

## **A guide for Social Workers about securing quick and appropriate school admission for a 'child we care for'**

### **Oxfordshire Schools**

#### **In all circumstances**

- Find out the Ofsted rating of the school. The government will only accept a 'child we care for' going to a school Good or Outstanding. In exceptional circumstances Please contact the Virtual School Head to obtain their agreement in these cases.
- Contact the Virtual School for a discussion about the schools under consideration.
- Involve the learner and the carer in the decision about which school is appropriate.
- Do not approach the school directly.
- Download an 'In Year Transfer Application Form' from the Oxfordshire School Admissions site on the intranet
- List up to 3 preferences (This will save time if your top preference cannot offer a place)
- Put your favoured school as your first preference, even if it doesn't have vacancies

#### **If a change of school takes place mid-year; i.e. any time other than the beginning of term 1 in September**

- Follow the guidance above.
- Remember CAPF (Common Admissions Preference) is the only valid means of applying for a place in a school.
- If in any doubt, contact The Virtual School for advice.

### **Education of a child we care for when they are brought back into Oxfordshire, have been out of provision for a period of time and are a mid-year admission**

#### **In all circumstances**

- It is essential to start the process of identifying an appropriate school as soon as a decision to return to county is taken; *ideally* the school should be identified alongside the care placement and the child should not return to county without a school place. Early information to the Virtual School will secure good long-term provision planning.
- Read the inspection reports of schools in the area under discussion. Do not apply for a school which has an overall judgement of 4 or 3.
- Seek early advice Virtual School staff.
- If a child has a statement or EHC plan, the Virtual School will refer you to the SEN Officer.
- Always complete/ensure the carer completes a CAF (common admissions form) without which no child can enter a mainstream school.
- Even if a placement is temporary, seek a school place immediately. Some children have ended up out of provision for many weeks because 'short term' placements have lasted two terms.

## Schools in other counties

See easy reference flowchart **How to get a new out of county school place for a child we care for:** <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/virtual-school-policies-and-procedures>

### **In all circumstances**

- Use the local knowledge of the carer.
- Contact the Local Authority admissions team immediately for advice. Non application for a school is usually not an option; even if the child needs alternative provision (e.g. placement in a college engagement programme, enrolment in an ESOL programme, private alternative inclusion provision) it is likely that they will have to start on roll at a mainstream school.
- Read the inspection reports of schools in the area. Do not apply for a school which has an overall judgement of 4 or 3. Consult with the Virtual School about your proposals.
- If you have difficulty in making contact or getting advice from the LA contact the Virtual School. There is also a national network of Virtual Heads who we can ask for advice and who work together to resolve problems.
- Ensure that a PEP meeting takes place within 20 days of arrival in the school. This must be convened by the social worker but chaired and written by school.
- Sometimes a child is moved to a children's home which is linked to specialised independent education and not a mainstream school. It is important to check that the last Ofsted judgement for the **education provider** was good or better. The education may not have the same grade as the home.

## The roles of people within the local authority who can help you

**The Admissions Officer** processes school applications centrally, other than for pupils with a statement of SEN (see below). Admissions Officers are each responsible for a number of schools and manage the applications for those schools. Tel: 01865 815175  
[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/admissions](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/admissions)

**The SEN Officer** manages all admissions for students with a statement of special educational needs. [sen@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:sen@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

**The Virtual School** can give advice on choice of school or the right actions to take if there are delays. [virtualschool.LAC@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:virtualschool.LAC@oxfordshire.gov.uk).

**The Education Inclusion Service** provides advice to all parties including social workers on matters relating to exclusion from school and pupils who don't have a school place. Exclusion and Reintegration Officers work closely with schools, governors, parents and local authority colleagues to provide advice. They may be able to assist in resolving problems and delays where children are changing school's mid-term. NB, they do not have a role with regards to children with

SEN Statements other than the provision of general advice. [ERT@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:ERT@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **Key Points from the 2018 statutory guidance for local authorities, 'Promoting the education of Looked After Children'**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/683556/Promoting\\_the\\_education\\_of\\_lookedafter\\_children\\_and\\_previously\\_looked-after\\_children.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683556/Promoting_the_education_of_lookedafter_children_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf)

16. Admissions authorities of all mainstream schools must give the highest priority in their oversubscription criteria to looked-after and previously looked-after children, as defined in the School Admission Code<sup>5</sup>. The admission requirements for looked-after and previously looked-after children are set out in the School Admissions Code. This Code applies to maintained schools and academies, including free schools<sup>6</sup>.

It is the responsibility of the Virtual School Head (VSH) to ensure that:

- admission authorities understand that they cannot refuse to admit a looked after child on the basis of challenging behaviour or refer a looked after child for action under the Fair Access Protocol on the basis of challenging behaviour (See paragraph 3.12 of the School Admissions Code).
- admission authorities understand that looked-after children can be admitted as 'excepted pupils' in relation to the infant class size limit, if they are admitted outside the normal admission round (see 2.15(b) of the School Admissions Code)
- the local authority, as a corporate parent, does not tolerate drift and delay where children the authority looks after are without an education placement that is appropriate to their assessed needs. This includes using their powers of direction in a timely way rather than delay issuing a direction as a result of protracted negotiation.

The choice of school requires skilled working between relevant people. It should be based on a discussion between the child's social worker, the child, their carers and, if appropriate, birth parents. The VSH should be consulted to avoid choosing a school that is unlikely to meet the child's needs. The carer's level of input into the choice of school for the child should be addressed explicitly in the child's permanence plan, which is part of their wider care plan. 19. The VSH should provide advice and support to social workers to ensure they understand the admissions process. If social workers need further information on how the school admissions process works in relation to 'children we care for', they should discuss this with their VSH or someone else who can provide the correct information, e.g. the local authority's school admissions officer. If the appropriate placement is at a mainstream academy or maintained school, the corporate parent must apply through the same process as other parents. They are asked to note that the national closing dates for applications are: 31 October for secondary schools, and 15 January for primary schools.

### **SEND**

The large proportion of 'children we care for' have special educational needs. Of those a significant proportion will, subject to transition arrangements resulting from changes introduced by the Children and Families Act 2014, have a statement of special educational needs. From 1 September 2014 statements are being replaced by Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. In these circumstances the VSH should ensure that:

- the special educational needs and disability code of practice 0 to 25 years, as it relates to looked after children, is followed; and,

- the child's statement or EHC plan works in harmony with his or her care plan to tell a coherent and comprehensive story of how the child's needs are being met. Professionals should consider how the statement/EHC plan adds to information about how education, health and care needs will be met without the need to duplicate unnecessarily the information that is already part of the child's care plan.
- Some children may have undiagnosed special needs when they start to be looked after. As part of the PEP process there should be robust arrangements in place to ensure that any undiagnosed special educational needs are addressed through the SEND framework as soon as possible.

**For further guidance contact the Virtual School on:**  
[virtualschool.LAC@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:virtualschool.LAC@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

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