. Schools are doing their best to make sure all looked after children have access to education and are safeguarded. If you are unsure about anything related to school provision you can contact your school’s Designated Teacher and/or the Virtual School team if you have any questions.

Take care and best wishes from the Virtual School team

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