



Department
for Education

Boarding schools

**An opportunity to improve outcomes for
vulnerable children**

November 2014

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Foreword

“State boarding schools are a hidden gem in our education reforms which are delivering consistently good results. They bring extra stability. Support from responsible adults. Pastoral care. And I think there’s a real opportunity for them to do more to help looked after children.”

Prime Minister David Cameron (18 August 2014)

The boarding schools sector is an essential part of the school system. We commend the work these schools do in providing a high quality education and an extended range of support and pastoral care to pupils.

We also value the support given to children from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds by charitable trusts, such as the Royal National Children’s Foundation, Buttle UK and the SpringBoard Charity, which enables them to take advantage of state and independent school boarding provision.

But we believe there are opportunities to increase the availability of state and independent boarding to vulnerable children, that is, those who are in danger of entering care in the future, or are looked after, because they are at risk or experiencing challenging home circumstances.

We know there are many vulnerable children, young people and families who, for a variety of reasons, do not get the support they need soon enough. As a consequence, children often end up in situations where they achieve poor or limited outcomes.

Boarding will not be the right option for every child and decisions need to be taken on a case-by-case basis through careful assessment of a child’s needs and matching the right child with the right school. But for some children it can bring stability to their lives, help to reduce education barriers and improve educational outcomes. Boarding can be one way of meeting the needs of young people in difficult situations to prevent family breakdown or a formal move into the care system. It can also help to raise the aspirations of the child and everyone around them.

Boarding schools would welcome more applications for boarding places for vulnerable children. We want to encourage local authorities, virtual school heads, social workers and other professionals to consider whether a boarding place could be a beneficial option for some vulnerable children. The decision should always focus on what provision would be in the best interests of the child as a whole, taking into account both their social and educational needs.

We hope this guidance will help you identify vulnerable children who might benefit from a boarding environment, and encourage you to consider boarding as an appropriate and cost effective option for some children.

Overview of the boarding schools sector

Boarding schools attract a wide range of children and families who choose boarding for different reasons, including providing a greater sense of stability and continuity of educational experience for the individual child.

The diversity of backgrounds of the pupil population in boarding schools is a key factor in their success and it is important that this diversity is maintained. However, we believe there is capacity within current state and independent boarding schools to take more vulnerable children. Head teachers tell us that most local authorities do not fully consider the benefits of boarding and are unwilling to fund placements.

State boarding schools

As at September 2014 there are 40 state boarding schools. Of these, 27 are academies, 2 are free schools, 8 are maintained schools and 3 are FE colleges. It is a small sector but is slowly expanding.

Data taken from the 2013-2014 State Boarding Schools Association (SBSA)¹ schools' census indicates there is boarding capacity for around 4,700 pupils. Approximately 15% of boarding places are taken up by children whose parents serve in the Armed Forces. Around 4% of boarders receive assistance with fees, with only a small number of these receiving assistance from a local authority. The vast majority of assistance is provided by charities or other sources.

Independent boarding schools

There is a thriving independent boarding schools sector with around 400 schools spread widely across the country. Independent boarding schools may offer local authorities more opportunities for the local placement of vulnerable children.

Fees for independent boarding schools are higher than the charges for state boarding as independent schools charge for tuition as well as extended day services and boarding provision. However an advantage of an independent school is that they may be able to offer more in terms of a reduction of fees through a bursary either from the school itself and/or from a charitable trust.

More information about independent boarding schools is available on the Boarding Schools Association (BSA)² website.

¹ State Boarding Schools Association – www.sbsa.org.uk

² Boarding Schools Association – www.boarding.org.uk

Benefits

What are the potential benefits?

The department believes boarding is an option local authorities should consider to increase the life chances and achievements for some vulnerable children, and more should be done to open up access to boarding for those children who would find it beneficial. We believe that if boarding placements are used wisely and targeted for individual pupils they can provide benefits for vulnerable children.

There is some evidence from research³ conducted by the former Royal Wanstead Children's Foundation (now part of the Royal National Children's Foundation (RNCF)⁴) in 2007, and by Buttle UK⁵ in 2012, which found a correlation between the boarding environment and improved educational outcomes for vulnerable children.

The department is part-funding 40 boarding places in state boarding schools as part of a research project⁶ being undertaken by Buttle UK, RNCF and the Education Endowment Foundation⁷. The project will look at the impact of boarding in state and independent boarding schools for children identified as 'in need'⁸. All of these children require local authority support of some kind and some will eventually need to be placed in to residential care.

Who are the children that might benefit?

Decisions about whether boarding might be a suitable option should be taken on a case-by-case basis through careful assessment of a child's needs and matching the right child with the right school. We know that the current use of boarding placements for vulnerable children by local authorities is very modest and varies considerably between authorities. The number of vulnerable children for whom boarding would be the most suitable option is always going to be relatively small. Very few vulnerable children in existing placements have serious behaviour or learning problems, but many come from families where there was a shortfall in parenting capacity or where they had encountered serious problems in their home environment.

The children likely to benefit are those who are looked after by a local authority or those at risk of entering care in the future. These young people will be in a situation where living with their birth family is becoming unsustainable, and they have:

³ See www.rncf.org.uk/research.php

⁴ Royal National Children's Foundation – www.rncf.org.uk

⁵ Buttle UK – www.buttleuk.org

⁶ See www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects/boarding-for-in-need-children/

⁷ Education Endowment Foundation – www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk

⁸ See [section 17 of the Children Act 1989](#)

- links with their family network but the links may be fragile or chaotic, and full-time, long-term care by the wider family is not possible;
- generally an average to good educational potential or an identified talent or potential talent;
- good attachments and the ability to make and sustain positive relationships.

What do local authorities say?

Local authorities that do place children in boarding provision believe it is the most appropriate placement, improves outcomes and is cost effective. They believe that most children would not have been on the same trajectory had it not been for the placement. One LA made a strong case for boarding provision, highlighting that their authority provided this option because it supports the 'care of the child'.

“It is not about saying they will get a better education, because they won't. It is enabling them to learn there, which wouldn't normally be possible because of a chaotic home life”.

Boarding schools offer many opportunities for all children including an extended range of education, supervised homework time (“prep”), before and after school activities and high quality pastoral care. This is particularly important for vulnerable children coming from chaotic homes or homes where they are not supported to make the most of their educational opportunities.

A child whose parents were heroin addicts was being looked after by ageing grandparents who were finding it increasingly difficult to cope full time. Boarding in this situation provided a way of maintaining the home placement.

A lone parent with poor mental and physical health struggled to care for her daughter. The daughter was often a young carer to her mum. By attending boarding school she was provided with stability and has succeeded academically.

Annex A provides more case studies of children and young people that have benefitted from a placement in boarding provision.

Identifying children who may benefit from boarding provision

General

The decision about a boarding placement must be made on the basis of careful individual selection and looking at a range of options that would benefit the child in the long term. Every good parent wants the best for their child. This is true for individual parents whose child may be at risk of entering care in the future, and for local authorities who are corporate parents for looked after children. Local authorities as corporate parents have the statutory responsibility to act for, support and look after a child in the same way a good parent would.

It is important for local authorities to ensure that the assessment process for identifying children who may benefit is multi-agency and holistic.

Is the child vulnerable?

These are children and young people who are in need because there is a risk to their well-being, either because they may be at risk of harm and/or they do not have the opportunity to achieve.

The child's family may be dealing with complex situations such as severe mental illness, physical disability, illness, drug or alcohol problems, domestic violence, homelessness, acute financial hardship, instability, and may be on the verge of breakdown.

The local authority supported a boarding option for a young girl at risk of entering the care system because her adoption, which had taken place several years before, was in danger of breaking down. She entered her boarding placement in Year 9 and is now in Year 11. She's on course to get a set of good GCSE results and go onto the 6th form in the boarding school. As a result of the boarding placement the family dynamic has improved and the virtual school head says that the placement has worked well.

Suffolk LA

The child may be cared for by siblings, grandparents, aunts or uncles, or other extended family members because of the death of their parents, or the inability of their own parents to care well and safely for them. Their carers may themselves be disabled, elderly or ill and unable to provide full time care.

A primary school boy came from a chaotic home where his mother had mental health problems and he was often cared for by siblings. He was supported to take-up a boarding school place and has now won a scholarship to the senior school as a boarder. The school has provided stability and structure that has enabled this young man to thrive.

Norfolk LA

A local authority will need to consider the individual needs of the child and work through the relevant issues with parents as appropriate. The circumstances will be different for children whose parents have full parental responsibility, as in the case of children who may be at risk of entering care in the future or those looked after under section 20 of the Children Act 1989, to those where the local authority has parental responsibility through a child in care order.

Could he or she benefit from boarding school?

The educational outcomes of vulnerable children play a crucial part in determining their future opportunities and prospects. All children have individual learning needs and need stability to thrive. We want to give these young people access to an achievement culture and the cultural and enrichment opportunities that we know can make a real difference to their lives and those of their families. A boarding school can offer these opportunities.

Indicators might be that they may have problems socialising, be withdrawn or isolated and have few friends. They may have experienced instability, or a life lacking in structure, and be likely to flourish in a setting with clear routines and structures.

The child most likely to have the best outcomes from boarding school will not have severe behaviour problems or need for specialist support. The local authority must assure itself that the child will be able to cope both academically and emotionally with a boarding environment.

In terms of age, each child's circumstances will be different but some general advice from local authorities and schools is that:

- Caution should be exercised in considering boarding for primary age pupils, it can be better to delay until secondary transition for reasons of maturity.
- A key transition stage in a child's life might be a suitable time to consider boarding, e.g. at year 7, year 9 or year 12, and a placement should be planned at least 6 months ahead of the start of the first term wherever possible.

Will the young person want to consider boarding?

The child must be properly informed about a boarding opportunity and what it would mean for them. The child will need to visit the proposed school before any decision is made and must actively want to go to a boarding school.

Will the family or other significant adult want to support a boarding placement?

The family or primary carers must be fully involved in the choice and be committed to the idea; having been given the opportunity to understand fully what is on offer.

Are the child, parents and local authority prepared for a long term commitment?

The child, parents and local authority must be aware that, in most cases, boarding is a long term commitment. Parents and local authorities will need to be clear that their commitment to supporting the children they place will continue until they leave school at 16 or 18 years. Local authorities will need to consider:

- Are the child's parents willing to make a long term commitment to the placement?
- Is the local authority willing to support the placement, financially and otherwise, for the long term?
- What will happen to a looked-after child who is placed in boarding provision and then a decision is made for them to return home from care? Will the local authority continue to pay for the boarding placement? Making a decision for a child to return home from care should include ensuring a robust plan for success. The stability of their education and hence the financial support continuing will be essential.

Will out of term support be available?

The local authority will need to ensure a vulnerable child placed in a boarding school will also have a stable placement for holiday periods, with as much consistency in carers as possible. The child must have a significant adult figure with whom they can spend holidays and who has a good relationship with them. This may be a family member, a friend, a foster parent or their children's home.

A local authority will need to assure itself that arrangements are in place to provide stable, high quality care for the child during the holidays.

Is a suitable placement available?

It is essential to ensure the right match between the child's individual needs and talents and the provision available at a school through the boarding placement. Local authorities

that do use boarding as an intervention strategy have found they have become better at matching pupils' needs with possible boarding schools as time has gone on, which ensures better quality placements and avoids them breaking down in the early stages.

Vulnerable children often have particular challenges. These can include poor educational attainment and emotional and behavioural difficulties. Careful discussion will be needed with the proposed school/s to assess whether they are fully able and willing to support and meet the child's needs. The child should be involved in this process and their wishes and feelings taken into account.

Prior to the placement being agreed, a detailed plan for supporting the child should be agreed between the local authority, school, and, where appropriate, the parents. A local authority will want to ensure a school is aware of any particular safeguarding⁹ issues that need to be considered for a child, e.g. any restrictions that are in place on contact with family members or others. A school will want to be clear that it can provide the right level of support the child requires, for example a vulnerable child may need a high level of pastoral support. Will the school be able to provide this through appropriately skilled and qualified staff?

The local authority has recently placed a girl into a boarding placement in Year 12. She has challenging behaviour and the virtual school head says there is a real commitment from the school to make the placement work. It is important to ensure the school understands and is prepared for the difficulties a child may have, and is able to provide the support required. It is early days, but the placement is working.

Suffolk LA

In addition to whether the school is a good fit for the child and able to support them, consideration will also need to be given to the location of the school. Some children may have secure and positive family attachments at home but for various reasons cannot live there full-time. In those circumstances they (and their carers) may prefer a boarding school place to foster care nearer home. Under normal circumstances, we know that children will be less likely to thrive if they are living well away from their own communities, and – if they are in care – at some distance from the local authority that has parental responsibility for them. State and independent boarding schools are spread throughout England and in most instances local authorities will be working with boarding schools that are in their local area where distance will not be a significant issue.

However, there may be circumstances where a local authority feels that an out-of-authority placement is clearly in the child's best interests. For example, for some

⁹ See "Keeping children safe in education" - www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education

vulnerable or looked after children a decision to place at a distance may be made either for their safety or to remove them from detrimental influences. For these children a move away from their home area could be beneficial.

The main consideration should be to ensure the school is appropriate to meet the child's education, social and emotional needs.

Contact issues for a child will need to be considered whether the proposed school is close to home or at a distance. How will the child maintain contact with their family, community, social worker and/or responsible local authority?

The school search engines on the SBSA and BSA websites can be used to find schools in a particular area.

Can a funding package be made available?

Boarding school placements can be funded from a number of sources:

- Boarding school scholarships and/or bursaries;
- Local authorities from the Schools Budget and/or the children's services budget;
- Grants from charitable trusts;
- Families.

Scholarships and bursaries

Many schools offer scholarships for children talented in particular areas: academic, sporting, dramatic, artistic and musical children may be rewarded in this way.

Schools may also offer bursary schemes, either directly or in partnership with charitable organisations, where financial assistance is offered in some cases.

Schools' policies will differ on both scholarships and bursaries. If you are considering a boarding placement you should consult the individual school for details.

Admission arrangements for boarding placements

The timing of applications for places in boarding schools is important. There are a finite number of boarding places available and the demand is high, which means the opportunity for in year admissions can be severely limited but not impossible.

All boarding schools have a duty of care, both to the vulnerable child for whom a place is being sought and to all other young people who are boarding. A school will therefore require full information about a child's background and achievements. They will want to interview children to assess their suitability for boarding, and some schools may have selection/entry criteria that a student has to meet.

State boarding schools

As mainstream state funded schools, state boarding schools and academies have to comply with the School Admissions Code¹⁰ and the School Admissions Regulations, which set out the timetable and procedures for admissions. They require state boarding schools to give priority in their oversubscription criteria in the following order:

- a) looked after children and previously looked after children;
- b) children of members of the UK Armed Forces who qualify for Ministry of Defence financial assistance with the cost of boarding school fees;
- c) children with a 'boarding need', making it clear what they mean by this.

State boarding schools can interview applicants to assess their suitability for boarding, but interviews must only consider whether a child presents a serious health and safety hazard to other boarders or whether they would be able to cope with and benefit from a boarding environment.

Independent boarding schools

Independent boarding schools do not have to comply with the School Admissions Code and can sometimes offer more flexible admission arrangements. A local authority should contact an independent boarding school directly for information about their admission arrangements.

¹⁰ School Admissions Code, see www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code

Costs and charges for boarding provision

Boarding school charges

State boarding schools can charge the full cost of board and lodging. They can also charge for extended day services outside of school hours provided it is not education provided as part of the national curriculum, as part of a syllabus for a prescribed public examination that the pupil is being prepared for at the school, or as part of religious education. However, they cannot make attendance at, or the payment of charges for, extended day services compulsory for day pupils.

Charges for boarding provision in state boarding schools range from £8,500 to about £15,000 per year, with the average being around £10,500.

Fees for **independent boarding schools** will be higher as an independent school will charge for the cost of tuition as well as extended day services and boarding provision.

Whether a child is placed in the state or independent boarding sector pupils may also need to have financial support to take part in the trips and activities in schools and social activities at the weekend so may need more financial backing than just the boarding fees. A sensible estimate for these extra-curricular activities would be around 10% of the boarding charge.

Meeting the cost of boarding school charges

Fee/financial support is a long term commitment, required for the whole of a student's school life/educational phase, to ensure a student would be able to complete their education.

Local authority funding

Local authorities receive funding to address the needs of vulnerable children. They also receive funding within the Dedicated Schools Grant to help them meet their duties to remit the whole or part of boarding charges in cases of parental hardship¹¹. Local authorities can hold this funding centrally, subject to consultation with the local Schools' Forum. Schools' Forums may well be sympathetic to the idea of boarding for vulnerable children, particularly if it can be demonstrated it is cost effective.

In considering boarding provision for a vulnerable child a local authority is not just thinking about educational outcomes but about providing an environment that will enable the child to learn, which would not be possible in their current environment, e.g. because the child is looked after, or because of a difficult or chaotic home life. They are seeking to

¹¹ Section 458 of the Education Act 1996 and section 10A of the Academies Act 2010

meet all the needs, educational and social, of a vulnerable child. This may mean there could be long term cost savings across authority budgets, e.g. both educational and social, that should be factored into meeting the cost of a boarding solution.

A local authority will need to compare costs between schools, and with the costs of other care and education options. It is particularly important to compare the costs of a boarding place with the costs that would be incurred if it became necessary for the child to be taken into care, which would be significantly higher. Investing in the child to prevent family breakdown or the development of more complex problems can be extremely cost effective.

We are aware of two local authorities who consider boarding provision an 'investment saved' compared to the costs involved if the young person had entered the care or justice systems. The savings were quantified in terms of the direct costs of being in care, or the potential costs involved with secure accommodation, unemployment or social costs.

Other funding sources

When considering a placement a local authority may want to discuss with an individual school whether the school offers scholarship or bursary funding that would help to meet the school charges.

There are a number of charitable trusts that may provide assistance with fees. Each trust will have their own criteria for assessing applications and deciding on whether they are able to offer support. The Educational Trusts' Forum¹² provides links to registered charities that are prepared to consider grants and awards to assist families in need who cannot afford educational or boarding fees.

Local authorities may also be interested in the Assisted Boarding Network¹³, which was established by the RNCf in 2011 to encourage local authority participation in Assisted Boarding. It has been responsible for helping local authorities to make boarding placements since its launch. The key contact for the network is Christine Hughes who can be contacted by email at cjhughes@rncf.org.uk.

¹² Educational Trusts' Forum - www.educational-grants.org/

¹³ See www.flashesandflames.com/charity/ and www.buttleuk.org/pages/abn-conference.html

Annex A – Individual case studies¹⁴

Amina

Amina was known to Social Care and was assessed as a Child In Need. Her mother was alcohol dependent and could be violent to her 2 older siblings. Father did have contact with the family but he lived in a one bedroom flat so could not look after Amina or her siblings full time. The primary school through contact with Buttle UK enquired about the possibility of a boarding school for Amina as she transferred to secondary school and entered year 7. Buttle UK were able to create a financial package with a school and RNCF to enable her to attend boarding. She is doing incredibly well at her new school and is away from the chaos of home life.

Sophie

Sophie, aged 13, was a young carer to her mum who was in a wheelchair due to a long-term illness. She was often unable to get out of bed due to pain and depression. Sophia often missed school to attend to her mum's needs as she was too worried to leave her. The school was becoming increasingly worried about the situation and through a support worker at the school enquired to the educational charities about a place at boarding school. This was put in place and additional carers were found to meet mum's needs. While Sophia still worries about her mum she is able to attend all her schooling and have fun with her peers at boarding school.

Chris

Chris has no contact with his birth father. His relationship with his mother deteriorated over time as she was frequently away from home and he was often left in the care of his older sibling.

Chris was assessed as a 'child in need' when he was 14 as his mother had left the home for an extended period and it was not known if she would return. His attendance and attainment at school dropped significantly at this time, causing great concern. The school suggested boarding to provide him with stability. This was following a CAF assessment through collaboration between the school's Child Protection Officer and Social Services. According to the social worker involved, Chris's home life was chaotic and with his mother often spending time abroad communication with her was very difficult.

Chris was accepted into a boarding placement with his mother's verbal consent only.

The school started by meeting the full cost of the boarding, which was proving difficult, as it was a state school. Social Services were unable to assist and so Buttle UK and RNCF provided support for a jointly funded fee package with the school.

¹⁴ These case studies have been provided by Buttle UK

The relationship with his mother deteriorated further while he was at the school, and this was unsettling for Chris. However the school provided stability at a key time of his life, as he took his GCSEs. He obtained 1A*, 2As, 4Bs and 1C and is now in the school's 6th Form.

Marcus

Marcus maintained contact with an uncle and went to stay with him in the holidays. While visiting his uncle his aunt informed him that he could not return and that he should stay where he was. The family agreed to this.

The family failed to appreciate the impact that Marcus would have on their life. The aunt had health problems and was in continuous pain. Within a short time of Marcus's arrival she found that she was becoming increasingly exhausted. Her own children were competing for attention and there was increasing conflict. Marcus was inclined to moody phases and silences, and he himself says that, while he knows his aunt and uncle were doing their best for him, he was not happy.

The pressure in the household was creating tension between Marcus's aunt and uncle and so they approached Social Services for help. Social Services suggested respite care which they rejected as they were anxious that Marcus should not feel pushed out.

However, they did respond to the idea of weekly boarding. After investigating possible schools they found one that was most appropriate. Initially Marcus resisted the idea but gradually was sold on the proposal.

The family were dependent on state benefits at the time and were struggling financially since Marcus's uncle had to give up work to care for his wife. Their social worker attempted to obtain funding from her department and after extensive discussions the authority agreed to finance some of the fees. Buttle UK and other educational trusts paid for the remainder.

Marcus enjoyed life at boarding school despite his initial misgivings, "It was the best time of my life," he said after he left, and that in a way it 'saved his life'. Marcus is now 26 – he has a career in marketing and sees his aunt and uncle regularly.



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