



Providing Opportunities for Excellence

Fulfilling the potential of children
in care through funded bursaries

A Toolkit for
Independent & Boarding Schools



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Introduction

This toolkit aims to provide guidance to independent and boarding schools on how to provide funded bursaries to children in care, to enable them to overcome disadvantage by providing them the opportunity to excel in their education.

In the most recently published national data, attainment for children in care is very low. While local authorities are the primary corporate parent to children in care, the government believes that the wider civil society, including education providers, have a key role to play in supporting these children. There is already some exceptional work happening in the education sector to provide additional support for children in care and through funded bursary opportunities, we want this to become the norm rather than the exception.

Our journey in Sutton started through a conversation between Homefield Preparatory School, the Local Authority and Cognus Limited (the company who delivers the London Borough of Sutton education services). This led to a funded bursary being offered to a child in care in 2018. The first year has resulted in excellent outcomes for the child and a strong partnership between the school, the local authority and the foster carer. We are making plans for our second bursary placement and we want to start the conversation with other independent schools.

This approach enables independent schools to use their bursary allocation as charitable benefit for vulnerable children.

‘We can work together to provide life-changing bursary opportunities for children-looked after across the country.’



Jonathan Williams
Assistant Director,
Children's Social Care &
Safeguarding, London
Borough of Sutton



John Towers
Head of Homefield
Prep School

The Process

Having a clearly defined process will be integral in giving children the best opportunity to benefit from the bursary.

The roles referred to could be fulfilled by either the Local Authority or the Virtual School, depending on the structure in place in your local area. If you do not know who the Virtual School Head is, simply use a search engine to find out.

This chart summarises the steps taken to prepare and progress a bursary offer to a child, followed by an overview of the stages involved in the process.



PREPARATION

Steps to be taken by the school

- Review Bursary Policy with Trustees, to consider provision for children in care
- Model a budget to consider number of bursaries available for children in care, with the aim that the child(ren) will have an assisted place throughout the school
- Make first contact with Virtual School Head in Local Authority to share the context of the independent school's ethos/aims and so consider any children that might benefit from a bursary supported placement
- Using the profile/data provided by the Virtual School, match potential candidates to the school

Steps to be taken by the Virtual School/ Local Authority

- Virtual School Head or senior manager to analyse the current cohort of children in care, identify potential candidates and liaise with their Social Worker and manager
- Virtual School to gather an Educational Profile for each potential candidate, to include attainment, progress, behaviour, information relating to their Care plan that might affect their education (see appendix)
- Corporate Parenting Team to authorise pursuing the placement having considered any implications and logistical considerations

PRE-ADMISSION

Steps to be taken by the school

- Invite the child, foster carer and social worker to visit the school and undertake the standard application process. This might include visits to school and assessments (you may wish to waive the normal Registration Fee)
- Schools may wish to consider the full context of the child's potential attainment if they are to sit an entrance test
- Where a candidate is suitable for placement then offer a place, with Local Authority as parent signatory to the school contract as the 'corporate parent'
- Engage child and foster carer in usual process for new school starters. The school may wish to consider providing a free set of uniform, etc.
- Be sensitive and consider levels of confidentiality around their status
- Engage a member of staff to have responsibility as 'Designated Teacher/Lead' for the children and act as the key contact (for example the Head of SEND or Deputy Head) with the Local Authority for the child

Steps to be taken by the Virtual School/ Local Authority

- Local Authority to consider any funding implications and confirm their position to the school, foster carers and the Virtual School
- If a boarding school place, explore subsidised funding through the Boarding Schools Partnership, Buttle UK or directly via the school
- Social worker and LA managers formally agree the place and any funding agreement
- The Virtual School will liaise with the school, social worker and the foster carers, as well as the previous school, to facilitate a smooth transition and hand over of educational information
- The Virtual School will initiate a process to meet, discuss and review the child's progress through a 'Personal Educational Plan' (PEP) meeting

JOINING THE SCHOOL

- The 'Designated Teacher' to attend regular (usually twice yearly) 'Personal Education Plan' meetings with Local Authority colleagues to keep placement under review and to report back on progress. This will enable the School to access ongoing support where required.

- Ongoing support is provided to the school through the PEP process, which is a record of the child's educational achievement and enables professionals to ensure the child receives the support needed to overcome any barriers to learning
- Children in care are eligible for pupil premium funds, which you can claim via the Virtual School through the PEP (refer to your local authority's process for this)

Roles and Responsibilities

The Headteacher

The Headteacher firstly needs to consider whether they can offer a placement and then make the first step to contact the Local Authority. We would suggest contacting either:

- The Head of Corporate Parenting or Looked-After Team Manager in the Local Authority; or
- The Head of the local Virtual School;

Their details will be available online. Moving forward, the Head will need to make a decision on admission and subsequently delegate staff to oversee any placement moving forward.

The Local Authority

The Local Authority can seek to secure the best outcomes for children in care by actively considering independent and boarding school placements within their Corporate Parenting Strategy and work in partnership with these schools to provide these children the very best educational opportunities. Senior staff within the Local Authority, such as the Head of Corporate Parenting, can play a key role in bringing together Headteachers, the Virtual School, social workers and foster families.

Every child in care has a dedicated social worker and these colleagues will be able to support placements and decision-making, for example by attending meetings at school where required.



The Virtual School

All Local Authorities have a Virtual School, who oversees the education plan for every child in care and promotes their educational achievement through their work with schools, other educational specialists and the Corporate Parenting team. Virtual Schools facilitate a smooth admissions process into schools and can provide a range of additional support. In practical terms, the Virtual School will take a lead in helping this process.

The Virtual School can analyse its cohort of children in care to identify potential students that might benefit from an independent school placement. They consider requirements such as age-phase, distance to the school and academic ability and to match any potential candidates before providing the social worker and the Headteacher a summary of potential candidates' educational profile. Once a candidate has been identified and all parties working with the child share an agreement to pursue the bursary, the Virtual School will help progress and smooth any pre-admission arrangements.



The Virtual School can allocate pupil premium plus funds directly to the school to support the child's educational achievement. They are also able to signpost or provide a range of useful educational services.

Foster Carer / Placement Provider

Foster carers are responsible for the day-to-day care provided to the child in care and are key in co-ordinating and promoting the child's education. The foster carer ensures that the child maintains school attendance, will generally have brief daily contact with school professionals during morning and afternoon arrivals and departures, and attend relevant meetings to discuss the

child's education. Foster carers play an important part in providing a stable and secure home, in order to help a child to develop a good academic routine, engage and encourage a child with participation in activities, and nurture a child's overall emotional and mental well-being in order to focus on achieving great outcomes.

Foster carers will liaise closely with school professionals to offer input about the child in care, co-ordinate strategies to promote education and social/emotional skills and inform the school of any issues that could impact on the child's education.

Starting the Placement

The school bursar and Headteacher need to issue a standard school contract or agreement to confirm funding arrangements between the school and the local authority, to be signed by the social worker/ manager as Corporate Parent of the child.

The school will need the contact details of the foster carer(s) who usually have daily responsibility for the child, or provide respite, weekend or school holiday support for those in boarding.

Children in care benefit from smooth, well planned transitions and inviting the child, their foster carer and social worker to visit the school prior to their start date supports a successful school move. It is useful for the child to familiarise themselves with the school layout, their classroom, teacher and to meet any other key members of staff. The foster carer will also need to ensure that the child has the right uniform and school equipment in time for their start date, which could be provided either as part of the funded bursary or with a cost.



The Personal Education Plan (PEP) process

Government guidance stipulates that every child in care who moves to a new educational or home placement requires a Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting within twenty working days of the move. The purpose of the PEP meeting is to review the child's educational progress and work together to ensure that they have the support they need to overcome any barriers to learning to fulfil their potential and achieve the best academic outcomes possible. The meeting is facilitated by the Virtual School and Local Authority and usually takes place twice a year. The PEP process also enables schools to request Pupil Premium Plus to fund various types of support that promotes the child's achievement and examples of this include funding targeted academic intervention or emotional or pastoral support.

Ongoing Support

Due to the status of the child in care, be assured that an additional depth of support will continue throughout their placement at your school. This will include dedicated time and care from the Local Authority through specialist personnel, structured reviews and additional resource where required. This provides a safety net to maximise the chances of academic and pastoral success for the child in care.



A case study

'D' is a child in Sutton Local Authority care. Previously, he attended a mainstream primary school in the local area. Homefield contacted the London Borough of Sutton offering a funded bursary.



Collaborative discussion between the Head of Corporate Parenting, the Headteacher and consequently, the Sutton Virtual School enabled us to agree, in principle, to a placement.

An Assessment and Quality Assurance Manager at the Sutton Virtual School then analysed the cohort of children in care to identify potential candidates. They designed an educational profile to provide the Corporate Parenting team and school an academic overview of the student and their eligibility, and led co-ordinated discussion between 'D's' social worker, foster carers

and previous school to consider logistical implications around the entrance test and potential school move. They also acted as the main point of contact for the school until 'D' joined, when the foster carer became the primary point of contact.

Within the school, designated staff facilitated the opportunity for 'D', his foster carer and social worker to visit, and arranged the assessment and subsequent school place offer. The Headteacher and the school registrar then worked closely together to progress the admission process and ensure a smooth start to the placement.

At baseline, 'D's' attainment was just in line with national expectations. Although his admission assessment was modest, the school viewed his positive potential and considered the wider contextual picture around his pastoral and academic development. Given this, the school believed he could benefit from a placement.

Homefield Preparatory School in Sutton is an independent day school for boys. The school is selective with a policy to take pupils who are at, or around national age expected standards. Many boys leave at 11+ and go on to selective state grammar schools in the area, whilst others stay on until 13+ to attend independent seniors.

As a 'not for profit' trust since the 1960s, civic and community responsibility is part of the ethos and so all students engage with young citizen and leadership programmes. Pupils come from families of a very wide variety of social, professional and cultural backgrounds. It is a cosmopolitan setting where most pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds.

By the end of the first year, 'D' had flourished. In standard progress testing, he was assessed to be working within expectations in English and is already way ahead of national expectations in mathematics, demonstrating the accelerated progress that he's made having attended the school for a year. He has met and exceeded all the targets in his Personal Education Plan. More widely, 'D' has benefited from the enhanced resources around the school.

In Science, he secured an A grade at his last assessment, and across humanities and both French and Latin he scored B Grades. Socially and emotionally, he is thriving. In this current academic year, he was voted as Form Captain by his peers and is enjoying this early taste of leadership and civic responsibility. 'D' also has broad enrichment opportunities, such as participation in competitive sports fixtures and enjoying the variety of extra-curricular clubs on offer.

The placement has also encouraged greater communication between the school and the Local Authority. Homefield works with the 'Schools Together' programme, a scheme from the Independent Schools Council and Department for Education to encourage state/independent partnerships. There were two existing partnerships with local state primary schools, which included provision of sport and science 'masterclasses' for these schools, enabling them to access specialist teaching and resource at Homefield.

Homefield were able to extend their work to involve the Sutton Virtual School, who co-ordinated the opportunity for some local children in care to participate in the 'masterclass' programme.

The partnership continues to grow with the school keen to take on more children in care. There are currently more children in care in the admissions process and have used the assessment tool and existing relationships to help fast track potential candidates.

Measuring impact

This opportunity has been a life-changing experience for the child involved. Over time, the full extent of the impact the bursary provides will be seen. Here are some of the benefits noted already:

How has the bursary opportunity benefited the student?

- High quality teaching is enabling 'D' to make sustained educational progress, particularly in core subjects
- Excellent resources aid and enhance learning, such as science and sports equipment; since joining the school 'D' has enjoyed playing rugby and cricket at a competitive fixture level
- Immersed in an environment where he can thrive and progress – 'D' has grown in confidence considerably and is flourishing socially and emotionally, as well as academically. He has recently gained a leadership position within his peer group
- Long-term, his future is even brighter, as it is expected that he'll complete his schooling with achievement and skills significantly above national expectation



“We are passionate that every child looked-after deserves an engaging, enriching learning experience with high-quality teaching that enables them to fulfil their potential. Bursary places give these children the chance to make excellent educational progress and flourish”.

Sara Martin
Assessment & Quality Assurance
Manager, Sutton Virtual School

“D has just finished his first academic year at Homefield. Over the year, we have seen his confidence grow and his teachers have all reported that he is really focused and hard-working. We are all very grateful for the fantastic opportunity that he has been given and we are committed to supporting and encouraging him in all aspects of his education”.

Ruth
Foster Carer

How has the bursary opportunity benefited the school?

- As a not-for-profit school, this project helps us fulfil our charitable aims
- Demonstrably effective use of bursary funds to target vulnerable pupils
- Broadened our work with the Schools Together ISC/DFE Programme
- Greater communication and collaboration with school leadership and Local Authority staff has opened doors; from INSET training opportunities for staff, to wider recognition of the school's value as a community resource
- Recognition and appreciation from School Trustees around effective discharge of achievable aims



“This was a hugely successful pilot programme and because of this, we can use our experience and work with other schools to provide this opportunity to more children. The positive impact has been seen by all those working closely with the child, including, social workers and foster parents and headteacher”.

Michael Taylor
Head of Corporate Parenting

“We have effectively used bursary funds to change the life of a vulnerable child. In doing so, we have also forged some excellent relationships with the Local Authority.”

John Towers
Headteacher at Homefield Preparatory School, Sutton

Appendix:

Educational Profile Template

EDUCATIONAL PROFILE of Pupil's Name

For consideration in relation to a CLA bursary at _____ School

Current educational setting and year:	
Care plan:	
Academic ability:	
Behaviour:	
Any learning needs identified?	

Attainment and progress to date

EYFS Profile			
Area of learning		Aspect	END of EYFS
Communication and language	ELG 01	Listening and attention	
	ELG 02	Understanding	
	ELG 03	Speaking	
Physical development	ELG 04	Moving and handling	
	ELG 05	Health and self-care	
Personal, social and emotional development	ELG 06	Self-confidence and self-awareness	
	ELG 07	Managing feelings and behaviour	
	ELG 08	Making relationships	
Literacy	ELG 09	Reading	
	ELG 10	Writing	
Mathematics	ELG 11	Numbers	
	ELG 12	Shapes, space and measures	
Understanding the world	ELG 13	People and communities	
	ELG 14	The world	
	ELG 15	Technology	
Expressive arts and design	ELG 16	Exploring and using media and materials	
	ELG 17	Being imaginative	

Pupils are assessed to be: Emerging (1), Expected (2) or Exceeding (3) against the Early Learning Goals

	English		Maths	Attendance %
	Reading	Writing/SPaG		
Year				

Attainment & Progress: *An overview of the child's academic performance, attitude and readiness to learn, behaviour*

Care Plan: *An overview of how the Care plan would support a bursary opportunity e.g. is the child in a stable, long-term home placement?*

References and Resources

- Homefield School Policies, including bursaries: www.homefield.sutton.sch.uk/Our-Policies
- Support for the school's appointed Designated Lead for children in care can be found in the DfE publication 'The designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance on their roles and responsibilities', February 2018
- Boarding School Partnerships: www.boardingschoolpartnerships.org.uk/
- Buttle UK commissioned a five-year research project looking at the experiences of care leavers who managed to attend university. This research project resulted in the development of a Quality Mark awarded to Universities and Colleges who offer a minimum level of support to care leavers and also demonstrate a commitment to improving their provision further. Some of the Key Documents from the project may be of use in developing your own provision for children in care: www.buttleuk.org/about-us/quality-mark-for-care-leavers/quality-mark-documents



Contact Us

If you would like to find out more about the project, key colleagues involved in the pilot scheme would be delighted to talk to you and to share their insights. Feel free to contact us on:



Local Authority

Councillor Marian James

Chair of the People Committee
marian.james@sutton.gov.uk



Local Authority

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Virtual School for Children Looked-After

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